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MEANING-MAKING AS A CRITICAL PROCESS IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM  
IMPLEMENTATION: INSIGHTS FROM THE DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS-BASED  
STUDENT GROWTH OBJECTIVES

By

DESSISLAVA GRADINAROVA-KIROVA

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Meaning-Making as a Critical Process in Educational Reform Implementation:  
Insights from the Development of Standards-Based Student Growth Objectives

by DESSISLAVA GRADINAROVA-KIROVA

Dissertation Director:

Dr. Drew Gitomer

This case study focused on the process through which educators make meaning of the purpose of developing student growth objectives (SGOs) as measures of teaching effectiveness in the first year (2013-2014) of the statewide rollout of the policy in New Jersey. During the same year, two other components of the comprehensive educational reform were launched - the teacher evaluation initiative (part of which is the development of SGOs) and the statewide implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). As educational reform implementation depends on educators' meaning-making process, the study used a cognitive approach to the study of reform implementation, based on work by Spillane and colleagues (2000, 2002), and explored assumptions of a proposed theory of change, built around the policy's officially stated outcomes. Data were collected in three separate rounds of interviews with seven 3rd grade teachers and three administrators. Questions addressed multiple aspects of the policy's mandates, including the nature of collaborative practices, selection of appropriate assessments, and perceptions of the policy's adequacy in providing valid measures to be used for teacher evaluation purposes. The findings show that teachers and administrators developed

distinctly different implementation goals based on their interpretation of the policy's purpose. Teachers approached the implementation process with the goal of showcasing their teaching talent and obtain high evaluation ratings. Administrators saw the SGO policy as means to boost students' overall academic performance, and more specifically to improve outcomes on the state's year-end test. Consistent with findings in other studies of policy implementation, educators adopted mostly form-based interpretations (Spillane and Callahan, 2000, Coburn, 2004) of needed changes. Although teachers and administrators used common language to describe implementation, the meanings they derived differed significantly. Educators also developed rudimentary function-based understandings of the policy's intent which were suppressed by strong regulatory pressures.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

As part of widely adopted new systems for teacher evaluation in the U.S., funded through the federal Race to the Top (RttT) initiative, in 2013-2014 the state of New Jersey rolled out its own teacher evaluation mandate. The new teacher evaluation initiative was based on multiple measures of teaching effectiveness, among which the student growth objectives (SGOs). These measures, accounting for students' learning gains were set to contribute to a teacher's overall yearly evaluation rating. Because of their high-stakes character and the emphasis on the process through which they were set to be implemented by schools, and specifically by teachers for their students, the SGOs became a focal point of the larger teacher evaluation reform implementation. However, successful educational reform implementation depends on the process through which educators make meaning of the policy's message. The understanding of the purpose of the educational reform, and what it calls for in terms of actual changes in practice defines how policy is enacted by the implementation agents (IAs).

The SLO measure consists of several components contributing in the implementation process – an assessment of baseline student' knowledge and skills, a learning target (set prior to instruction and on the basis of the baseline assessment), a post-assessment measuring learning gain along the learning target, and a set number of students who are covered by the learning target. As such, the SLO provides a measure of students' learning growth, which is attributed to the teacher who provides instruction toward the learning target. The measure is used to provide evidence of teaching effectiveness, which in addition to other measures make up a composite yearly rating used to evaluate educators. Within this general definition, specific features of the SLO

development and implementation process can vary substantially, based on the local state requirements (Crouse, Gitomer and Joyce, in press). In New Jersey, the policy recommended implementation of all these components, and emphasized the importance of collaborative practice both among teachers and between teachers and administrators or supervisors.

All of these components, or aspects of the SGO implementation were framed as a response to broad recommendations for use of “quality assessments”, and “rigorous, yet achievable” growth expectations and “collaborative practice”. Unpacking these broad recommendations into practical suggestions about changing existing practices was assumed to occur as a collaborative process in which IAs would come to mutual understanding of what “quality assessment” meant, and design “rigorous, yet achievable” growth expectations based on contextual factors and familiarity with students’ learning needs. For this reason, the aim of this research is to track the process of meaning-making as it occurred throughout the first year of implementation and follow IAs’ understanding of all of the different components described in the SGO policy. To this end, the research is structured to follow IAs’ understanding of recommendations for selection of learning targets, selection of high quality assessments, reliably measuring learning growth, and use of evidence of learning to design targeted instruction. Because of the policy’s emphasis on collaborative and professional learning, IAs’ understanding of these aspects of the implementation process were also tracked. Ultimately, the IAs’ understanding of the policy recommendations for implementation of different components support inferences about their attitudes and beliefs about the policy’s purpose.

While this research explores the process through which educators made meaning of the purpose of developing SGOs as a measure of teaching effectiveness in the first year of statewide rollout of the policy in New Jersey in the academic 2013-2014 year, by exploring their understanding of recommendations about the various components of the SGOs (articulation of learning targets, selection of standards-based assessments, collaborative efforts, and professional learning), other considerations relating to the SGO implementation were also taken into account. Notably, during the same year, two other complementary educational reforms were launched in the state - the teacher evaluation initiative (part of which is the development of SGOs) and the statewide implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

The goal of the study is to provide insight into the process of stakeholders' (teachers' and administrators') understanding of the purpose of the implementation of the standards-based SGOs. The process of interpretation of the policy message, as it pertains to changing instructional and organizational practices to align practice to policy requirements, is motivated by the stakeholders' own practice and specific position they have, and therefore the types of interpretations they make are deeply rooted in their professional background, experience, and beliefs about instruction and educational assessment. The study aims to describe the different stakeholders' understanding of the policy requirements and implementation purpose. The challenges in this process (the implementation of standards-based SGOs), as described by the study, result from the multilayered character of the policy message, as SGOs are integral to the implementation of several different components of the comprehensive reform, such as the implementation

of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and the new systems for teacher evaluation, which take into account the SGOs as measures of student learning gain.

Additional challenges to stakeholders' interpretation of the SGO policy relate to the complexities of identifying appropriate standards-aligned learning targets for mixed classes of native English speakers and English Learners (ELs). The articulation of SGOs crosscuts multiple mandates and multiple sets of standards, such as the CCSS and state-adopted Language Proficiency Standards (LPS).

The review of the literature on the cognitive approach to policy meaning-making, and specifically studies utilizing Spillane and colleagues' models of policy interpretation (Spillane 1996, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005; Spillane and Callahan 2000; Coburn 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006; Hill 2001; Hill and Ball 2004), theoretically situate the study of the SGOs implementation in New Jersey by sketching an account of how IAs approach interpretation, adaptation, and transformation of new policy directives into practical solutions. The presented research on policy implementation meaning-making in this section discusses cognitive models of IAs' understanding and reflecting on what the instructional policy message calls for. The cognitive approach to understanding meaning-making in policy interpretation allows to build a model of the different factors taking place in this complex process (O'Toole, 1986; Honig, 2006).

The review of the literature in this section motivates the study design and strengthens the argument about studying the meaning-making process and how it affects stakeholders' capacity to understand the policy's purpose, as the IAs' understanding of the

goals of the policy motivates particular changes in practice throughout the implementation process. As the most important school-based factor affecting student achievement (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Kane & Staiger, 2008), teachers and their perceptions of the new educational policies they are to enact in practice are in the center of this study.

This study of is based on a cognitive approach to policy implementation, which uncovers the complex cognitive aspects of stakeholders' implementation efforts (Figure 1, chapter 2). The cognitive aspect to policy implementation, which is further described in the literature review section provides a framework to understand the way IAs perceive both the purpose and their own role in the policy implementation process. To ensure that the cognitive approach to studying policy meaning-making accounts for the many aspects of the processes through which policy gets translated into practice, the issue of implementation of SGOs as instructional policy, as defined by Sykes and Wilson (2016) situates the study in the wider policy implementation literature. The specific challenges of the SGOs policy, as implemented in the state of New Jersey in 2013-2014, are compared to major and well known challenges to policy implementation and the findings of this study are extended to inform the wider policy implementation field and allow for broader contextualization of the insights from this research.

The study follows a proposed theory of change<sup>1</sup>, based on the interpretation of the policy's intent (communicated through officially released documents and policy guidelines) to track how specific policy requirements are approached by educators and how they make sense of them in a context of multiple interpretation influences. To understand the implementation process, the study analyzes participants' perceptions of various policy resources, materials, and initial understanding of key policy concepts, and the extent to which policy requirements are put in place.

The significance of this study is that it explores issues of implementing a teacher evaluation component amidst policy changes around measuring teaching effectiveness and learning standards. As the policy interpretation process was embedded in the context of strong regulatory pressures with respect to teaching evaluation, the research is focused on the meaning-making process of a third grade team of teachers and their supervising administrators. In New Jersey, third grade is the first year students are required to take standardized assessments, and thus teachers were faced with both the need to implement a measure of teaching effectiveness based on learning growth, while also prepare students for the state's test. The study deals with the challenges of the third grade team, as teachers and administrators reconciled their commitment to providing optimal instructional opportunities for the diverse population of students they served, with the need to comply with the implementation requirements. The third grade team's meaning-

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<sup>1</sup>The theory of change was based on my own interpretation of the officially stated desired outcomes of the policy. Both the theory of change, and the Logic Model outlining its components are not officially endorsed.

making challenges are discussed in the context of the school's various programs, including programs aimed at supporting students with diverse learning needs, i.e., English learners (ELs). As such the study provides important insights with respect to IAs' meaning-making, and highlights a comparison between teachers and administrators based on the two groups of implementers' beliefs and goals with regard to the policy. By including a motivational aspect of the meaning-making process, the study offers important insights into the IAs' consideration of needed changes resulting from interpretation of the policy.

### **Theory of Change**

The study's theory of change makes use of the officially stated desired outcomes of the SGOs policy (NJDOE, 2012, p.14), as articulated in official documents, i.e., 1) An increase in the quality of discussions surrounding student growth and learning, 2) An opportunity for teachers to engage in the evaluation and creation of assessments, 3) Increased knowledge and focused use of New Jersey's curriculum standards, 4) Deeper understanding of the academic strengths and weaknesses of students, 5) Clearer indications of when and how to adjust instruction to meet students' needs, 6) Increased opportunities to reflect on student performance and teaching practice, and 7) More thoughtful professional planning for the next school year.

The theory of change, as proposed in this study, examines the participants' self-reports establishing how well they understood the officially stated outcomes of the policy and the extent to which specific inputs and implemented requirements contribute to the

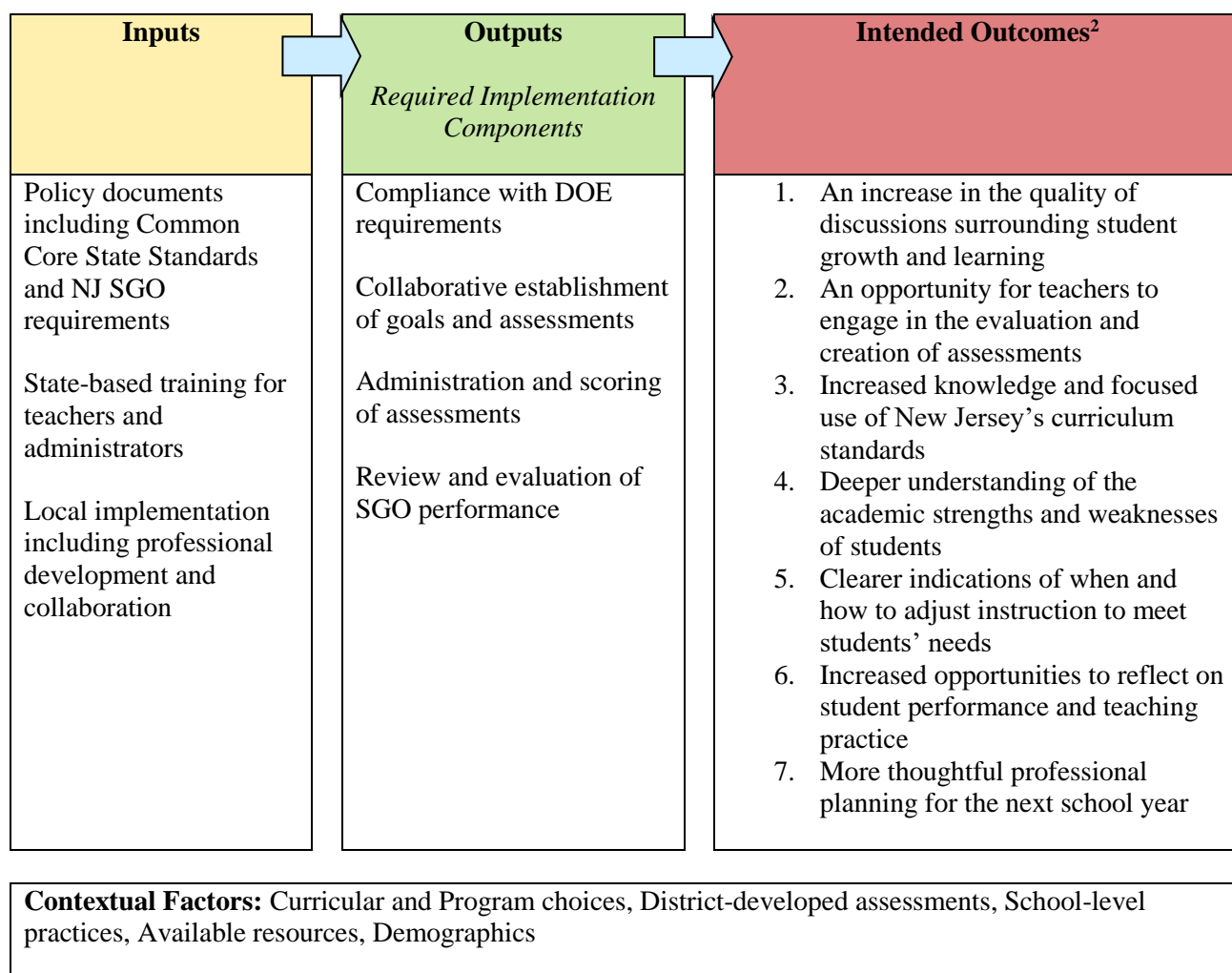


implementation process. The study also describes the extent to which stakeholders' perceptions of the purpose of the new policy aligns with the officially stated purpose of the SGOs, and how their own goals, as connected to their understanding of the purpose leads to perceived changes in instructional and assessment practice.

