



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
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Deborah A. Gist  
Commissioner

**DATE:** January 18, 2013  
**TO:** Superintendents  
**FROM:** Deborah A. Gist  
Commissioner of Education  
**SUBJECT:** SLOs

Thank you for your continuing commitment and unwavering diligence as you fully implement educator evaluation systems in your school district. We began planning for this moment in December of 2009, when the Board of Regents (BOR) promulgated the Educator Evaluation System Standards, which are regulations with the full force of law. In the ensuing three years, we worked with you to develop and approve educator evaluation models, conduct field tests, train evaluators, and begin implementation, starting with gradual implementation last year. Each phase strengthened the next, based upon your feedback and our collective learning.

We continue to gather feedback and engage in research to refine the system and strengthen its implementation. That is part of our commitment to continuous improvement. We know that educator evaluation is the right work. It is the mechanism to support all educators' growth, and it ensures that all students have great teachers and principals. The SLO process is a formalization of the actions that our best teachers have used for many years. They identify the most important skills and knowledge their students need to learn, set appropriate learning goals, monitor student progress toward those goals, and assess the degree to which students achieve them.

A union-sponsored petition has generated significant feedback suggesting that many teachers do not feel comfortable with the process of identifying important learning outcomes, setting targets, and gathering evidence to demonstrate student progress, as the Student Learning Objectives (SLO) process requires. There is an apparent concern that the SLO process is being implemented unevenly across the state. Some teachers have expressed that they do not have confidence that decisions made based on data generated through this year's process reflect valid and reliable indicators of their work with students. Simultaneous with the petition, Providence requested the authority to make internal personnel decisions during the 2012-13 school year based on evaluation data without factoring in the SLO evidence, which I have decided to allow for the current school year.

Based on all of these factors, I believe that it is important to reinforce the following:

1. Every local education agency (LEA) in Rhode Island is now deep into full implementation of an approved educator evaluation system. Every approved system includes the commitment to use SLOs as a measure of student achievement to meet the system requirements for the inclusion of student learning as part of an approved evaluation system. SLOs are a required component of this year's evaluation process.
2. RIDE is committed to performing a thorough review of the SLO process through an analysis of data generated during this school year, as well as other feedback-generating opportunities, such as surveys and focus groups. In order for this analysis to be objective and relevant, it is critical that every LEA remain fully committed to the SLO process. This will ensure that the data generated about the system is accurate.
3. RIDE will make a decision about how the SLO process will be used for recertification purposes this year, based on the data analysis conducted once all districts have reported their results. We are confident that the SLO design is strong and provides the structure and flexibility to accommodate all teachers and assignments. We will better understand the validity and reliability of SLO-based results once we have had a chance to analyze the data.
4. For the 2012-2013 school year only, an LEA may request the authority to make some internal personnel decisions based on evaluation data without including SLO evidence.
5. In order to maintain RIDE approval of the LEA's educator evaluation system, SLO evidence must be fully implemented for the 2013-2014 school year, including for all internal personnel decisions.

I know that many of you are quite confident with how your district is implementing the SLO process and do not want to interrupt that good work. There are many safeguards in place to make certain that any educator who receives an *Ineffective* rating has a preponderance of evidence, beyond SLO data, that results in that rating. However, we want to be sure that statewide use is built upon a strong foundation. We want to hear from you about how RIDE can more effectively support your implementation efforts to be sure that we have a fair and valid way to collect evidence of student learning.

Rhode Island is committed to systems of multiple measures and chose to use the SLO process rather than building and implementing a multitude of state assessments. We believe that it is important for teachers to work together to design and collect curriculum-embedded evidence to determine the progress students are making on important instructional goals. We are confident that we made the right decision and are looking forward to working with you to ensure that this process works statewide and provides an opportunity for all educators to capture how they contribute to student learning.