

# **Supplemental Student Learning Objective Development Guide: Teachers of Students With Disabilities**

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## Teachers of Students With Disabilities

Teachers of students with disabilities play the important role of providing special education services and specially designed instruction to identified students. This specially designed instruction, according to the Ohio Administrative Code, means adapting “the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction: (a) to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and (b) to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the school district that apply to all children” (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2014, pp. 25-26).

As teachers meet the needs of students with disabilities, they must understand how students grow and assess how the specially designed instruction supports student learning. However, accurately measuring and attributing achievement growth of students with disabilities (including those participating in general assessments and alternate assessments) presents unique challenges that can have an impact on educator evaluation results. As teachers write student learning objectives (SLOs) for students with disabilities, they face specific contextual challenges:

- **A variety of service delivery models.** Students with disabilities may receive support in a variety of settings, so district guidelines must be developed to address each of these service delivery models (e.g., co-teaching, resource room, self-contained classroom). The different service delivery models utilized in districts and schools will affect which teachers and related service providers are responsible for the development of SLOs. Depending on the model, multiple teachers may be required to collaborate on the development of an SLO.
- **Small numbers of students.** Some teachers of special education students support a small number of students, which can require combination of classes and grade levels in a single SLO in order to meet the minimum number of students (six) required for an SLO.
- **Establishing rigorous yet achievable growth targets.** Teachers who do not have sufficient training in this area may have difficulty setting appropriate growth targets. Targets should be differentiated for students with disabilities according to their growth trajectories and present levels of performance instead of modifying the content. All students should be working toward the same standard, but growth targets should be adjusted when appropriate for the unique needs of students with disabilities.

Given these challenges, the following sections provide considerations and strategies for teachers as they develop SLOs for students with disabilities.

Supplemental guides are provided for the following teacher groups:

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

## Considerations

The following section describes some of the specific contextual factors that can influence a teacher's ability to measure student growth. The considerations are organized according to the sections of the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Template [Checklist for Writing and Approving Student Learning Objectives](#).

### Special Education Service Delivery Models

**Co-teaching settings.** In co-teaching situations, regular classroom teachers and special education teachers work together to teach a group of students that contains general education and special education students.

**Resource room settings.** Students with disabilities who receive instruction in co-teaching settings often also receive some pull-out instruction in resource room settings. Resource settings provide a smaller teacher-to-student ratio and have a flexible curriculum that can focus specifically on the content of a group SLO (if SLO goals happen to align with individual student's individualized education program [IEP] goals).

**Self-contained settings within a school.** Students with low incidence of disabilities are often educated in more restricted, segregated settings where they can receive specialized support.

**Therapeutic settings or other settings outside a school.** Other students with disabilities may be temporarily educated in therapeutic settings, such as in residential treatment facilities.

## Student Population

- **Teachers who work with small class sizes may need to combine classes or grade levels within an SLO.** As outlined in [Business Rules for Student Growth Measures](#) (ODE) when developing SLOs, teachers must have at least six students. When appropriate, SLOs may be written across grade bands to capture the minimum size of six.

In most cases, SLOs can include a grade band of students to address small class size. For example, Mr. Thomas teaches Grades K–3 students with severe cognitive disabilities. He has one kindergarten, two first-grade, one second-grade, and three third-grade students. His SLO can be written as a grade-band SLO covering the standards and content for Grades K–3. It should be noted that for special education, the minimum size of six does not refer to six full-time equivalent students; it is referring to six students on the teacher’s roster.

## Standards and Content

- **SLOs should support the participation of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible.** Students with disabilities should be instructed and assessed using the same standards as their general education peers. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) focuses on high academic standards and clear performance goals for students with disabilities that are consistent with the standards and expectations for all children. There is a potential risk in the SLO process for students with disabilities to become separated from the process for general education students, which could result in inappropriately lower growth targets for students with disabilities. It is important that students with disabilities are not held to lower standards or content than general education students and that general educators are involved in the process for students with disabilities in both co-teaching and resource room settings in order to achieve the result of college and career readiness for students with disabilities. All educators involved in providing services to students with disabilities in the targeted area of growth should collaborate in the SLO process. Teachers without specialized training may have difficulty creating rigorous, achievable goals for students with special needs.
- **SLOs for students with disabilities should align with the same academic standards as their general education peers but have growth targets adjusted appropriately.** SLOs are written for academic content area standards (e.g., English language arts or mathematics standards). Special education is not its own content area with its own set of standards, thus teachers should design SLOs for all students toward meeting Ohio’s Learning Standards. If students with disabilities work toward general education standards, SLOs should align with those general education standards. The learning targets for students with disabilities should be adjusted to ensure students have opportunities to demonstrate growth. In addition, teachers will need to ensure students with disabilities are receiving the supports and services necessary to help them achieve their growth targets.