Based on the interpretation of the described policy intent, explicitly stated in the SGOs Guidebook (NJDOE, 2012, p.14), the Logic Model in Table 1 represents the types of inputs and outputs (requirements in terms of actions and considerations) that must be put in place in order for the articulated outcomes to be reached (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). The requirements pertain both to implementation activities (what has to happen) and to specific features of the SGOs (what has to be produced). The Logic Model lays out a logical framework that informs the study design with respect to the types of information collected to answer the research questions of the study. The study focuses on stakeholders' perceptions of the inputs and their understanding of the required implementation components, and their perceptions of progress towards intended outcomes. As the table suggests, the study is based on the assumption that the quality of implementation of the inputs and required components, together with specified contextual factors will lead to intended outcomes. In addition to examining these assumptions, the study probes stakeholders' own understanding of the purpose of the SGO policy, namely the extent to which they believe that the officially stated outcomes exhaustively describe the goals of the implementation of the SGOs as a measure of teaching effectiveness.

Table 1 –

## Logic Model Representation of the Proposed Theory of Change



**Logic Model inputs.** The inputs listed in the Logic Model are all addressed separately in policy documents released by the New Jersey State Department of Education (NJDOE) and aimed at supporting the implementation process (NJDOE, 2012). The documents are particularly important, because of their capability to guide a

<sup>2</sup> The NJDOE SGO Guidebook (NJDOE, 2012), states that when done thoughtfully and collaboratively, the SGO process will lead to these seven outcomes (p. 4).

straightforward process of policy implementation. As pointed out by Cohen and Moffitt (2009), any adopted policy ambiguity depends on the policy message strength, or how directly it recommends “what must happen in practice to achieve policy objectives” (Sykes and Wilson, 2016). The focus of this study is on the participants’ understanding of the inputs and requirements (as per the Logic Model) and their perception of the capability of these requirements to guide a straightforward implementation process. This is important, because as Sykes and Wilson describe, when ambiguous policy aims are coupled with intense regulatory pressures (which was the case with the high-stakes character of the SGOs policy in 2013-2014), the gaps in the IAs’ necessary expertise and understanding could become problematic for the implementation process (Cohen and Moffitt, 2009). In this sense, the Logic Model Inputs are examined with respect to their role in implementation of the SGOs. The stakeholders’ perceptions of these inputs inform the capability of the available documents, instruments, and other information to support a well-defined and prescribed implementation of the policy.

**Logic Model outputs - required implementation components.** The specified Logic Model Outputs have to do with the required activities and the products to be developed through the implementation process. These are specified in policy documents (NJDOE, 2012), and describe significant steps and milestones in the SGO implementation process, which would ensure attainment of officially stated policy outcomes. The Required Implementation Components are aimed at providing recommendations with regard to the implementation process (e.g., compliance with DOE requirements, collaborative establishment of goals and assessments, administration and scoring of assessments, review and evaluation of SGO performance), and thus avoid

potential ambiguity in the practical implementation. The focus on the listed Required Implementation Components in the Logic Model for this study is motivated by the issue of the balance of pressure and support offered by instructional policy (Sykes and Wilson, 2016). This issue is traced back to Elmore's (2005) argument which involves issues of reciprocity and agency in policy implementation.

**Logic Model outcomes.** The Logic Model Outcomes describe the intended changes in practice resulting from the policy's implementation. These outcomes were explicitly stated in SGO policy documents (NJDOE, 2012) and provided a strong statement for the intended policy purpose. The Logic Model Outcomes outlined key assumptions about how the new policy would affect school practices, if the new policy is implemented as intended by the state. Following the internal logic of the model, the study was built around the collection of evidence on the IAs' perceptions of the Input and Required Implementation Components, and their role in reaching intended policy outcomes. Ultimately, the Logic Model helped to identify and examine stakeholders' perceptions of the policy's regulatory pressures and its intended purpose, and subsequently helped identify appropriate indicators to measure success of stated outcomes.

In an effort to build an argument for the study design, the next chapter offers a review of the wider reform implementation literature, and more specifically the research conducted using a cognitive approach to policy-meaning-making. The literature review explores recent findings with respect to how participants' perceptions and prior experiences combine with the pressures from the environment, including normative and regulatory pressures of the policy itself (Coburn, 2004) to shape policy implementation.

The description of the data analysis in Chapter 3 offers additional detail about how the Logic Model components were addressed in the data analysis process. Chapter 4 includes the proposed theory of SGO policy implementation, and goes on to describe specific findings of this research study. The findings of the study are then discussed with respect to recent and more traditional theoretical paradigms and other research results in Chapter 5. The concluding section addresses limitations of this research as well as considerations related to the research findings, as well as implications for practice.

**Logic Model contextual factors.** The described theory of change takes into account contextual factors affecting the local implementation process and puts forth assumptions that can influence local policy enactment. These factors include curricular and program choices, district-developed assessments, school-level practices, available resources, and demographics. The contextual factors are of particular importance in this research as they play a role in framing the meaning-making process, and ground the decisions about practical changes as a response to the policy. The extent of the changes to practice are constrained by resources available to IAs (e.g., access to information, PD, etc.). Decisions made regarding assessment and use of evidence of learning to improve and target instruction are bound by the existing assessment and instructional requirements adopted by the school and the district. Further, the roles of the IAs, as defined by the schools' programmatic and curricular choices (i.e., bilingual, dual language, ESL, and English-only programs) determine the types of collaborations, professional conversations and implementation decisions IAs are able to engage in.

The theory of change, which was formulated around the officially intended policy outcomes (as described by policy documents), is grounded in the larger context of teaching evaluation reform taking place nationally. The next section describes some general conditions under which new systems of teaching evaluation make use of student growth measures as indicators of teaching effectiveness and provides the backdrop for delving deeper into the implementation of the SGOs as a measure of teaching effectiveness in New Jersey in 2013-2014.

### **Teaching Evaluation Reform: The Role of Student Measures**

Before taking a closer look at the state of affairs in the first year of teaching evaluation implementation in the state of New Jersey and describe common and more specific issues of SGO policy recommendation, it is important to describe the essence and purpose of using measures of student learning gain for evaluation of teaching effectiveness. Understanding the use of student learning measures for evaluation of teaching quality ultimately helps build an argument about why and how the implementation challenges are connected to the interpretation of the policies by IAs and what educators need to understand and do to implement these measures in practice.

At the time of the study, in the United States funding was available under the RttT initiative only to states that required schools to adopt systems for teacher evaluation at least partly based on student learning measures (U. S. Department of Education, 2009). Although this is no longer the case, and the teacher evaluation practices have changed substantially with the reauthorized Every Student Succeeds Act (U. S. Department of

Education, 2016), this study reflects legislation that was in effect at the time when the research took place. To satisfy this requirement, and to continue to receive federal funding, many state-level Departments of Education throughout the U.S. have adopted metrics that connect student achievement to quality of teaching. In many states this has translated to basing about half of the teachers' professional evaluation ratings on student growth measures (Shepard, 2012). Two widely popular metrics are based (a) on calculations of student growth based on performance on standardized assessments, typically administered state-wide at the end of each academic school year, and (b) on calculations of student growth as a change measure between a baseline score (start of academic school year) to a post-assessment measure (end of academic school year). The latter measure is known as Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), which in the state of New Jersey are termed Student Growth Objectives, or SGOs.

The requirements mandating the use of student achievement gains in evaluation of teaching effectiveness result from a wider trend in educational accountability in U.S. public education system. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), required that State Educational Agencies (SEAs) conduct yearly assessments for all students in grades 3-8 in both mathematics and English language arts (ELA) to determine school districts' performance levels. As a result of heightened accountability measures the pressure for teachers to better prepare students for standardized assessments has increased and evidence has shown that teachers largely shaped their instruction to "conform to the expectations set by end-of-year accountability tests" (Shepard, 2012, p.15).

In 2009, resulting from a number of federal programs including RttT, School Improvement Grants (SIGs), the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), accountability with regard to student achievement shifted from schools and districts to the classroom teacher (Crouse, Gitomer and Joyce, in press). The requirement for using standardized testing scores from yearly state assessments in mathematics and ELA also shifted from an evaluation of absolute performance to calculating learning growth between multiple test administrations. The process consisted of using sophisticated statistical models, designed to account for the degree of individual teacher contribution in a given academic year to the learning growth of the students, through a formula comparing assessment scores of students to the scores of the same students in previous school years, and/or to the scores of other students in the same grade level. Much of the wider debate about the use of high-stakes testing for educational accountability purposes is focused on the quality and fairness of learning growth models (e.g., Amrein-Beardsley & Collins, 2012; Harris, 2009, 2011; Ladd & Walsh, 2002), and their adequacy for measuring teaching effectiveness and informing teacher evaluation ratings.

Less attention has been paid to other student-level measures used to inform teacher evaluations, as the majority of states receiving RttT funds use student learning measures based on standardized yearly assessments only for teachers in grades 3–8 in mathematics and ELA. For all other teachers, states receiving RttT funds are also required to use measures of student growth for evaluation purposes. To this end, U.S. states participating in the RttT initiative have adopted SLOs, meant to satisfy two distinct



purposes (Crouse, Gitomer and Joyce, in press). On one hand they represent one measure (of a set of multiple measures) to provide yearly evidence about teacher effectiveness for personnel decisions related to tenure, dismissal, and promotion. On the other, SLOs are intended to provide useful data to inform understanding of student learning gains and needs, and by extension recommendations for professional improvement of instructional practice.

Studies of the use of SLOs point to a number of intended benefits of SLO/SGO implementation, among which greater teacher involvement in goal setting, the crafting of instruction to align to goals, and the collection and analysis of data (Crouse, Gitomer and Joyce, in press). The five-year Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC) report published in 2013 examined the genesis, development, and implementation of the SLO approach and found that often, SLO implementation assessment choices were not well standardized and had “a high error rate in a “routine sample” of exams. This led to the design of an audit of SLO assessments as a way of establishing quality control requirements of SLOs” (CTAC, 2013, Crouse, Gitomer and Joyce, in press).

An earlier CTAC report (2004) on the evaluation of the Denver Pay-for-Performance initiative and the impact of performance-based compensation on student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and systemic change, found that students whose teachers crafted high quality SLOs outperformed their peers. However, CTAC (2004) found that many teachers and schools set modest SLOs for their students. Additionally, the report suggests that teachers learned how to develop high-quality learning targets for their students after a period of several years.

**Assessment measures as indicators of teaching effectiveness.** Although studies of implementation of teacher evaluation systems are limited, this section reviews specific impacts of implementation of instructional policy on teaching practices, and specifically how the use of student assessment measures affects instructional practice as teacher evaluation implementation continues to add pressure for teachers to work toward better preparing students for testing. The issues of using SGO/SLO assessment measures in teacher evaluation implementation are also connected to particular ways in which this affects instruction of EL students.

In recent years, research on accountability policy has established connections between changes in teaching practice to ensure satisfactory student outcomes, and more specifically has described instances in which teachers narrow their instruction to focus their instruction on the content being assessed by tests linked to teaching effectiveness (Hamilton, 2003). Parallel to this is a tendency to teach using the formats of the accountability test, i.e., having students spend extensive amount of time answering questions in the format of the accountability test rather than using formats that might have greater pedagogical value or spend a great deal of time having students practice with released forms of the tests.

Studies have also explored the impact of instructional policy based on the use of student achievement gains and their effect on the instructional practices of teachers. Firestone et al. (2004) found that when testing is used as a policy tool, it directly affects teachers' instruction. The study reported on data focused on the effect of the sanctions for teachers associated with use of student assessment data for policy purposes. Of interest is

the study's discussion of the factors contributing to increased pressure for teachers. The authors suggest that there is evidence that teacher accountability systems based on student achievement may have a detrimental effect on the actual quality of teaching due to the emphasis on test-taking instructional approaches, aimed at decontextualizing test preparation. This finding is also supported by evidence from research showing that decontextualized, test-like, drill-and-practice routines are harmful for students' learning (Shepard, 2012). Increased emphasis on didactic teaching takes away time and resources that could be used by teachers to engage students in more challenging instruction, building students' competence and motivation to engage in deep learning.

