

Supplemental Student Learning Objective Development Guide: Teachers of Preschool Programs and Kindergarten

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Teachers of Preschool Programs and Kindergarten

Teachers of children in preschool and kindergarten require unique knowledge and skills to serve the youngest of learners. The teacher, the classroom, and the materials are each critical aspects of young children’s learning. Although much of what we know about the positive impact of preschool and kindergarten concerns at-risk children, the research indicates that all learners can benefit from early, high-quality early learning opportunities. A large-scale study of 84 preschool programs determined that, on average, “children gain about a third of a year of additional learning across language, reading and math skills” by participating in developmentally appropriate preschool programs (Yoshikawa et al., 2013, p. 1). Other studies indicate improved results for children who attended prekindergarten programs, including higher attendance rates at fifth and sixth grades, higher achievement test scores at third grade, and improved retention rates at fifth, eighth, and 10th grades (Center for Public Education, n.d.). To create such positive results, teachers must provide children with rich content and stimulating activities with a high level of emotional support (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). This work requires a special set of teacher skills and the ability to relate well across multiple domains through young children’s ever-changing development.

Because of the student population, preschool and kindergarten teachers face unique challenges in accurately measuring and attributing achievement growth of young children.

- **Limited background data.** Because preschool and kindergarten students are just entering the school system, teachers may need to rely on collecting baseline data at the beginning of the academic year to establish growth goals. Trend data are generally not available.
- **Student age.** Because students are just beginning school, teachers have limited baseline and trend data on which to draw; teachers of these students may need to provide different information on their student population than other teachers. Also, because young children are not yet skilled in reading and writing, they are not able to use the kinds of written assessments that are otherwise often used with students. With few valid and reliable assessments for measuring summative learning of young students during the year, preschool and kindergarten teachers should consider using multiple assessments to assess student learning more accurately. Finally, the lack of baseline and trend data can make it difficult for teachers to set informed growth targets that are rigorous and attainable.
- **Program variability.** Variations in preschool and kindergarten programs (e.g., full day, half day) may affect the interval of instruction and standards and content covered by the class.

Given these challenges, this document provides teachers of preschool programs and kindergarten with considerations, strategies, student learning objective (SLO) samples, and additional resources to aid in writing high-quality SLOs.

Considerations

Preschool and kindergarten teachers experience specific contextual factors that must be considered in measuring student growth using SLOs. This section describes some of those considerations and is organized in the order of the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Template [Checklist for Writing and Approving Student Learning Objectives](#).

Baseline and Trend Data

- **Teachers of preschool and kindergarten may need extended time to establish benchmarks or baselines.** Preschool and kindergarten teachers will generally have limited student data because, in most cases, these students are just entering the school system. Trend data should be sought when possible, but some teachers may need to rely on collecting baseline data at the beginning of the academic year to establish growth goals. Students new to the school environment need time to adjust. Taking time for adjustments and assessments will likely result in better, more valid measurements of student learning and development.

Student Population

- **Detailed student population might include student gender, attributes, and prior education.** SLOs should include the number of students, their gender and other attributes (e.g., number of English language learners), and their participation in previous learning opportunities (e.g., Head Start, community- or church-based preschool programs). Prior learning opportunities influence children's later performance. Knowing students' prior experiences through class lists from other programs, parent interviews, or other means will increase understanding of children's differences and inform their learning needs.
- **Teacher may consider the age, in months, for each child listed in the SLO and describe the age requirements for district enrollment in preschool or kindergarten.** Knowing the ages of children in months assists teachers in interpreting data and setting appropriate growth targets for individual or groups of students. In fact, children at this age are often described by months rather than years (e.g., 42 to 48 months) because of the degree of variance in development from one month to another. District cutoff dates for

enrollment are important to note. If the cutoff date is September 1, a kindergarten teacher may have a child who recently turned 5 years old but who functions more like a 4-year-old, and a child who is 6 years, 11 months old who functions like a 7-year-old. Knowing these details will support teachers in setting targets more appropriately.

Interval of Instruction

- **SLOs should include the length of the school day and the number of days in the school year.** Preschool and kindergarten programs may be half days or full days or a combination, such as two full days a week and three days not attending school. Administrators at the district level may not know each teacher’s schedule, so including this information in the interval of instruction is important. Schools and districts may want to consider how the length of the day corresponds to setting appropriate growth targets. Research results are mixed as to the differences in long-term achievement of students in half-day versus full-day kindergarten (Child Trends Data Bank, 2013; Hanover Research, 2010; Villegas, 2005).

Standards and Content

- **SLOs should align with the appropriate academic content standards.** This alignment includes academic content standards from the “Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards in All Essential Domains of School Readiness (Birth–Age 5)” for preschool programs and “Ohio’s New Learning Standards” for kindergarten programs.

Assessments

- **SLOs should include the use of multiple measures.** On-demand performance assessments of preschoolers and kindergarteners may not yield valuable information. Because of young children’s lack of adequate reading and writing skills and the whims of their cooperation in formal testing, multiple measures, including observations, are needed to obtain valid baseline and trend data. “Young children do not understand the purposes or importance of assessments, so they are unlikely to perform at their best if they are interrupted in the middle of a game or playtime to do a specific [assessment] task” (Helm, n.d., p. 4), leading to the need for multiple measures over time.
- **SLO assessments must be appropriate for students who are ELLs or students with disabilities.** State and district policy should clarify how assessments should be used with early childhood students who are ELLs or students with disabilities. Ohio’s guidelines for Kindergarten Readiness Assessment include tiered levels of support beginning with universally designed allowances for *all* children as well as additional supports for children with disabilities and ELLs.

