Measures of Student Growth

Overview

Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, appraisal systems in Texas, whether the state-recommended system or a locally developed system, will need to include a measure of student growth at the individual teacher level.

What is Student Growth?

Student growth measures how much a student progresses academically during his or her time with a particular teacher. It takes into consideration a student's entering skill level when measuring how much the student grew over time, and, as opposed to measuring student proficiency on an assessment, student growth isn't concerned with whether or not a student passes a particular test or reaches a predetermined and uniform benchmark. It considers equally students who enter behind grade level, on grade level, and beyond grade level, tailoring growth expectations to each student's context.

By measuring growth, a teacher develops a better understanding about the academic impact of his or her instructional choices. In a formative appraisal process like T-TESS, feedback derived from student growth acts as a complimentary piece to the feedback derived from the appraisal rubric. Whereas the rubric captures how the teacher's practice impacts students holistically, student growth captures how the teacher's practice impacts students academically.

How Should Student Growth Data Be Used?

Student growth data should be used just as observation data and goal-setting and professional development data are used in T-TESS – as feedback that will help inform teachers about what worked, what didn't work, and what they can do to improve their practice moving forward.

Student growth is one measure in a multiple-measure evaluation system, and the inclusion of student growth data in a formative evaluation process provides for a more complete understanding of the impact of instructional and professional practices teachers deploy over the course of a school year.

What Are the Four Options for Measuring Student Growth?

Districts have four options for measuring student growth: 1) student learning objectives (SLOs); 2) portfolios; 3) district-level pre- and post-tests; and 4) value-add measures (VAM) for teachers in state-tested subjects.

Districts are free to choose any measure for their teachers – no single measure must be used for a particular grade or subject (e.g., VAM doesn't have to be used for teachers of tested grades and subjects). Districts can also use different measures for different grades or subjects. For example, a

district could use SLOs for elementary generalists, but portfolios for secondary foreign language teachers.

Measures of Student Growth
The four measures of student growth can generally be placed into two buckets.

- *Process-based* Student Growth Measures: SLOs and Portfolios
- *Assessment-based* Student Growth Measures: District Pre- and Post-Tests and VAM

SLOs and Portfolios:
The SLO and Portfolio processes follow very similar paths. They are designed to engage teachers in deliberate thinking as they answer fundamental questions about their instructional plans and decisions.

1. What are the foundational skills that I teach in this class?
2. Where do I think my students will be with these skills upon entering my course?
3. Where are my students actually with these skills upon entering my course?
4. Based on where my students are with these skills, if I provide effective instruction throughout the course, where should these students be at the end of the course?

With these growth targets set (in answering question 4), the teacher then monitors students' progress throughout the course to ensure that the instructional plans for those students are effectively moving them toward their targeted skill level, making adjustments to pedagogy when necessary.

In both SLOs and Portfolios, the teacher's rating would come from both how well the teacher interacted with the process and how well students reached and/or exceeded growth targets.

SLOs and Portfolios are not about precisely quantifying or calculating an amount of growth. They are designed to guide deliberate and thoughtful decision-making for teachers and determine the impact of their instruction. The benefits and challenges of SLOs and Portfolios lie in the depth with which they prompt strategic instruction and reflection. While this can be difficult and sometimes uncomfortable, it can also be extremely valuable in improving pedagogy.

District Pre- and Post-Tests and VAM:
District Pre- and Post-Tests and VAM are student growth measures that focus on assessments as the basis for determining students' skill levels entering a course and exiting a course. They are designed to quantify growth at the individual student and/or teacher level.

VAM uses standardized state assessments to determine whether or not a student progresses as much as expected based on the student's unique profile based on his or her prior state assessment results. VAM results can be broken down into entering achievement levels (high, medium, and low), gender, socio-economic status, and other student subcategories. VAM can show teachers what types of students are

or aren't progressing in their classes so that teachers can target professional development opportunities to improving instruction for those groups.

Because VAM measures growth using state assessments, VAM can only be used for teachers in tested grades and subjects. Any district choosing to use VAM as a measure of student growth will need to use at least one other measure for the approximately 80% of teachers that can't use VAM.

District Pre- and Post-Tests, like VAM, use assessments to determine entering and exiting skill levels for students, but they are based on district-level assessments instead of state assessments. Districts would be free to decide whether to use district-created assessments or assessments secured from a third party. The level of formative feedback and data analysis available with District Pre- and Post-Tests would be dependent on how the district collects, disaggregates, and shares student results with teachers.

District Pre- and Post-Tests and VAM allow for greater comparability across campuses – students are taking the same assessments and the interpretation of assessment results are generally objective and mathematical. The challenges with District Pre- and Post-Tests and VAM lie with the value of the feedback in improving instruction. Knowing how much a student or a group of students grew over time doesn't necessarily indicate which actual instructional practices either lead to or hindered that growth.

Training for Student Growth Measures

SLOs and Portfolios
TEA will have a one-day training for appraisers and support teams on SLOs and Portfolios for those districts that use these measures. The training will be provided through the regional education service centers (ESCs) and will be at no cost to the district for the 2017-2018 school year.

District Pre- and Post-Test and VAM
Although TEA will not have training for District Pre- and Post-Tests and Value-Added, districts that choose to use these measures are strongly encouraged to seek out training and guidance (TEA will provide guidance documents) on how best to use these two measures in a formative appraisal process so that the data has instructional value for educators as teachers seek to improve their practices.

Pilot/Refinement Opportunities

VAM
Through the T-TESS pilot and refinement years (the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years), districts have been piloting VAM, looking at the campus and teacher-level data for informational purposes. Although it is uncertain at this point whether TEA will be able to continue the VAM pilot in the 2016-2017 school year, districts that plan to use VAM in the 2017-2018 school year and beyond should plan on producing and funding that measure on their own.

SLOs

TEA is piloting an SLO process during the 2015-2016 school year. An SLO refinement year will occur during the 2016-2017 school, where TEA will implement a refined SLO training and process based on feedback and lessons learned from current pilot districts.

Any district that is considering or wants to experience SLOs prior to the 2017-2018 school year is encouraged to participate in the SLO refinement year during the 2016-2017 school year. Districts can participate in a limited capacity, with just a single campus or a few grades and subjects taking part in the SLO refinement year. This experience will better position districts to both determine whether or not SLOs are a measure of student growth they'd like to use and understand what district-wide implementation would entail heading into the 2017-2018 school year.

Summary of Pros and Cons of the Student Growth Measures

SLOs and Portfolios

Pros	Cons
More granular feedback about *which* instructional choices were effective and ineffective	Subjectivity and estimation throughout the process
Ratings based on a balance between teacher behaviors and student outcomes	Results not practicably comparable between campuses
Teacher-driven processes	Requires more campus-level support to implement

District Pre- and Post-Tests and VAM

Pros	Cons
Less campus-level support required for implementation	Feedback less insightful at the instructional level
Results more objective, quantifiable, and comparable between campuses	Ratings based on assessment results (don't include teacher behaviors)
	Assessment-driven process