Teachers who teach in low-performing and under-resourced schools may have considerably different approaches to teaching and preparing students for testing compared to teachers in better-performing school districts (Baker, Barton, Darling-Hammond, Haertel, Ladd, Linn, Ravitch, Rothstein, Shavelson, & Shepard, 2010; Firestone et al., 2004; Shepard, 2012). When faced with sanctions for students' low performance in historically low SES-ranked schools, teachers are more likely to take a teaching-to-the-test approach in order to prepare students to do well on the accountability assessment. Directly linking teacher evaluation ratings and sanctions to student performance is potentially discouraging for teachers. In districts with large and unpredictable variation in student assessments scores, the perceived unfairness of the association between teaching effectiveness and students' achievement can undermine teacher morale (Valli & Buese, 2007). Evidence from research shows that "teacher attrition

and demoralization have been associated with test-based accountability efforts, particularly in high-need schools” (Baker et al., 2010, p. 4).

Reports and findings of recently implemented teacher evaluation systems (Fleischaker, 2014), based partially on student growth measures, reiterate the concern about increasing pressure for teachers to teach to the test (Haertal, 1999; Shepard, 2000) rather than spending appropriate time and effort to ensure that students acquire academic content at sufficient depth (Herman, Heritage and Goldschmidt, 2011; Marion & Buckley, 2011). Moreover, SLOs have been deemed “the least effective form of evaluation” (Gill, B., J. Bruch, and K. Booker, 2013), as they may be used to game the system by selecting low targets to get higher evaluations (Bergin, 2015, p. 4). Herman et al., (2011) focused on the issue of valid and reliable use of assessments data, such as “standardized test administration conditions, using a common rubric for scoring, and assuring reliability of scoring” (p. 9). Following systematic requirements for administration and scoring of assessments helps ensure the fairness and consistency of the process. Unless there are clear procedures in place, the results would be “dependent on who does the scoring rather than on the quality of the student response” (p. 9). Thus, unless SLOs are consistent across classes, valid comparisons among teachers cannot be made (Gill et al., 2013; Bergin, 2015).

Apart from the issue of the scoring of the assessment, used to account for student growth, which includes alignment to learning standards, several publications (Briggs, 2011; Marion & Buckley, 2011; Prince, Schuermann, Guthrie, Witham, Milanowski, & Thorn, 2008) address additional criteria needed for SGO/SLO assessment administration

and scoring, such as integrated vertical links across grade levels, use of interval scale properties for the scoring criteria and consistent use of measures. Authors of these publications also recommend that states and schools establish clear learning expectations, with appropriate quality assessments aligned to these expectations. To ensure that educators are well prepared to implement these expectations and monitor learning growth through well aligned assessments, districts need extensive professional development to train staff to make valid interpretation of the results (Prince et al., 2008; Marion & Buckley, 2011; Zoller & McNabb, 2012). Related to the issue of using valid student assessment scores as indicators of teaching effectiveness, is the issue of measuring causal attribution to the teacher based on student assessment data and using this information for teaching quality inferences (Prince et al., 2008; Fleischaker, 2014).

*Assessment of English learners.* As part of the issue of using student assessment measures as indicators of teaching effectiveness, issues of assessing English learners must also be addressed. Although guidelines for assessing learning growth of ELs for high-stakes decisions are rarely explicit, reports of important issues have started to emerge from teacher evaluation implementation reports and other research findings. However, addressing these issues should take into consideration the mobility and diversity of immigrant populations (with EL students), as well as small research samples may affect the extent to which research results are statistically reliable and thus provide valid results (Amrein-Beardsley, 2008; Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006; Holdheide, Goe, Croft, Reschly, 2010).

Holdheide et al. (2010) describe several important issues with regard to using EL assessment measures to evaluate teaching effectiveness (p. 12-13). The first one has to do with the fact that for recently immigrated EL students, schools often do not possess test scores from previous years, which makes it difficult to estimate with any level of accuracy possible learning gain for these students. Additionally, assessment procedures for ELs must necessarily account for both the specific knowledge of the content matter being tested in addition to the level of English comprehension. Because of this, assessment results might not always provide an accurate account of the level of knowledge and skills of EL students. ELs' English proficiency depends on a number of factors, including "how much education they had prior to immigrating to the United States, how proficient they are in their home language, and whether they have sufficient support in their homes and communities for developing further proficiency" (p. 13).

All of these factors, in addition to the level of support provided by teaching staff in terms of culturally and linguistically-relevant instruction, determines the potential for learning gains across the different subject areas. As research is still conducted to understand the academic development and issues of assessment of ELs, they gain proficiency in speaking, writing, reading, and academic skills (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2009; Holdheide et al., 2010), test scores must be carefully considered as indicators of teaching effectiveness. Related to the issues of using assessment scores of ELs to measure teaching effectiveness is also the question of evaluation of co-teaching professionals. As Holdheide et al. (2010) point out, contributions to learning gains may not always be explicitly clear in co-teaching

environments (Janzen, 2008), which might be a complicating factor in evaluation of ELs' teachers.

Herman et al. (2001), recommend that in developing and selecting quality assessments providing data used in teacher performance evaluation, expert authorities on ELs and students with disabilities participate in the review process to ensure that assessments are appropriate for measuring learning growth of specific groups of students. The process must ensure that information about what is being tested corresponds to learning targets set by teachers and assessment items are well aligned with standards (p. 8). These considerations must take into account not only linguistic challenges (e.g., unnecessarily linguistically complex math problems), but also examine potential assessment bias (e.g., inclusion of cultural stereotypes) that contain images or situations that are less familiar to one group than another and thus could adversely affect performance (p. 9). Evidence from research shows that when test bias is present, achievement levels may not account for the same level of knowledge and skills for individuals from different subgroups. Thus, it is important that assessment items and tasks should be reviewed to exclude such examples and minimize those effects (Thompson, Johnstone, Anderson, & Miller, 2005; Thurlow, Quenemoen, & Lazarus, 2011).

The review of these considerations for using assessment measures of EL students are particularly relevant for this study, because of the linguistically diverse population of students, served by the school where the research takes place. In addition, it shows

general considerations for the quality of assessment results of ELs and the implications of using these as indicators of teaching effectiveness.

### **Teaching Evaluation Reform in New Jersey, 2013-2014**

In the state of New Jersey, implementation of SGOs followed the signing of the TEACHNJ Act into law in 2012, mandating that evaluation of teachers in New Jersey must be partially based on indicators of student achievement and should include multiple measures of student growth, among including SGOs. The process through which SGOs scores are calculated follows a multi-step procedure, described in the SGOs guidebook (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012). The process starts with identifying an academic area in which student learning is targeted. This step is then followed by a selection of a quality assessment which sets a baseline of student learning, against which student learning will be measured post-intervention, or at the end of the school year.

The selection of a quality assessment, as well as identification of an appropriate learning target, which must be both rigorous and achievable occurs in collaboration between teachers and their direct supervisors. The process includes careful consideration and alignment of the growth objectives to subject content standards for the respective grade level. Teachers, in collaboration with their supervisors, are responsible for selecting appropriate quality assessments that accurately and reliably measure students' level of ability with respect to the identified growth objective. The SGO assessment instruments are administered in the very beginning of the academic year to establish students' baseline ability levels. At the end of the school year teachers administer a post-



assessment, the results of which are compared to the students' baseline ability to account for any learning gain accumulated throughout the school year as a direct result of instruction.

In contrast with student growth measures, based on standardized assessment scores, the SGOs are based on teachers'- and supervisor-identified learning targets and the assessments selected by them to measure student learning. The issues of assessment validity and reliability are addressed implicitly in the SGOs guidebook, recommending that teachers collaborate with peers and their supervisors to develop meaningful SGOs and either select or develop appropriate assessments to test student learning. Further, teachers are responsible for the administration of the entire assessment process – from the development of the assessments or selection of commercially available tests, through administering the assessments and scoring students' work. However, there is not much specific guidance in the SGO guidebook in terms of assessment literacy training, or recommendations about systematic assessment and/or data interpretation. An example of an SGO, available in the SGO guidebook provides guidance for elementary school teachers in developing systematic and specific SGOs:

A 4th-grade elementary team focuses its Specific SGO on science. In consultation with the middle school science teacher, the team develops a portfolio assessment that requires the students to demonstrate scientific thinking and practice. Each teacher sets an SGO for their individual class based on the starting point of their students. Students build a science portfolio throughout the year. At the end of the

year, the team sits together to collaboratively grade the portfolios using a rubric (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012, p. 7).

The example emphasizes the importance of collaborative effort in developing quality SGOs, as well as in grading SGO assessment data. Although teachers select SGOs that are specific to the learning needs of their students, the focus is on common learning targets, selected by the entire grade team.

Further describing the measuring of SGO attainment and its use in indicating teaching effectiveness, the guidebook provides an example of using changes in proficiency levels on a Developmental Reading Assessment to account for teaching quality on a 4-point scale - Exceptional (4), Full (3), Partial (2), and Insufficient (1):

You may use an assessment method in which the same target score is not appropriate for everyone in the class. For example, for a 3rd-grade teacher, an objective may be to have all students increase one proficiency level in reading as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment 2. However, even if this is the case, you would still go about setting attainment levels in the same way as described. For instance, full attainment of the goal might be if 85 percent of students gained one proficiency level (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012, p. 16).

Further providing guidance for interpretation of SGO attainment for the purposes of evaluating teaching effectiveness, the following table (Table 2) parsing attainment levels is included in the guidebook (p. 17).

Table 2 –

*Scoring guide when target score is a “proficiency level” change*

Target Score	Attainment Level in Meeting Student Growth Objective			
Students increase at least one proficiency level on the DRA™ 2	Exceptional 4	Full 3	Partial 2	Insufficient 1
Percent of Students Meeting Target	At least 95%	At least 85%	At least 75%	Less than 75%

As shown by these examples, the SGO attainment level was used as a measure of student learning gain, and as such it provided a student-level score to inform the summative teacher evaluations. In the first year (2013-2014) of the initiative implementation, the teacher evaluations were based on a system of multiple measures of effectiveness, out of which the SGO measure accounted for 15% of the final summative score of the teacher evaluation ratings (AchieveNJ, 2013) for both for teachers of mathematics and ELA in 3-8 grade, and all other teachers in the state. As such, the SGOs were part of a high-stakes reform initiative, informing locally made decisions about teachers’ promotion, tenure, and potentially employment.

Because of the high-stakes character of the teacher evaluation initiative in the state, the early adoption of the new systems and measures of teaching effectiveness were closely monitored by the state department of education. A Preliminary Implementation Report, (NJDOE, 2014b), stated that the Department of Education “has worked to demonstrate a commitment to a cycle of continuous learning and improvement”, and that

“state officials continue to work with educators to make the evaluation system as flexible and reasonable as possible – while also ensuring high expectations for all teachers and students” (p. 22). Further, the report identified successes and challenges in teacher evaluation during the academic year 2013-2014, addressing areas in which data collected from the state was supposed to inform policy adjustments for 2014-2015 year. Overall, the report focused on evidence from this “pivotal year” suggesting that the new teacher evaluation allowed “districts to better identify areas of strength and weakness in teacher practice and to respond accordingly to this information” (NJDOE, 2014b, p. 4).

Similar to other studies of early adoption of SLO/SGO, which focused on the quality and rigor of selected learning targets (CTAC, 2004, 2013) as measures of teacher effectiveness, the report (NJDOE, 2014b) stated that the use of SGOs allowed educators to focus on individual student growth. Additionally, it offered guidance on how to approach the SGO review process for teachers for whom the SGO score “was the sole reason why an educator’s summative rating dropped from Effective to Partially Effective or from Partially Effective to Ineffective” (p. 22). The outlined review process was further described in a referenced NJDOE memo document aimed at addressing “concerns in districts where SGO implementation may have faced significant challenges” and ensured that “educators will not be unfairly penalized for having inaccurate or incomplete goals in place due to extenuating circumstances”. Implicitly, these findings and recommendations echoed the CTAC (2004) report stating that implementation of SLOs requires educators to learn how to set quality learning targets.

**Implementation of the Common Core in New Jersey, 2013-2014.** The

implementation of SGOs in the academic 2013-2014 year was tightly connected with the state-wide adoption of the CCSS. As SGOs are in fact yearly learning goals, the learning targets they articulated had to be aligned to the newly adopted CCSS, both for language arts and mathematics to ensure that teaching and learning follow standards-based instructional goals. In this sense, the requirement for the SGOs to be aligned to the CCSS added an additional layer of complexity for educators, as many school districts throughout New Jersey implemented the CCSS for the first time in the academic 2013-2014. The CCSS were adopted by the New Jersey State Board of Education in 2010 to replace the previous New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) (NJDOE, 2014).