Preschool Assessments for Creating SLOs

For non-state-funded preschool programs, teachers, schools, and districts are allowed to determine the assessments measures. However, for state-funded prekindergarten programs, the state of Ohio requires specific assessments:

1. “Ages and Stages” for social-emotional development
2. Early Learning Assessment
3. A program-adopted curriculum-based assessment tool

The results of these assessments are appropriate for preschool teachers to use in creating their SLOs.

Kindergarten Assessments for Creating SLOs

The kindergarten readiness assessment measures school readiness (birth to kindergarten) using Ohio’s Early Learning and Development Standards. The assessment includes six components: social skills (including social and emotional development, and approaches toward learning), mathematics, science, social studies, language and literacy, and physical well-being and motor development. Students must be assessed between the first day of school and November 1, with the later date advantageous as it allows children to become more accustomed to school. All kindergarten children are required to take the assessment. The results of the assessment will serve as a starting point for instruction and will be useful in writing SLOs (ODE, 2014a).

Growth Targets

- **SLO growth targets should reflect high expectations for student growth that are developmentally appropriate.** The growth target should reflect children’s current level of performance and expected gains over time. The Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes notes the challenges in designing and using SLOs for teachers of young children, including “difficulty in creating appropriate growth targets that are rigorous but realistic given the variability in the development in this age span” (Conners-Tadros & Horowitz, 2014, p. 18). Other means of assessment, formal and informal, should be used to provide additional information of group or individual predicated growth. Teachers may track student growth in monthly increments and use the results of formative assessments as a guide for meeting summative growth at the end of the year.
- **SLOs should reflect the continuum of development of young children, supporting individual school readiness, which is not necessarily based on children’s ages.** Young children learn and grow at their own pace. SLO growth targets should be rigorous while

reflecting the individual starting points of young students and growth patterns that early learners follow.

Considerations for Districts and Coordinators

- Review the information attained from current assessments with preschool and kindergarten teachers to see if these data are providing the information they need to write effective and appropriate SLOs. If not, assist the teachers in investigating other data sources that could be used to inform SLOs.
- Consider the training needed or received for the Ohio Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. Ask teachers if they feel prepared to administer the assessment or if additional training is needed and provide support as requested.
- Consider if the student population in the school has changed during the past several years. If so, determine if the preschool and kindergarten teachers are receiving the support they need to teach the current student population.
- Consider allowing more time for teachers of preschool and kindergarten to develop their SLOs. Because young children cannot yet read and write, they may require hands-on or visual assessments, which are completed individually, requiring more time. Second, young children require time to adjust to their environments, and testing too early in the school year (e.g., the first three to four weeks) could provide unreliable results.
- Determine the supports received by the preschool and kindergarten teachers for their students with disabilities or who are ELLs. Are early interventionists and ELL specialists available to work with the children and provide guidance to the teacher? What programs is your district or school using with the young learners? Federal law requires districts to provide for both groups of children, even at young ages.

Strategies

When teachers of preschool programs and kindergarten write SLOs, the following strategies may identify helpful sources of support. Teachers are encouraged to review this list as they develop their SLOs for their preschool and kindergarten students.

Strategy 1: Collaborate with other preschool or kindergarten teachers to write an SLO based on multiple assessments. Teachers may work together to write an SLO with multiple measures of assessment that are “appropriate to the development and experiences of the young child” (Shepard, 1994, p. 208). SLO assessments should correspond to the children’s age group and grade spans. Measures may include standardized and formative assessments, curriculum-aligned measures, and teacher-, school-, or district-developed measures (Halle, Zaslow, Wessel, Moodie, & Darling-Churchill, 2011). When combined with any of the previously noted assessments, teachers of preschool and kindergarten students also may use observational data through journals, checklists, or running records to provide additional understanding of children’s strengths and needs. Collaborating with colleagues can help teachers coordinate and interpret these data sources to set realistic growth targets.

Strategy 2: Focus one course SLO on literacy and one course SLO on mathematics. Teachers of preschool programs and kindergarten lay the foundations for literacy and mathematics learning for their students. In particular, kindergarten teachers play an important role in supporting Ohio’s [Third Grade Reading Guarantee](#). District leaders and school administrators might ask teachers of preschool programs and kindergarten to prioritize writing SLOs in these subjects.

Strategy 3: Collaborate with colleagues to select assessments and write growth targets. Teachers of preschool programs and kindergarten, like all teachers, can benefit from developing SLOs collaboratively. This collaboration can allow teachers to share their knowledge and experience with previous groups of students to select appropriate assessments. The discussion of student baseline and trend data may assist early childhood education teachers in writing appropriate growth targets for students.

Strategy 4: Write a targeted SLO that focuses on students with disabilities or ELLs. After creating a broad course SLO, teachers also may choose to collaborate with specialists to write an SLO for students with a disability or English language learners based on appropriate assessments (National Association of Young Children, 2009). Collaborating with specialists allows all teachers who support the student to share their knowledge of student strengths and weaknesses and can help teachers to develop appropriate growth targets.

Early Childhood Sample SLOs

[Prekindergarten Mathematics](#): This sample SLO from Ohio focuses on English language arts in prekindergarten.

[Mathematics Grades K–2 Low Incidence Students](#): This SLO example from Ohio focuses on the mathematics performance of low incidence students.

[Literacy Grades K–2 Low Incidence Students](#): This SLO example from Ohio focuses on literacy of low incidence students.

References and Additional Resources

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