In the rare cases where students with disabilities take alternate assessments, those alternate assessments may be based on (1) grade-level academic achievement standards; (2) modified academic achievement standards; or (3) alternate achievement standards (IDEA, 2004). In Ohio, SLOs for students with disabilities taking alternate assessments should align with Ohio’s Academic Content Standards—Extended.

- **SLOs should not focus on attainment of IEP goals.** The SLO should include multiple students (six or more) and be focused on critical skills and content—not focused narrowly on individual students’ IEP goals. That said, the IEP can be a useful source of information included in the baseline and trend data and student population sections of the

SLO template. Information found in individual students' IEPs includes information about area(s) of identification, student interest and learning styles, academic strengths and needs, and present levels of academic and social or emotional functioning. Parts of the IEP process can inform the development of SLOs. IEPs and SLOs require many of the same elements, including collection of baseline data, determination of growth targets, measurement of student progress, and supports and accommodations. It is important to remember, however, that SLOs are focused on the expected learning growth for **a group of students** (within a school district, a school, a single classroom, or across classrooms) over time, **not an individual student**. Special education teachers can leverage work that is already done within the context of specialized instruction specified on IEPs to gather data for SLOs, including progress monitoring.

In 2012, the Council for Exceptional Children published a position paper on special education teacher evaluation containing the following recommendation relevant to SLOs:

When measuring student growth, evaluations should not use a student's progress on their goals, objectives, or benchmarks on the individualized education program (IEP) as a measure of a special education teacher's contribution to student growth. Doing so may compromise the integrity of the IEP, shifting its focus from what is designed to be a child-centered document to the performance of the teacher (p. 10).

For more information on this policy paper, visit the Council for Exceptional Children ([www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)).

- **SLOs should be collaboratively developed and staff held jointly accountable for the academic growth of students with disabilities.** The staff involved in the development of SLOs can vary greatly depending on the type of service delivery model in place and the services students with disabilities receive.
  - In a co-teaching service delivery model, students with disabilities receive services in a regular education classroom from both a regular education teacher and a special education teacher. Both teachers are responsible for the development and implementation of the SLO and growth target. An SLO in this setting should focus on grade-level content and standards but should ensure that assessments are accessible to students with disabilities and that these students can accurately demonstrate knowledge with the use of appropriate accommodations. Growth targets should be rigorous yet achievable according to the students' present levels of performance.
  - In a resource setting, the special education teacher is accountable for the SLO but will want to develop it in collaboration with regular classroom teachers. Resource services for students with disabilities align directly with supporting students in acquiring the knowledge and skills taught in the regular classroom. An SLO for students with disabilities in a specially designed pull-out class provided by the special services department will use grade-level standards, but the content focus of the SLO may be

different from SLOs in regular education classrooms. It may focus on learning skills and strategies that help students be more successful in regular classroom settings.

- In a self-contained setting, the special education teacher will work with related service providers who have specific expertise to design specialized services for students with disabilities. SLOs may focus or incorporate these specialty areas in learning targets for students.

## Assessments

- **Appropriate assessments must be used to measure the growth of students with disabilities.** In all cases, appropriate accommodations should be provided to students with disabilities during instruction and assessment as included in student IEPs, so students can accurately demonstrate their knowledge and growth.
  - In a co-teaching and resource service delivery model, special education teachers should be using the same assessments as general education teachers if their students are working toward the same academic standards. The same assessments can be used, provided that the assessments are accessible and students can adequately demonstrate progress on the assessments. Granted, these students will need to have the same accommodations allowed per their IEPs when taking this assessment as when taking other assessments. All teachers teaching the same subjects and grade levels should strive to use common assessments, whether they be teacher-team created assessments, vendor assessments, or grade-band assessments that a school may have developed.
  - In a self-contained setting, teachers should ensure that assessments chosen for SLOs are sensitive enough to capture growth for the population of students. Assessments used in SLOs should be designed using universal design principles, be vertically scaled, and allow the student to demonstrate growth that can be captured, even when growth is minimal.

## Growth Targets

- **SLO growth targets should reflect rigorous and appropriate growth for students with disabilities.** Growth targets for students with disabilities should take into account their unique growth trajectory. Setting growth targets that are rigorous and appropriate requires teachers to have a strong understanding of their students' IEPs, background knowledge, and historical performance. It is important for teachers to realize that all students should be working toward the same standards and content, with the growth targets of students with disabilities adjusted as appropriate.

## Strategies

While the Ohio Department of Education still recommends a minimum of two student learning objectives, each teacher may now have just one. ODE guidance states that two to four SLOs should be representative of a teacher's schedule and student population. After the course level SLO is in place, general education teachers with a proportion of special education students may consider focusing on those students in one of their SLOs.

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 students with disabilities.** Students with disabilities are provided instruction and services using a variety of service delivery models. In all of these service models, professionals collaborate to provide services for students.