As the state-wide transition to the CCSS in 2013-2014 happened simultaneously with the teacher evaluation reform, and by extension the adoption of SGOs, resources and professional learning stretched to cover all aspects of the comprehensive reform implementation. Public schools in the state of New Jersey underwent a slow process of CCSS implementation, which officially began in 2010, the goal of the full statewide implementation was set for the 2013-2014 school year, and coincided with the teacher evaluation (and by extension the SGOs) implementation. In order to prepare educators to incorporate CCSS into instructional and assessment practice, and support learning objectives alignment to CCSS, NJDOE provided more than 500 trainings across the state, in addition to launching the Model Curriculum web site as a CCSS-aligned resource for educators in NJ. The Model Curriculum included examples of student learning

objectives, along with EL-scaffolded student learning objectives, and “model assessment items” (NJDOE, 2014a). Separately from the Model Curriculum, an additional free website - [www.njcore.org](http://www.njcore.org) was launched to promote educators’ state-wide collaboration by supporting the upload of videos and lesson plans and sharing among educators across the state.

Many of the challenges to implementing SGOs in alignment with the CCSS were not unique to the state of New Jersey. In many states, because of the weak alignment between yearly state tests and CCSS expectations, the SLOs provided an “especially important opportunity to emphasize Common Core’s areas of emphasis” (Wiener, 2013). However, the responsibility of supervision of the level of alignment between SLOs and CCSS fell on the local SEAs (p. 9). In this sense, it is evident that quality control becomes increasingly important, but this proves problematic as it is unclear whether local SEAs, and in particular “principal evaluators would be able to reasonably and reliably assess SLO processes given the time and resource constraints they face” (Crouse, Gitomer and Joyce, in press).

**New Jersey’s English Language Proficiency Standards: Implications for Teaching ELs.** To address potential implications of the alignment between SGOs and newly adopted learning standards, this section provides information about the status of state-endorsed English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards, as they play a role in setting SGOs for linguistically diverse learners. A special consideration for this study is the attention to the instructional needs of ELs and how teachers develop learning targets that are both aligned to the CCSS and to the learning needs of linguistically diverse

students (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006). New Jersey, along with California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois serve 54.1% of the total LEP population (Migration Policy Institute, 2011), and as such faces considerable challenges in ensuring that implementation of the new standards and assessments attends to the challenges for students classified as ELs (Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuk, 2012). As ELs face a double challenge – one related to the language learning in addition to understanding of the content knowledge and skills (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012), it is important that educators develop practical understanding of how state ELP standards correspond to the CCSS to determine what supports need to be put in place to provide ELs with the help they need to access grade-level content while building their language proficiency. The challenges are directly connected to the need to understand and implement CCSS shifts in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Educators will need to develop a deep understanding of the learning progressions that operate within the domains of each discipline, as well as to develop assessment literacy capacity, which would enable them to understand “where students are in relation to the learning continuum” and help these students advance in ways that produce deep learning (p. 3). More recent studies have reported on teachers’ perception of insufficient and inadequate professional development and curricular materials for EL that meet the high standards set in the CCSS (Ajayi, 2016). As training on unpacking the CCSS and translating the standards into attainable learning targets for EL is an important aspect of the implementation of standards-based SGOs for linguistically diverse students, this was also an important consideration of this study.

The state of New Jersey officially adopted a set of English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards in grades preK-12 to meet federal NCLB requirements (NJDOE, 2011) to support linguistically diverse populations of students in all academic content areas. The ELP standards are used to “integrate both language and academic content in four language domains – listening, speaking, reading, and writing” (NJDOE, 2011), and are used to develop the ESL Curriculum Exemplars, which are similar to the Model Curriculum resources, but were specifically developed to support instruction of EL students. The NJ ELP standards are based on the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) standards ([www.wida.us](http://www.wida.us)), which have been a focus of CCSS-alignment studies (Chi, Garcia, Surber, & Trautman, 2011). Neither WIDA standards, nor the WIDA assessments are addressed explicitly in the SGOs guidebook (NJDOE, 2012) or the Model Curriculum web site. The EL-specific learning targets and reading materials made available through the NJDOE web site were intended to support teachers in schools throughout the state with large linguistically diverse population of students, for which selection of appropriate SGOs were potentially based on a distinctive set of considerations.

In summary, the teachers’ and administrators’ ability to unpack the requirements of the new SGOs policy and translate it into practical decisions and changes in instruction for linguistically diverse students were dependent on the educators’ interpretation and enactment of the SGOs policy message. The varying level of professional learning around the CCSS, and the challenges related to unpacking the standards for EL instruction (Linguanti, & Hakuta, 2012) raises further complexity for the implementation of



initiatives that enhanced educators' understanding of and capacity to use language development strategies for EL instruction (Santos et al., 2012). Because of the shifts in instructional practice, stemming from the adoption of the CCSS, and because the SGOs were integral to the newly adopted systems for teacher evaluation, the process of implementation of standards-based SGOs was dependent on the level of educators' understanding of all educational reforms that underwent simultaneous implementation. The process is heavily dependent on the IAs' ability to construct policy interpretations that align with officially stated desired outcomes. This adds to the argument of using a cognitive approach to studying policy meaning-making and implementation.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The main goal of the literature review is to discuss prominent research, pertaining to the aspects of policy meaning-making that affects changes in practice, and thus informs the method to studying IAs' interpretation and understanding of the purpose of the educational reform, and the role of SGOs in particular. To do that, the literature review presents key theoretical and methodological considerations for this research and makes a case for describing real world conditions, under which educational reforms become enacted. The chapter includes a discussion of established considerations in policy implementation research, and emphasizes the effects of regulatory requirements over policy implementation efforts. As implementation bears heavily on IAs' perceptions of the policy intent and their interpretations of what changes are needed as a response to policy messages, the chapter introduces a cognitive framework for policy meaning-making, widely used in recent research on education policy implementation. Major research findings in the cognitive approach to education policy implementation with respect to IAs' responses to regulatory policy are presented to provide a background for the design and research findings of this study.

The chapter begins with an overview of the broader perspective on reform implementation, bringing up theoretical considerations of major issues and challenges associated with instructional policy implementation, most notably the tensions between regulatory and programmatic views (Elmore, 1983, 2005, 2009) on implementation efforts. Based on these wider considerations, the review offers discussion of more recent research on instructional policy implementation by drawing on reported findings from the

body of research based on the cognitive approach to policy meaning-making. The cognitive processes through which IAs come to understand policies are presented with an emphasis on the role of using common language to derive meanings from the directives and thus build understanding of the true purpose of the needed changes. The work of Spillane (1996, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005), Spillane and Callahan (2000), Coburn (2001, 2003, 2004, 2006), Hill (2001), Hill and Ball (2004) and other researchers is reviewed to provide a theoretical background for this study. The presented theoretical considerations frame the discussion of the study findings, which while localized in the context of New Jersey in the academic 2013-2014 and presenting a specific case of regulatory policy implementation, offer wider implications for the field. The chapter concludes with a set of research questions, used to guide this research study.

### **Overview of Theoretical Considerations in Policy Implementation**

To cast the challenges of implementing high stakes policy in education and understand how the introduction of SGOs as a measure of teaching quality played out in the context of the comprehensive reform implementation, this sections offers a broader look at the policy implementation literature and explores challenges in the SGO implementation in more general theoretical terms, drawing on established issues in instructional policy research. In this section the distinction between programmatic and regulatory views on policy implementation are introduced as they relate to IAs' implementation efforts. These opposing views, defining compliance versus improvement efforts are then linked to actual changes in practice, as a direct response to pressures from the institutional environment.

Discussing the effects of education reform implementation on instructional practice, Sykes and Wilson (2016) describe a long history of using policy and mandates to shape and structure instruction and student learning and discuss the potential of using instructional policy to positively influence teaching. The authors refer to several seminal publications (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Cuban, 1993; Rivlin & Timpane, 1975) to describe trends in policy implementation efforts and outline general challenges to implementation. Their in-depth review of literature informing the understanding of the potential of instructional policy to shape classroom practice centers around several important factors, the role of which allowed them to “generate a set of hypotheses concerning the conditions necessary to the effective execution of instructional policy” (p. 20).

One such consideration in the implementation of a high-stakes reform initiative (which SGO adoption were part of) relates to the distinction between regulatory versus programmatic policy implementation (Elmore, 1983, 2005, 2009). While regulatory aspects of reform lead more directly to compliance with policy requirements, programmatic aspects focus on the capacity of public agencies to deliver a service. Fundamentally, the distinction results from the purpose of the accountability system being implemented, and whether it is designed to produce compliance or improvement (Elmore, 2005, p. 20). In Elmore’s view, compliance-based systems (regulatory aspect) assume that IAs possess the necessary capacity, both in terms of skill and knowledge to introduce necessary changes to practice. In contrast, improvement-based systems (programmatic aspect) assume that IAs undergo changes in their knowledge and skills in

order to implement changes to practice. While many state accountability systems are designed with the intent to foster improvement, they turn out to be compliance-oriented in practice (Elmore, 2005). In order to promote improvement, the system must be based on an underlying theory supporting continuous improvement of performance, but in absence of explicit improvement theories, directly linked to standards and assessment, “all accountability systems degrade in the direction of compliance” (p. 21-22). Further, as accountability systems degrade from improvement to compliance, so does their capacity to guide the actions of IAs. In the face of concrete consequences for failing to implement changes for which they do not possess adequate skills and capacity, IAs often invalidate the intended purpose of the policy.

Discussing this notion of appropriate balance of pressure and support, needed to implement improvement-oriented systems in schools, Sykes & Wilson (2016) emphasize the importance of creating conditions in which IAs are enabled to build their capacity to deliver quality services. The need for an appropriate implementation strategy supporting the development of the school’s capacity to meet accountability demands is a relevant consideration in the SGOs implementation process, because of the inherent regulatory character of the teacher evaluation reform, and the high stakes associated with the use of student growth scores to measure teaching quality.

Another important factor discussed by Sykes and Wilson (2016) has to with the frequent conflict between the policy’s new requirements and the provision of adequate training and information to support the IAs’ efforts to enact those requirements. As the authors suggest, a common theme in describing challenges to policy implementation are

factors such as “professional isolation and low levels of collegiality, the absence of a shared technical vocabulary with which to analyze instruction, and the demands on teacher time” (p. 860). In this sense professional learning and developing of capabilities to implement new requirements is a complex process, which rarely is resolved with a “menu of workshops or summer institutes for teachers” (same page). This consideration, put forth by the authors shows the importance of shared meanings, and the role of the use of common language in policy implementation. The theme of common language is one of the main components of the theoretical framework employed in this study and it is discussed in detail in the next section, which introduces the cognitive framework for policy meaning-making. The role of shared technical vocabulary is particularly important with regard to implementation of the SGO policy because of the many layers and aspects of the comprehensive teacher evaluation reform (e.g., connections to standards and assessment, as well as other components of the teacher evaluation systems) and the limited timeframe for training and preparation for implementation.

A third important factor, brought up by Sykes and Wilson (2016), has to do with the process of policy message interpretation, or the way educators make sense of the needed changes in their practice to align it to the requirements of the new policy. As this factor in the implementation process suggests, the enactment of policies would depend on the social dynamics and relations among IAs. In this sense, the process of translating policy directives into practices depends on the capacity of the local IAs to make meaning, and adopt practices that are aligned with the intended purpose of the new instructional policy. The specific ways in which these factors affects SGO policy implementation are

further discussed in subsequent sections because of its implications for framing the study's design, particularly for the selection of a cognitive framework to studying policy meaning-making.

All three of these considerations are important for the implementation of instructional policy, connected directly to the need for balance between pressure and provided support. As implementation focuses on the regulatory aspect of the policy (Elmore, 2005), and IAs focus on accountability over developing capacity for changing practices, implementation efforts may “become diffuse, weakened, and misunderstood” (Sykes and Wilson, 2016, p. 860).

Elmore's notion of distinction between regulatory versus programmatic view of policy is further developed in more recent research on policy implementation. The need to develop a better understanding of how IAs perceive regulatory and programmatic aspects of new policy, a considerable body of research has explored the cognitive aspect of policy interpretation, and has offered rich empirical evidence for the types of cognitive processes experienced by IAs. In addition, findings from this research are presented to elaborate on the specific changes in practice, adopted in response to programmatic (or normative as referred to by Coburn (2004)), and regulatory pressures in the environment. As Coburn adopts a cognitive approach to studying regulatory pressures and building on previous research to expand the understanding of the types of response to policy that IAs are able to construct, an in-depth discussion of these findings (2001, 2004, 2005) is presented in the section following *Cognitive Framework for Policy Meaning-Making*.

## Cognitive Framework for Policy Meaning-Making

The theoretical basis for the cognitive framework for policy meaning-making (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002) focuses on the construction of knowledge, based on models for cognitive processing of new information. Building on previous work focusing on shortcomings in state or federal policy to define consistent and actionable directives with respect to needed instructional policy implementation (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1974; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977), Spillane et al. (2002) proposed a cognitive framework accounting for the cognitive aspect of the process of policy interpretation. In this research several levels of analyses are proposed to account for the complex cognitive processes through which meaning-making occurs and affects immediate changes in established educational practices and behaviors. Because IAs base their understanding of what a policy message means on their current cognitive structures (knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes), mediated by the situational circumstances and on the specific policy signal, it is important to describe the meaning-making process on several different levels (Figure 1).

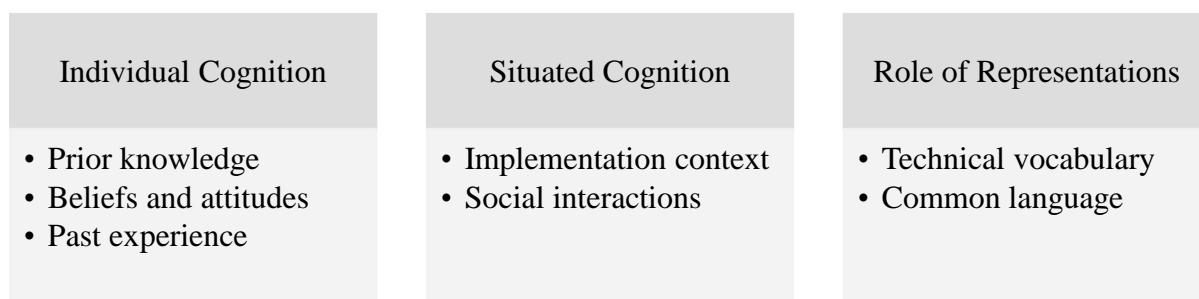


Figure 1. Cognitive Framework for Policy Meaning-Making



Spillane et al. (2002) describe three distinctive levels of meaning-making, based on how policy directives may filter into practice. At the first level – the individual level, the person’s prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences shape the understanding of the message and purpose of the policy. Individual cognition is based on constructivist models for information processing, linking meaning-making to each IA’s existing frames of reference. At the second level – the situated cognition - the individuals’ meaning-making process is affected by the local context, the social discourse, and the types of meanings shared by others. The second level, grounded in social-constructivist models takes into account shared and negotiated interpretations of the policy message. In this sense, meaning-making is distributed among the members of the professional community, and the types of shared understandings are important in that they inform the decisions about actual changes in behavior and practice. At the third level, the role of common language, used by IAs is indicative of how IAs’ shared vocabulary and the meanings associated with specific terminology facilitates construction of common understanding of their role in the implementation process. As meaning is tied to the types of external representations that are negotiated among colleagues, the role of language constitutes a separate level in the cognitive framework for meaning-making.

However, representations and interpretations are rarely uniform and IAs often construct intuitive models of what the policy requires in terms of actions and behaviors (Spillane et al., 2002). Intuitive models allow people to anticipate behaviors and develop expectations about changes by inserting their own biases, attitudes, and explanations about how they must act in response to external messages (Dweck, 1999). Intuitive

models are based on common language, used by educators to represent their understanding of the specific changes to be implemented. Because the common language that is used by the members of the community of practice plays such an important role in translating directives into actionable implementation steps, recent research studies have emphasized the importance of representational functions of language used by IAs (Coburn, 2001; Hill, 2001).

Each of the three components of the cognitive framework are further elaborated in the next three sections. Relevant explanations, theoretical grounding, and research findings are presented to illustrate their interconnectedness.

**Individual cognition.** Since the ground-breaking theoretical work of Jean Piaget in the 1960s (Piaget, 1964) describing thinking as a process of knowledge construction, many theoretical approaches to defining human cognition have been founded on the idea that understanding of new information is determined by the types of connections that individuals are able to draw between novel and prior knowledge. In a broad sense, the constructivist model of building on prior knowledge defines learning as adaptation of new information to previously established conceptions (Piaget, 1953).

The importance of this model in the study of instructional policy meaning-making is important because the types of representations and interpretations the IAs are able to articulate are deeply rooted in their individual background and prior knowledge (Cohen & Weiss, 1993; Cohen & Barnes, 1993; Spillane, 1996, Coburn & Stein, 2006). The educators responsible for policy implementation go through a process of reconstruction

of existing knowledge to make sense of the new policy and gain understanding of how it resolves a current problem in their practice (Spillane, 2000). Emphasizing the types of interpretation and meanings which IAs are able to construct helps studying the immediate effect on whether they change or do not change established practices based on their understanding of the adequacy of the new policy in addressing a specific instructional need in their practice (Spillane et al., 2002). Following a cognitive perspective, the needed behavioral changes, enacted as a response to a policy message, are fundamentally determined by cognitive changes. Spillane et al. (2002, p. 392) describe the policy messages not as “inert, static ideas that are transmitted unaltered into local actors' minds to be accepted, ejected, or modified to fit local needs and conditions”, but rather as a process, determined by the IAs ability to understand, interpret, and re-construct meaning for policy messages. Based on how they approach the interpretation process, and the types of representations with regard to their behavior they are able to make, the process could lead or not lead to a change in how they view their own practice.

An important caveat to consider is that the differences in interpretation among IAs reflect differences in understanding of how new information connects to prior knowledge (Spillane et al., 2002). In this respect, failure in implementation is not necessarily related to lack of capacity or a deliberate attempt to ignore policy. Rather, meaning-making is a complex process of knowledge re-construction, rooted in the individual's prior experiences and knowledge, belief system, and attitudes (Rumelhart, 1980; Schank & Abelson, 2013). Moreover, IAs are very selective in attending to policy messages based on these messages' consistency with IAs' own interests and agendas (Firestone, 1989).

Messages that are congruent with their agendas are more likely to be implemented, and the ones that are not are often likely to be ignored or transformed to fit.

In a constructivist paradigm, individuals construct new meanings, based on prior knowledge. Thus, when confronted with new information through the policy signal, each individual will take away the portion of the message they most closely can relate to, accommodating this new information to whatever prior cognitive structures they already have (Spillane et al., 2002). Interpretation of policy and research evidence is determined by how much and what portion of the new information can be unpacked by the individual. Interpretation with regard to implementation is determined by the practitioners' opportunities to learn about the new initiative and to engage in meaningful training, guidance, and support from the district or school (Spillane, 2002). The level of access to the new policy supports understanding of the practitioner's role in the implementation process. However, teachers who use the same materials and resources, and engage in similar professional development training, may construct significantly different understanding of needed changes. The variability in the types of understandings educators develop is influenced by their pedagogical and subject matter beliefs. It is also deeply embedded in how teachers connect the perceived message to their prior experience and current practice.

The application of a constructivist model, taking into consideration the cognitive processes involved in the construction of new understanding is important, because the policy implementation is not a simple process of straightforward compliance (Darling-Hammond, 1990), but rather is a process in which IAs engage in interpretation of

whatever directions they were able to construct by translating the policy message. They fill up the gaps of their understanding with meanings based on existing and familiar practices (Cohen & Ball, 1990). Educators' understanding is critical, as it determines their ability to extract actionable insights from the information they have. As meaning-making depends so much on current and prior practices, as well as on IAs' previous background, teachers and administrators may have significantly dissimilar interpretations about changes in practice that must be enacted as a result of implementation of seemingly well-defined instructional policy reform.

In a study of the impact of individuals' prior knowledge and existing beliefs on ability to implement instructional changes based on elementary mathematics instruction reform in California Cohen and Ball (1990) reveal that teachers developed understanding of specific expected changes from reforms based on the context and situation in which their interpretations of the policy occurred. In the study, teachers were able to only minimally change their instruction in response to the new policy. Enacted changes were directly based on teachers' inherited beliefs, knowledge, and practices. Teachers were able to re-frame the new policy and adapt the message of needed changes in terms of what they already knew and believed about teaching math to elementary school students.

For educators to develop sufficient buy-in into a new policy, they must figure out how this new policy relates to and improves their current practice, and also come to terms with the practices that will be abandoned (Spillane et al., 2002). The process is deeply rooted in existing approaches to teaching, and although teachers may believe that they are actively implementing the policy message, their actual instruction may not significantly

change. This is an important finding, as it informs ways in which individuals' approach change in professional practice. It emphasizes the importance of clarity of required changes that should result from a new policy. Since interpretation of policy messages are mediated by the IAs' adopted practices, the new SGOs policy must offer specific and practical directions for what and how much must change to ensure more than minimal modification in the professional practice of IAs.

**Situated cognition.** IAs do not interpret policy directives in a vacuum, but rather situate their understanding of the intended changes within the context of their practice, and within the social interactions leading to shared and common interpretations of instructional policy. A situated level of the cognitive framework takes into account shared understandings of the policy message, local programs and resources, as well as the specifics of the role of the IAs (Spillane et al., 2002).

In a study reporting on district leaders' meaning-making of instructional changes based on mathematics reforms, Spillane (2000) identified several major patterns in understanding the changes necessary to enact in response to the reform. Because district administrators engage in activities that differ from direct implementation in the classroom, their particular role in the implementation process equipped them with qualitatively different types of experiences. These experiences provided and promoted entirely different (as compared to the teachers) understanding of the policy's call for needed changes. Spillane (2000) found that district administrators tended to focus on formal changes that often missed the needed shift in pedagogy. The administrators were focused on "piecemeal changes that often cut across school subjects and missed the

disciplinary particulars of these instructional change ideas” (p.169). Another identified pattern in the administrators’ understanding of reform changes related to their dethematized understanding of reform changes. For example, administrators did not understand collaborative learning as it specifically pertains to mathematics instruction, but rather as a generic pedagogical strategy that has no particular connection to mathematical understanding. The same pattern of understanding was described with other instructional strategies, such as problem solving, which was understood by administrators as a generic approach that can be applied across subject areas.

Because of the different professional roles teachers and administrators have, they consider needed changes in practice through different lenses. In this sense the available materials and policy supports may have entirely different meaning for the teachers and administrators. These findings inform the issues of the current study, in that the complexity of the SGOs policy depends on the different roles teachers and administrators have with respect to the implementation process and inform potential variability among IAs in developing of practical understanding of what the SGOs policy is about.

In addition to differences in perception of the purpose of the SGO policy, based on prior knowledge, beliefs, and position in the school, teachers’ and administrators’ meaning-making process is affected by the types of existing power dynamics and culture of trust among colleagues. Many studies exploring the influences of trust relations at the school level (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Louis, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008) make a considerable distinction between sense of trust among teachers and between teachers and their principals. This is of particular

importance in studying the influences of teacher evaluation, as principals are directly evaluating teaching effectiveness of teachers. Studies have also found that respect from the principal and personal regard for teachers, as well as competence in core administrative responsibilities are associated with reported trust relationships (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). However, trusting relations with other teachers and a sense of support from the professional community also contribute to changing teaching practices in schools, especially in a high-stakes teaching environment, where students' achievement gains account for a portion of the teachers' evaluation ratings.

Teachers in school districts where test scores are consistently lower may experience an increased pressure to ensure that their own evaluation ratings do not decline. Directly linking teacher evaluation ratings and sanctions to student performance is potentially discouraging for teachers. In districts with large and unpredictable variation in student assessments scores, the perceived unfairness of the association between teaching effectiveness and students' achievement can undermine teacher morale. Evidence from research shows that "teacher attrition and demoralization have been associated with test-based accountability efforts, particularly in high-need schools" (Baker et al., 2010, p. 4). Teaching in such districts increases pressure on teachers who feel that they are obligated to ensure increased student test performance scores in accordance with accountability standards (Firestone et al., 2004). However, when teachers are provided with consistent opportunities to meet, collaborate, and share instructional approaches to better support students' learning, this has an immediate effect on improved achievement, but also has a positive effect on teachers' perceptions of



support and trust in the organization. In addition, leadership practices are very important for building a strong professional learning community. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) report that powerful leadership practices create better motivation, increase trust, and build a sense of efficacy (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Both strong leadership and peer relationships positively impact classroom instructional practices.

Describing the process of collective meaning-making with a level of abstraction and with the goal of accounting for the cyclical nature of collective engaging with the meaning of the policy, Coburn (2001) has proposed a conceptual model to illustrate the process of developing common meanings. The author proposed that specific policy messages get filtered through the IAs' reading practices, worldviews and shared understandings. The proposed model emphasized continuous engagement in the cycle of meaning-making to construct evolving meanings of the practical aspects of policy messages, and to inform a collective constructing of understandings, gatekeeping practices, and understanding of technical and practical details. Coburn's model (2001) underlined the need of a well-functioning community of practice, in which educators are able to take advantage of available resources, materials, and training to develop and establish mutually agreed upon representations and interpretations of needed changes to existing practices. The continuous engagement in the cycle of meaning-making to accommodate new information that becomes available and make sense of adopted changes has the potential of informing additional considerations and keeping practice close to policy requirements. It also assumes a true collaborative model in which

educators support each other in their efforts to draw and derive meaning and come to shared understanding of the policy's purpose (Coburn & Stein, 2006).

In summary, constructivist and social constructivist cognitive models describe learning as an iterative process of conceptual change, resulting from restructuring of existing knowledge as a result of accommodating new knowledge. As noted by Spillane et al. (2002), conceptual change is extremely difficult and often new ideas are understood as familiar ones, with insufficient attention to diverging aspects of individuals' current frames of reference (p. 398), and a dramatic re-structuring of prior beliefs is rare (Smith, diSessa, & Roschelle, 1993).