- **Co-teaching settings.** In co-teaching situations, regular classroom teachers and special education teachers should collaborate to create, implement, and monitor SLOs aligned with the targeted academic standards. Students with disabilities may appear on both teachers' rosters, and thus both teachers can share the same SLO. The SLO should accommodate the learning trajectories for students with disabilities, and the learning targets should be differentiated to ensure students with disabilities can demonstrate growth. (See Mr. Adams' example in ODE's [Business Rules for Student Growth Measures](#).)
- **Resource room settings.** Regular classroom teachers and special education teachers should collaborate to determine the focus of the SLO for students with disabilities in resource settings, which might be related to the SLO for that same group of students when they are in a co-teaching setting. For example, if the SLO in the co-teaching setting was focused on reading comprehension, specifically determining new vocabulary meanings while reading, resource room teachers might write a related SLO focused on the related skills of developing knowledge of root words, affixes, synonyms, and antonyms.
- **Self-contained settings within a school.** If the number of students in the self-contained classroom is more than six, teachers can develop SLOs in consultation with related service providers, such as speech-language pathologists and physical and occupational therapists. Even if these providers will not be held accountable for student growth, they can be critical partners in the process of selecting or designing appropriate assessments, developing the SLO, and differentiating growth targets.
- **Therapeutic settings or other settings outside a school.** In these situations, teachers may be temporarily collaborating with other non-educators regarding students' education. In these cases, providers may not be involved in the creation, implementation, or monitoring of SLOs that include these students but may provide academic progress monitoring data or information helpful to teachers as they determine growth targets. Students also may be transitioning to or from one of these environments, so in those

situations, business rules regarding minimal interval of instruction for SLOs would apply. For example, a district can use an abbreviated reporting period (i.e., six weeks) if they have data to serve as baseline and end-of-course based on the interval of instruction period. (See the example in ODE's [Business Rules for Student Growth Measures](#).)

**Strategy 2: Collaborate to design or select assessments.** Special education teachers should use the same assessments as regular classroom teachers if their students are held to the same standards, which is an expectation established within IDEA. The same assessments can be used, provided that the assessments are accessible, vertically scaled, not biased, and have enough stretch for students to demonstrate progress on the assessments adequately. Student accommodations documented on the IEP should be applied to ensure that student knowledge and skills can be accurately captured. If your school uses a response to intervention model or other tiered intervention system, regularly recorded progress monitoring data can be used to determine student performance and growth. This data and performance assessments can be integrated and leveraged within the SLO process.

**Strategy 3: Write an SLO focused on students with disabilities.** Special education teachers working in resource room and other self-contained settings will focus their SLOs on the specific learning needs of a group of six or more students with disabilities. Resource room teachers may wish to write an SLO focused on an area of need for this group of students that is also heavily supported by research evidence as being an intervention that improves learning content. Examples of these interventions include classroom learning strategies such as study skills instruction, note-taking strategies, self-monitoring, and summarization (Scruggs, Mastropieri, Berkley, & Graetz, 2009).

**Strategy 4: Write tiered or individualized targets.** Given the diverse strengths and needs of students with disabilities, consider writing tiered or individualized targets for each student. This approach to growth targets recognizes that, while all students should be expected to show growth, it may not be 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. It also ensures that growth targets are individualized based on students' current levels of academic performance.

**Strategy 5: Write an SLO that includes students in multiple classes or grade bands.** When class sizes are small, teachers of students with disabilities should consider including multiple classes or grade bands within the same SLO. For example, if a resource teacher works with six kindergarteners on Tuesdays and four first graders on Thursdays, and the teacher addresses the same reading comprehension skills and standards with both groups, then the teacher should write one SLO that includes the two groups. This increases the number of students included in the SLO. The teacher can differentiate the growth targets based on student needs.

**Strategy 6: Collaborate with regular classroom teachers, other teachers of students with disabilities, and related service providers in your school or district to practice writing SLOs for the students you provide instruction for regardless of class size.** In rare cases, teachers may be without student growth data. Teachers without enough student growth data to meet the minimum six-student requirement may want to consider writing an SLO if the student population

may vary above the threshold during and across school years. The collaboration used through this process can benefit teachers and students.

### **Special Education Sample SLOs**

[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.

[English Language Arts Grade 6-8 Low Incidence Students](#): This SLO from Ohio focuses on ELA performance of low incidence students.

[Grade 9-10 Resource Room Physical Science](#): This SLO example from Ohio focuses on physical science standards for a self-contained resource classroom.

[Grade 9 Algebra Coteaching](#): This SLO example from Rhode Island is written for a coteacher in Algebra.

[Grades 1–2 English Language Arts](#): This SLO example from Rhode Island is written by an educator who supports students in Grades 1 and 2 in English language arts.

[Grade 7 English Language Arts Resource](#): This SLO example from Hawaii focuses on instruction provided in a resource room for Grade 7 students in English language arts.

[Grades K–5 Mathematics](#): This SLO example from Hawaii includes students in Grades K–5 and focuses on mathematics achievement.

## References and Additional Resources

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