**The role of representations.** In addition to the review of constructivist and situated models of information processing and meaning-making, the theoretical considerations of the role of common language further describe the complexity of the cognitive framework for policy meaning-making. When it comes to negotiating collective understanding of a policy, a closer look at the discourse and the types of representations used by the members of the community is critical to understanding the meaning-making process (Collins, Greeno, & Resnick, 1992). The communication of a set of abstract rules under new policy requirements often presents a challenge for IAs who must translate the abstract directions into actionable behaviors and procedures to be adopted in their existing practice. Spillane et al. (2002) describe this process as a result of an exchange of ideas, often in the form of analogies, which the IAs must be able to draw from their multiple sources of information. The process is contextualized by the local culture of the

educational setting, which could influence the way people think about adoption of new rules and ways of doing things.

Hill (2001) describes specific difficulties that characterize the development of common understanding of needed changes. The study of implementation of a state's mathematics policy found that teachers working on a district committee to adopt math materials interpreted the policy message quite differently than the intended policy outcomes. The teachers committed substantial time and resources to the work they undertook. However, they assumed little difference between their existing practices and the changes for which the policy called. Their misunderstanding of the policy intent could not be attributed to superficial attention to the policy. The challenge in implementation of mathematics reform stemmed from the different meanings and definitions of technical language developed collectively by the educators. When the same language was used to mean entirely different things by reformers and policy makers, the professional language that is used to describe mathematics reforms in education "inhibits any standards-based efforts to alter teachers' everyday practice" (p. 313). The lack of mutually held understanding and the inability to engage in a meaningful conversation about needed changes in mathematics instruction made construction of policy-aligned changes in curriculum and teaching impossible, and the conversations seemed to diverge (Hill, 2001; Hill & Ball, 2004).

To explore further the process of using new information to inform particular changes in practice, it is important to acknowledge the quality of information presented to practitioners. Tseng (2012) described the need for better communication of research as it

informs policy, and the need for clearer and more meaningful messages to practitioners. Current efforts to provide evidence-based information to practitioners emphasize accessibility and ease of use. Policy briefs and executive summaries are often designed to “be short and jargon-free so that they can be quickly read by busy people” (p. 4), taking away the depth of the message or some important practical aspects of needed changes. Tseng (2012) also discussed the “marketing approach” aimed at presenting research or policy as attractive alternative that can be “sold to practitioners”. In addition, attaching high stakes to test scores may create an unintended negative consequence such as narrowing practitioners’ definitions of the meaning of professional language.

For example, educators are reported to narrow the meaning of the word “evidence” to refer to test scores only (Finnigan, Daly & Che, 2011), rather than to an array of different sources of information. Use of language is often contextually or culturally determined and certain jargon can have different meanings, based on the group of professionals engaged in the discourse. In this respect, the study shows how IAs approach official policy documents and how practitioners connect the policy to their current practice. Thus, cognitive consideration and policy interpretation rely heavily on the use of language and the types of representations that are used by community participants are critical to studying and understanding shared meanings. The use of language, along with the implicit importance of the members’ ability to “represent” information available through written artifacts and documents facilitates negotiation of shared meanings (Barton & Tusting, 2005). For this study, it is of interest to inquire and

describe how practitioners use the SGOs policy language to talk about reform implementation.

In summary, research has established that true change in practice based on educational reform initiatives is difficult because it is filtered by the social, physical, and cultural context of the IAs (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Resnick, 1991). The cognitive approach allows researchers to understand the process of reform implementation that goes beyond the conventional implementation accounts, in which the discussion is focused on IAs' resistance to new policy or on the districts' limited capacity to carry-out reform directives to explain shortcomings in implementation (Spillane, 2000). The cognitive perspective explores implementation issues as a direct result of the IAs' efforts to translate the new policy message into actual changes in practice, while also navigating external regulatory pressures, as well as existing institutional constraints. As meaning-making is affected by the context and situation in which it occurs, teachers and administrators develop different interpretation of what reform is about and what specific changes need to be implemented.

### **Policy Implementation as a Response to Pressure from the Environment**

Many studies of implementation of reform proposals focus on the process through which reform directives get enacted in instructional practice. To do that, research has been focused on examining educators' attempts to adopt specific changes in their practice (Gitomer & Duschl, 1995; Spillane, 2000). This approach affirms that teachers are the final brokers and gatekeepers when it comes to instructional policy implementation

(McLaughlin, 1987, 1990; Schwille, 1982, Spillane, 2000), and true change in practice depends on the types of policy interpretations they are able to enact, and thus implement specific responses to policy requirements.

In this section research conducted within the cognitive framework for policy meaning-making is reviewed and connected to Elmore's notion (1983, 2005, 2009) of regulatory versus programmatic view of policy implementation, as these opposing views connect directly to implementation models that focus either on compliance-driven, or on improvement-driven changes to practice. To address this aspect of the implementation of new policy, Coburn (2004) builds on previous research to expand the understanding of the types of response to policy teachers are able to construct, based on a number of factors that are at play. The thorough investigation of these factors argues for the need to develop a better understanding of “when and under what conditions teachers respond to pressures from the institutional environment in one way, rather than another”, and sees this process as deeply embedded in the cognitive process through which teachers reconstruct and understand the pressures from the environment.

Coburn (2004) describes the “decoupling argument” of Meyer and Rowan (1977) in terms of its potential to show “how schools respond to pressures in the institutional environment by making symbolic changes in structure and procedures but decouple these changes from classroom practice, buffering the classroom from environmental pressures” (Coburn, 2004, p. 211). This argument (Deal and Celotti 1980; Driscoll 1995; Firestone 1985; Meyer and Rowan 1977, as cited by Coburn, 2004) implies that the institutional environment decouples structural or procedural changes in school organization “to meet

multiple and conflicting demands from the multilayered environment” (Coburn, 2004, p. 212), and is further grounded by empirical work on effects of environmental pressures in schools. This process has been largely investigated in terms of the relationship between school administration and classroom practice, but has overlooked the connection between actual changes in instructional practice of teachers as directly connected to the described environmental or institutional pressures.

These responses range from rejection of policy messages, “decoupling” or a symbolic response, development of parallel structures, assimilation, and accommodation. To describe these types of responses she also discusses four distinctive factors that influence teachers’ responses – degree of congruence between policy message and current practice, degree of intensity in terms of layered policy message pressures, degree of pervasiveness of exposure to the policy message, and degree of voluntariness. Although all of these factors play a role in the process of reconstruction of the policy message, the focus on voluntariness is related to two important considerations that play a significant role in the discussion of this study’s findings, notably to the balance of two distinctly different types of pressure: normative and regulatory.

Coburn (2004) argues that these pressures shape “how and when the teachers respond to messages in one way versus another” (p. 226). The normative pressures suggest changes to practice which teachers are to consider with respect to implementation of new policy, but these suggestions do not carry any consequences for the IAs, and are ultimately voluntary. In contrast, messages that carry regulatory pressures include specific recommendations to be implemented and are framed in terms of some type of

negative consequence in case of implementation failure (Coburn, 2004). Regulatory pressures mandate instructional changes, and consequently, policy messages are perceived as involuntary. This distinction is important to consider in the discussion of SGOs implementation, as the regulatory pressures that accompanied the policy had a profound effect on the IAs' perception of the policy message.

Coburn compares the process of assimilation of "new knowledge or experiences into existing schemas or ways of doing things" (p. 224) to Spillane and Callahan's (2000) "form-focused" understandings of policy messages, as they focused on implementing practices that on the surface looked like the ones called for in the policy message, but lacked deeper understanding of the epistemological considerations of how these practices change fundamentally the instructional process. These surface-level changes in practice are often based on superficial understandings of what the true policy intent is all about, and reflect quick and relatively easy modifications to existing practice. In addition, form-focused understandings of the policy message are based on familiar descriptors, articulated by IAs, which are aimed at providing "cognitive hooks" (Kolodner, 1983) or what Spillane (2000) also termed as "handles" which are said to "provide certain affordances or places to "hold" reform ideas" (p.153). Familiar descriptors are often coined by IAs to translate new knowledge and ideas in familiar terms, based on existing cognitive schemas (Spillane, 2000).



### **Response to Policy: Form versus Function**

The actual terms form-focused and function-focused response to policy were first introduced by Spillane (2000) as he described the implementation of mathematics reform and the understandings which district leaders were able to develop in response to the new policy. The form-focused understandings were based on the forms through which mathematics was understood to be taught under new policy guidelines. The same *form-focused response* term was used by Spillane and Callahan (2000) describing understanding of new policy “in terms of changes in instructional routines, materials or classroom organization, rather than in terms of the underlying pedagogical or epistemological assumptions of the approach” (Coburn, 2004, p. 224-225). Spillane (2000) delineated function-focused understandings of mathematics instruction reform from form-focused understandings. The reference to pedagogical forms including learning activities, students’ work, instructional materials, and grouping arrangements entailed so called form-focused understanding of the needed changes in instruction. Function-focused understandings on the other hand centered on what counts as mathematical knowledge, the practice of engaging in mathematical thinking, and learning and knowing mathematics.

Spillane’s original terminology about developing form-focused versus developing function-focused understanding of reform implementation was later built on and referenced in other studies, such as Coburn (2004), in which she describes how teachers implementing reform in reading instruction. The form-focused understanding emphasized teachers’ need to introduce new activities and materials into their teaching in ways that

affected technical aspects of their practice, especially classroom routines and materials. By focusing on form-focused features of instruction, teachers implemented only surface-level changes to their practice, but did not fundamentally change their core beliefs about what it means to teach reading. So teachers assimilated surface features of the new approach into “their preexisting framework for reading instruction, rather than challenging the framework itself” (p. 225). In this respect, they failed to develop function-focused understanding of the reading reform intent.

### **Chapter Summary and Research Questions**

Following the cognitive framework, and findings from research conducted through this theoretical framework, this research offers insights into the process of enacting a new instructional policy regarding state-wide implementation of standards-based Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) in the state of New Jersey throughout the first year of implementation in 2013-2014. The study has a specific focus on the meaning-making process around the development of standards-based SGOs in ELA as a measure of teaching effectiveness at the elementary school level (Spillane, 2005). The research is focused on the specificity of this process at a school setting with a large EL population. The school district, housing the elementary school in which research was conducted is identified as a high-needs school district by the New Jersey Department of Education.

In order to understand how IAs interpret the policy requirements, and subsequently approach implementation in practice, the study investigated meaning-making that takes place as individuals rely on their own prior knowledge to make sense

of the new information and develop specific representations of the meaning of the policy. As common language is of particular importance and common terminology facilitates shared understanding of the policy among key IAs, the language used by study participants is also a focus of this research. Another important consideration is given to the institutional constraints, as they often frame the extent to which educators are able to implement changes to their practice. External factors, specifically regulatory and normative pressures (Coburn, 2004) as related to the policy's intent are also considered. Similar to the reviewed literature on policy implementation in terms of form-focused versus function-focused outcomes, the terms are used in the present research study to describe surface-level responses to the implementation of the SGOs policy components, e.g., articulation of learning targets, selection of standards-based assessments, collaborative efforts, and professional learning (Figure 4, p. 88).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions frame the goals of this research:

1. How did different stakeholders (i.e., teachers and administrators) make sense and talk about the SGO policy requirements?
2. To what extent does teachers' and administrators' understanding of the required SGO components contribute to the quality of their implementation?
3. How does evidence from the teachers' and administrators' self-reports support the assumptions underlying the study's proposed theory of change?
  - a. What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of additional factors that are potential contributors to the implementation of SGOs?

- b. How does the presence of a population of diverse learners (e.g., ELs) influence perceptions and practice of SGOs?
- c. What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the purpose (compliance vs. enhanced learning opportunities) of SGOs' implementation? Do stakeholders' perceptions of purpose coincide with the intended policy outcomes?

### **Chapter 3: Method**

The study employs a qualitative case study approach (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) to inquire into the processes through which IAs engaged in policy meaning-making. As the process is always situated in the context in which implementation takes place, it is important to begin by describing the school setting and the research participants who are also key players in the implementation process. The research methodology focused on meaning-making as a multidimensional process following the development of shared understanding of the policy purpose, spanning individual interpretations, meaning negotiation among stakeholders, and use of common language to translate the policy message into actionable steps for implementation. Based on the reviewed research findings, the research instruments were designed and developed to capture specific perceptions of the policy purpose and inquire into the types of responses to policy messages adopted by the research participants.

This chapter provides information about the research participants, their educational background and current (at the time of the data collection) role in the school, as well as their professional experience. These details provide context for the types of interpretations IAs are able to develop and adds a frame of reference for the study findings. In addition, the chapter describes how the research instruments for the study were developed and administered by explaining the connections between the theoretical framework of the study, the assumptions of the proposed theory of change, and the research questions guiding the study. The timeline for the data collection is described with respect to the types of information captured in the data. The data sources are also

described in this section, along with the timeframe for data collection to give an account of what information was collected and how it was used to inform the research. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis process, which was based on standards for rigorous interpretation of qualitative data and which took place in several stages. Through these iterative stages of data analysis, theories about the research participants emerged and described a process of implementation that was focused on the IAs' understanding of the purpose of the SGO policy and how that subsequently affected the IAs' goals with respect to the implementation process.

### **School Setting**

To capture the depth and complexity of the meaning-making processes, the research focused on a single case – the third grade team in an elementary school in a high-needs<sup>3</sup> school district. The school serves students k-5, and had student enrollment between 400-1000 in 2013-2014. The linguistically diverse student population consisted of over 50% of students who primarily speak Spanish at home (data from NJDOE web site for 2013-2014). As in many other schools across the state of New Jersey in 2013-2014, both the new teacher evaluation (part of which was the SGOs component) and the CCSS were simultaneously rolled out in the school in response to the state accountability requirements.

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<sup>3</sup> N.J.A.C. § 6A:13 -3.3 Definition of high need school districts “(a) A high need school district is defined as a school district in which 40 percent or more of the students are “at-risk” as defined in P.L. 2007, c. 260 and is at one or more of the following proficiency levels on State assessments”, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/reform/ETTFFinalReport.pdf>

In addition to monolingual English-only classes, instruction in the school was provided through several types of instructional programs for ELs - the ESL program, the bilingual program and the dual language program. The three programs serving ELs had a goal of providing the most relevant and meaningful educational opportunities for the students, however they differed in the format of instructional practice, particularly in terms of language of instruction. The ESL program was a type of push-in instruction, where ESL teachers visited the regular teachers' classrooms and provided additional language support to ELs, in lessons planned and prepared by the regular classroom teacher. The dual language program was developed to combine two classes of students that received instruction from one English-only and one Spanish-only teacher on alternating weeks; the two teachers swapped the classes each week to provide balanced instruction in a week-long Spanish-only followed by a week-long English-only schedule. The bilingual program was set up similarly to the dual language program, however the same teacher provided the English-only and the Spanish-only instructional interventions. The monolingual program consisted of English-only instruction to students.

With respect to school's academic performance, data available through the publicly available NJDOE database on the web (<https://education.state.nj.us/pr/>) shows that the school significantly lags in comparison to schools across the state, especially in terms of performance in ELA. The school's performance report for the year prior to the SGOs implementation (i.e., 2012-2013) shows that state target for students' growth on Language Arts was not met. School performance data indicate that the school's

proficiency rate in ELA was higher than only 8% of all schools with NJASK scores statewide in the same year.

### **Participants**

The participants in the research were seven 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers in the elementary school, and three administrators. Two administrators were based in the same building – the principal and the vice-principal of the school. The third administrator was the district-level ELA supervisor for elementary education. The teachers were recruited for this study after their participation in a three-part series professional development on the development of SGOs. Their feedback with regard to their experiences in the first year of implementation of standards-based SGOs as a measure of teaching effectiveness provided critical information based on each participant's role and involvement in the process of unpacking the new policy and implementing it in school practice, especially because their teaching effectiveness played a critical role for preparing their students' for taking the state's test for the first time, while also ensuring that the students demonstrate adequate learning growth on classroom assessments.

**The teachers.** The teachers' group consisted of two ESL teachers, two teachers who partnered in the dual language program, two bilingual teachers, and one teaching an English monolingual class (Table 3). The group consisted of six females and one male teacher. Four teachers spoke Spanish fluently – one of the two ESL teachers, both bilingual teachers, and the Spanish-teaching teacher in the dual language program. Four



of the six teachers possessed advanced degrees, and two of the others had earned Bachelor's degrees.

Table 3 –

*Teacher - Participants*

<b>Teacher Name*</b>	<b>School Program</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>	<b>Highest Degree Earned</b>	<b>Fluent in Spanish</b>
Orlando	ESL	13	Master's	Yes
Adriana	Dual Language-Spanish	9	Master's	Yes
Amanda	Bilingual - ELA	1	Master's	Yes
Nina	Bilingual - Math	13	Master's	Yes
Tanisha	Dual Language-English	14	Bachelor's	No
Sandy	ESL	10	Master's	No
Ellen	English monolingual	13	Bachelor's	No

\* Teacher-participants were each given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

The ESL teachers both taught multiple grades, and one of them – Orlando – was fluent in Spanish, with a graduate degree in ESL and Bilingual Education. He also had an undergraduate major in Political Science, and had taught high school social studies bilingual classes for 9 years at the time of the research, in addition to teaching college ESL for one year. The year of the study - 2013-2014 –was his 4th year teaching elementary school ESL. The other ESL teacher – Sandy, had an undergraduate major in Music and possessed a graduate degree in elementary education and ESL certificate for K-12. She reported having taught for 10 years at the same school. In addition, she reported having experience teaching college-level ESL classes.

The two dual language program teachers taught the same students, providing simultaneously the Spanish and the English portion of the program. The dual program is a model in which instruction is provided in English and in Spanish in alternating weeks,

so that students learn both languages at the same time. In this manner, one teacher only teaches in Spanish, and the other is only teaching in English. The Spanish-portion teacher in the dual language program (Adriana) had an undergraduate degree in elementary education, and a Master's degree in Language Education. She had continued toward a doctorate in Language communication, but had not finished at the time of the research. She had taught for nine years, both in private and public schools, but mainly EL students. Her partner - Tanisha, who was providing the English-portion of the instruction for the same students, had an undergraduate degree in mathematics education. She had taught for 14 years, counting the year of the study, in the same school district for her entire career.

The two bilingual teachers taught ELA and Math respectively. Both were fluent Spanish speakers, and both had started recently teaching in the school district. The ELA bilingual teacher, Amanda is a novice teacher, with undergraduate major in marketing management and a Master's degree in education, with just over a year of teaching experience. The math bilingual teacher – Nina – reported having a Bachelors' in math and a Master's degree in education. She had taught for 13 years, including the year of the study. At the time of the research, she was teaching math and science and she was doing that for the first time as a bilingual teacher. The bilingual program is similar to the dual language program in that students receive instruction in Spanish and English in alternating weeks, however the same teacher is delivering instruction. In this manner, the bilingual teacher is teaching one week in Spanish and one week in English.

The monolingual teacher – Ellen – had a bachelor's degree in education. She has been a teacher for 13 years in the same district. She was the only 3rd grade teacher in the

school whose students only received English monolingual instruction. Her instruction varied significantly from all of the other teachers who taught either ESL, bilingual, or dual language classes, as the different programs in the school were aimed at providing optimal instructional opportunities for the wide range of learning needs of the students. Thus, teachers approached instruction with different goals, based on the overall objectives of the existing curricula.

**The administrators.** The three administrators who participated in this research were the school principal, the vice-principal and the district-level ELA supervisor for elementary education. All three of the administrators were long-time employees in the district. The school principal was male, and the vice-principal and the ELA supervisor were female. All three administrators reported having graduate degrees (Table 4).

Table 4 –

*Participating Administrators*

<b>Administrator Name*</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Years of Experience in Current Position</b>	<b>Highest Degree Earned</b>	<b>Fluent in Spanish</b>
Neal	Principal	10	Master's	Yes
Ashonda	Vice-principal	8	Master's	No
Alexa	District Supervisor	2	Master's	No

\* Administrators were each given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Neal had a bachelor's degree in music, in addition to two master degrees – one in bilingual education and one in educational leadership. He had been an administrator for almost ten years, and had otherwise worked in education for almost 30 years. The vice-principal, Ashonda, reported having a Bachelor's degree in communications and a Master's in education, supervision and administration. At the time of the study, she had

been an administrator for eight years. The district ELA supervisor, Alexa, reported having earned both a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in elementary education. She had been an administrator for two years in the same district, but had otherwise over 30 years of experience in education. She was the district's ELA supervisor for elementary education. Her primary responsibility was to supervise the district's supplemental teachers (intervention teachers), who were providing targeted ELA instruction for the lowest-achieving elementary students in the entire district.

### **Data Sources**

The study draws on multiple interviews with participating teachers and administrators. The interviews were conducted and data were collected from educators in three separate data collection rounds. The timing of the interview rounds was determined by the official timeline for development and implementation of the SGOs. For clarity, this section addresses the process of developing the three interview guides for the three rounds of interviews, and describes the purpose of each interview instrument separately.

The scheduling of the three rounds of interviews was based on the teachers' work on finalizing of SGOs and administration of post-assessments to establish students' learning progressions. Prior to conducting each interview in the second and third round of interviews, I went over the transcription of the participant's prior interviews to ensure that the questions would logically follow on information, provided in previous rounds. This was done to ensure that questions were not repeated, and that the requested information followed specific and particular information previously provided by each

participant's role in the policy implementation process. A table summarizing the data collection timeframe by month appears in Appendix B.

**Interview guide protocols.** The semi-structured interviews (Patton, 1990) were organized around three separate interview guide protocols, consisting of lists of questions on several main topics. Each of the three interview protocols was organized in terms of themes. The protocols were developed to ensure that the same information was obtained from each study participant (both teachers and administrators). After the first and second interview rounds, various probes were included to learn and explore aspects of the process, which may not have been clear at the time when the interview guide protocols were first developed. The interview guide protocols provided a tool assisting with keeping a focus on a set of issues that were addressed systematically with all interview respondents and were helpful in making the best use of the preset interview times. Interview guide protocols for all three rounds of interviews appear in Appendix A. Table 5 is a summary of the purpose of the three interview guide protocols by round, and show the commonalities between the questions for teachers versus administrators together with differences in the frames of reference for the two groups.

Table 5 –

*Interview Guide Protocols*

<b>Interview Round</b>	<b>Purpose *</b>
1	To gauge key information about the interviewees, the process of SGO development, including PD, and level of perceived collegiality
2	To gauge the interviewees' understanding of student growth, the level of collaboration, and perception about the extent to which SGOs improved instructional opportunities for students
3	To gauge the interviewees' understanding of the policy's purpose, including enhanced learning opportunities for educators and promotion of accountability

\* No substantial differences in teachers' versus administrators' interview guide protocols, except asking administrators to provide broader perspective of the process (i.e., school-wide or district-wide level).

***Round I interview guides.*** The first round of interviews was conducted immediately after the submission of the finalized SGOs of the teachers in late February, 2014 (the NDOE due date for SGOs submission was February 15, 2014). The first interview guide's (Appendix A) purpose was to gauge key information about the research participants, such as:

1. Demographic information, including educational background, professional experience, and any relevant information about participants' current professional role at the time of the study, including professional responsibilities (Q1),
2. Research participants' experiences with developing SGOs (Q2), and
3. Interviewees' perception of the level of collegiality and collaboration that supported the process (Q3).

The set of probing questions regarding participants' experiences with the process of developing SGOs included sub-questions and prompts to help the respondents

frame their responses around key requirements in the SGO implementation process such as comparing (to previous years) the process of identifying appropriate learning objectives for students, describing various opportunities to learn about the new policy, as well as identifying specific materials, guidelines, and suggested pre-assessment procedures that were available to them in the actual SGO selection process.

The probing questions regarding interviewees' perception of the level of collegiality and collaboration that supported the process gauged the respondents' perceptions of opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues at the school, including probes about specific professional learning events and more informal opportunities to work and share with others. The questions asked interviewees to describe the format of meetings, the dynamics of the collaborative teams, and the types of products they were able to produce as a result of these meetings. Last, the questions gauged the participants' perceptions of the level of support at the school- and district-level as well as at the state-level.

The interview guide for the administrators differed only slightly from the one intended for the teachers, in order to obtain the exact same information for both groups of interviewees. In terms of demographics and background information, the questions were virtually the same, to the extent they aligned with the respondents' varying roles in the school and the district (in the case of the district-level supervisor). The second set of questions, addressing the process of developing SGOs focused on the same types of inquiry, as they did for the teachers – the types and amount of professional learning and

training, the materials and resources available, including specific questions about assessment procedures. Administrator questions differed in that administrators could speak about the same process from a broader perspective, as they worked with individual teachers and could thus provide information about multiple ways in which the same requirements were reached - for example the issue with selection of appropriate pre-assessments.

The first round of interviews took a full month. Three interviews were done in person, in the school. All three were conducted after school hours, in the classrooms of the teachers. The rest of the interviews were conducted over the phone, usually at night. The first round of interviews was each about an hour long, and followed the interview guide for this round, focusing on the demographic information of the research respondents, their professional development and learning about the SGO policy implementation, and some of the specific steps that they took with regard to the implementation process. To this end, it was important to complete all of the interviews as close to the official timeline for SGOs submission to the state, so that interview respondents could provide relevant and detailed information about their experiences and perceptions of the process.

***Round II interview guides.*** The second round of interviews coincided with the administration of the SGOs post-assessments and establishing of student learning growth. The interviews with the participants closely followed each teacher's timeline for conducting the post-assessments, in an effort to capture their most candid and relevant perceptions of the process and to gauge the interviewees understanding of student growth



(protocols available in Appendix A). To this end, the interview guide included a set of questions pertaining to:

1. Research participants' understanding of student growth (Q1-Q3),
2. Specific pre-and post-assessments they used (Q4-Q6),
3. The process of monitoring and assessing students' progress, including collaborative practices at the school and the extent to which the implementation efforts reflected officially defined steps in the process, such as the mid-year opportunity to modify SGOs (Q8-Q9),
4. Participants' perceptions of change in their professional practice, specifically with regard to contributing to improved instructional quality of introduced activities and adopted changes to practice (i.e., form- versus function-based) (Q10-Q12).

When asking participants about their understanding of student growth and use of appropriate assessment to measure it, the administrators' interview guide implied a broader perspective on the various types of assessments, both pre- and post-assessments, and asked participants to talk about their overall sense of the capacity of the assessments and the actual assessment procedures to provide appropriate learning gain scores to be used as a measure of teaching effectiveness. When administrators were asked about changes in instruction, and specifically about the ability of the SGOs to improve teaching practice, the questions focused their perceptions of the overall process on a school- or a district-level. Apart from this, the questions in both interview guide protocols were virtually the same.

The second round of interviews started about a month and a half after the first round, however toward the end, scheduling of round two interviews overlapped with some of the round three interviews. This was due to the fact that some of the research respondent teachers conducted their post-assessments at the very end of the school year. As round two interview questions were focused on gauging information about the post-assessment process, some of the interviews were conducted at the end of the school year. As with the previous round of interviews, each interview was about an hour long with only a few exceptions. Almost all interviews were conducted after work hours, over the phone, with the exception of one ESL teacher – Sandy and the English teacher in the dual language program - Tanisha. Both teachers were interviewed in their classrooms, after school hours.

***Round III interview guides.*** The third and final round of interviews were set at the end of the school year and tapped into the participants' overall experiences during the first year of implementation of the standards-based SGOs. The main purpose of the third interview guide (protocols for both teachers and administrators appear in Appendix A) was to gauge the interviewees overall impressions, experiences and attitudes with regard to the purpose of the SGOs and included a set of questions inquiring about:

1. The contribution of the SGOs toward generally improving learning outcomes of students (Q1),
2. The contribution of the SGOs toward improving learning outcomes of EL students (Q3),
3. SGOs' contribution to improving teaching quality (Q4),

4. SGOs' contribution and adequacy in informing professional learning of teachers (Q2),
5. Perception of the ability of the policy to contribute to a more collaborative professional culture (Q5), and
6. SGOs' effectiveness in supporting accountability standards (Q6).

The last two questions were also aimed at getting participants' perception of the types of introduced activities and adopted changes to practice (i.e., form-versus function-based). The interview guide for administrators in the second round of interviews also differed very slightly from the one designed for the teachers, posing certain questions that they could address from a broader perspective than the individual classroom. The third round of interviews were conducted over the phone, with the exception of the same two teachers, who preferred to conduct the interviews in person.

All interviews in the three rounds were audio-recorded, with the exception of the three interviews of Tanisha, who was uncomfortable having her voice recorded. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, ranging anywhere between 30 minutes to an hour. As the audio-data were collected, files were immediately sent for transcription. Transcribed interviews were examined for identifiable information and were assigned anonymous identifiers. The transcriptions for the three rounds of interviews were aggregated into a single document for each of the ten research participants, yielding a dataset of 10 files.

### **Standards for Rigorous Interpretation of the Data**

To ensure high standards of scholarly interpretation of the collected data, the following standards for rigorous interpretation of the data were considered and played a role in the data analysis process. These standards addressed issues of research credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

**Credibility.** To address the issues of internal validity of the study, the analyses followed Lincoln and Guba's (1982) recommendations regarding data interpretation procedures. Data triangulation ensured that specific research evidence from multiple interviews supported credible causal conclusions to address common issues of research bias in qualitative data analysis and interpretation. In addition, data analyses were performed with attention to the way in which research evidence was interpreted to represent a valid instantiation of the problems of the research study, as defined by the research questions.

**Transferability.** The issues of transferability of the study's findings and the potential of the findings to inform broader practical implications will be addressed in detail in the discussion portion of the study. To address this aspect of the research, certain provisions in data analysis were made to ensure a level of transferability to other educational contexts despite the fact that the research is largely bound in the context and the timeframe in which the research took place. Issues raised by this study have the potential to inform the current state of affairs not only in the state of New Jersey but nationally, as reform efforts focus on re-definition of teacher accountability as it relates to

the use of measures of student learning gains for purposes of teacher evaluation.

Implementation of teaching effectiveness ratings partially based on student academic outcomes is ongoing in many states in the US, and although there is variation among the measures and the approaches used to take student achievement gains into consideration, many school districts across the country are grappling with the same issues, concerns and practical implementation challenges.

**Dependability.** When addressing dependability issues related to this research, one must consider the unique circumstances under which the research took place. As 2013-2014 was the first year of state-wide implementation of the SGOs as a measure of teaching effectiveness, and it was also heavily affected by the complementary large-scale CCSS implementation, many schools across the state experienced unique implementation challenges. Subsequent years of implementation by definition would substantially differ in terms of practical challenges and needs. In this respect, the study's findings are not likely to be replicable, and potentially not even stable over time. However, they may inform first-year implementation efforts in other states, as well as first-year policy implementation efforts. The question about reliability of the conclusions drawn from the study will be addressed in the discussion section in terms of consistency with other study findings coming from similar implementation circumstances, and examining issues, concerns, and solutions derived from other research studies.

**Confirmability.** In order to connect data interpretation back to the initial sources of information, transparency of the origin of information provided by study participants was preserved in the multiple stages of data analysis. In addition, the approach to

triangulation of the data followed the pre-determined levels of analyses, ensuring direct connection to the study's research questions and stated purpose. Although the research did not utilize member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure accuracy of the data, transcriptions of the interview data provided an authentic account of the information shared by the research participants. Prior to each interview, the available data for the interview respondent was reviewed, so that interview questions were directly related to previous responses of the individual. This approach to interviewing was similar to member checks in that questions in subsequent interviews were derived from information given by the interview respondent in prior data collection activities.

### **Qualitative Data Coding**

To begin the process of data analysis (Stemler, 2001; Kohlbacher, 2006), a project site was created on the Dedoose platform (Dedoose, 2015). Dedoose.com is a web-based application for qualitative and mixed-methods research analysis. The platform consists of multiple tools which enable the main steps in the data analysis process - uploading the data, creating and associating descriptors for each file, excerpting of segments of data files, creating multiple levels of categories of codes to be assigned to data excerpts, and aggregating and exploring data in various ways.

All ten of the data files (one file with aggregated three interview rounds for each research participant) were uploaded onto the project site on Dedoose. Each file was assigned a set of three descriptors, each with several options – (a) unique ID number, which ranged from 11 to 20, to reflect the IDs of the research participants, (b) highest

academic degree earned with two options (e.g., Bachelor's and Master's), and (c) role/position, which included the different roles of the participants – bilingual teacher, dual language teacher, ESL teacher, monolingual teacher, school-level administrator, and district-level administrator. Adding the descriptors to the files enables various ways of grouping the coded excerpts of the data, for example by specific role (e.g., by teacher versus administrator), and look for response patterns across the different descriptors.

After assigning descriptors to the data files, each file was chunked into excerpts, using Dedoose excerpting function. Excerpting followed specific rules about the process, and the definition about what constitutes an excerpt. An excerpt consists of a complete set of an interviewer's question and the respondent's answer (full definition and excerpting rules are available in the Coding Manual (Appendix C).

### **Axial Coding**

The coding process started with creating a set of first level codes, based on the study's theory of change (Logic Model is presented in Table 1). The first category of codes (Level 1 codes) were linked directly to the research questions of the study. Subsequent categories – Level 2 and Level 3 codes were developed to allow tracking the information, shared by the research participants with regard to their perception of contributing versus hindering factors, compliance versus accountability, and change to practice versus lack of change. A document, reflecting the architecture of the axial coding, which supported the creation of the coding scheme is available in Appendix C. In the next three sections, the three levels of codes are described with respect to their

purpose in the coding process, and describe how they relate to the research questions, around which the study was designed (Table 6).



Table 6 –

*Corresponding Level 1 and Level 2 Codes to Study Research Questions*

Research Questions	Level 1 Codes	Level 2 Codes
	1.1. Round 1 1.2. Round 2 1.3. Round 3	n/a
	1.4. Background and Demographics	2.1. Educational Background 2.2. Grade level currently teaching 2.3. Instructional practice 2.4. Professional Experience
RQ #1. How did different stakeholders (i.e., teachers and administrators) make sense and talk about the SGO policy requirements?	1.5. Implementation Timeline 1.6. Professional Development & Training 1.7. Teacher-Supervisor Collaboration	2.5. Contribution 2.6. Hindrance 2.7. Understanding
RQ #2. To what extent does teachers' and administrators' understanding of the required SGO components contribute to the quality of their implementation?	1.8. Peer Collaboration 1.9. Number and Type of SGOs 1.10. Alignment to Standards 1.11. EL Needs 1.12. Assessment Process	
RQ #3. How does evidence from the teachers' and administrators' self-reports support the assumptions underlying the study's proposed theory of change?	1.13. Purpose of SGO Policy	2.8. Compliance with policy 2.9. Enhanced learning opportunities for teachers 2.10. Enhanced Learning opportunities for students
a. What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of additional factors that are potential contributors to the implementation of SGOs?	1.14. Additional Factors Affecting Implementation/Institutional Constraints	2.11. Curricular/Programmatic Constraints 2.12. Instructional Resources Constraints 2.13. Belief Constraints 2.14. Time/Scheduling Constraints 2.15. Vertical Support Constraints
b. How does the presence of a population of diverse learners (e.g., ELs) influence perceptions and practice of SGOs?		
c. What are the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the purpose (compliance vs. enhanced learning opportunities) of SGOs' implementation? Do stakeholders' perceptions of purpose coincide with the intended policy outcomes?	1.15. Change from Previous Years	2.16. Change 2.17. No change

**Level 1 codes.** The first three Level 1 codes were applied to track the three interview rounds in which data collection proceeded – 1.1. Round 1, 1.2. Round 2, and 1.3. Round 3. The fourth Level 1 code was 1.4. Background and demographics, which allowed to identify the excerpts containing information about the respondents' educational background, the grade level they were teaching at the time when the research took place, their instructional practice, and professional experience. The rest of the codes reflected the policy implementation required components, articulated in the Logic Model, and pertained to the 1.5. Number and type of the created SGOs, 1.6. Assessment process, 1.7. Implementation timeline, 1.8. Professional development and training relevant to the implementation process, 1.9. Peer collaboration, 1.10. Collaboration between teachers and supervisors, 1.11. Learning standards, and 1.12. Consideration of EL needs. Level 1 codes 5-12 were created to appropriately address the first two research questions of the study. Level 1 codes 1.13. Perceived purpose of the policy and 1.14. Additional factors (later re-coded to institutional constraints) were created to keep track of the respondents' feedback with regard to the third research question of the study. The codes pertained to the participants' understanding of the purpose of the policy and the various factors that were at interplay and were used to track information that relates to the development of form-focused versus function-focused interpretations of the policy requirements and ultimately inform the types of responses to the SGO policy that were implemented by the IAs.

In the course of coding, another code emerged from the data, as participants often referred to actual changes (or lack thereof) in their practice. As these respondents' comments were consistent with reports from the literature on instructional policy

implementation, a code tracking the respondents' perceived understanding of change was added to complete the Level 1 system of codes – 1.15. Change.

From a methodological perspective the first level of codes followed a deductive, or a top-down approach to building the coding scheme. This was done to ensure that the coding scheme can keep track of respondents' feedback regarding specific aspects of the implementation process. These initial codes were only slightly changed in the subsequent phases of coding and data analysis.

**Level 2 codes.** Unlike the deductive approach to creating Level 1 codes, directly connected to the research questions of the study, Level 2 codes emerged from the data and were developed following the respondents' understanding and perceptions of the SGO requirements, as well as the perceived purpose and changes in practice. For each of the Level 1 codes (1.5 – 1.12), associated with the policy requirements three different Level 2 codes were created to track respondents' statements about (a) their understanding of each requirement, (b) its potential contribution, or (c) its potential hindrance in the implementation process. Excerpts in which respondents described policy requirements without making a judgment of contribution or hindrance were coded simply as understanding, while excerpts containing judgment about contribution or hindrance were coded as 2.5. Contribution, 2.6. Hindrance, and 2.7. Understanding (Table 6). For Level 1 codes associated with the purpose of the policy 1.13 - the creation of Level 2 codes also followed an inductive approach, based on the patterns emerging from the data. Following multiple reading and re-reading of the excerpts, three Level 2 codes were created to keep track of the respondents' understanding and beliefs about the purpose of the policy - 2.8.

Compliance with policy, 2.9. Enhanced learning opportunities for teachers, and 2.10. Enhanced Learning opportunities for students.

For perceived change in practice – 1.15, two Level 2 codes were created, allowing to track respondents' perceptions of change in their practice: 2.16. Change and 2.17. No change.

**Level 3 codes.** The third category of codes – Level 3 – was developed as a sub-category to Level 2 codes, which allowed for more in-depth categorization of the feedback received from the participants. The purpose of developing the level 3 codes was to keep in the coding scheme actual descriptions of specific contributing or hindering aspects of factors affecting the implementation process, as reported by the research participants.

An example of this was the Level 3 codes which were developed under participants' feedback regarding additional factors affecting the implementation process, a code which was later re-structured to better capture the meaning of the information provided by respondents. The code Additional Factors Affecting Implementation was applied to excerpts in the transcribed interviews, followed by application of a Level 2 code, indicating whether this factor either hindered or contributed to the implementation process. However, both Level 1 and Level 2 codes become meaningful at the third level of coding where Level 3 codes describe the specific factor referred to by the respondents. This specific example of axial coding is illustrated in Figure 2.

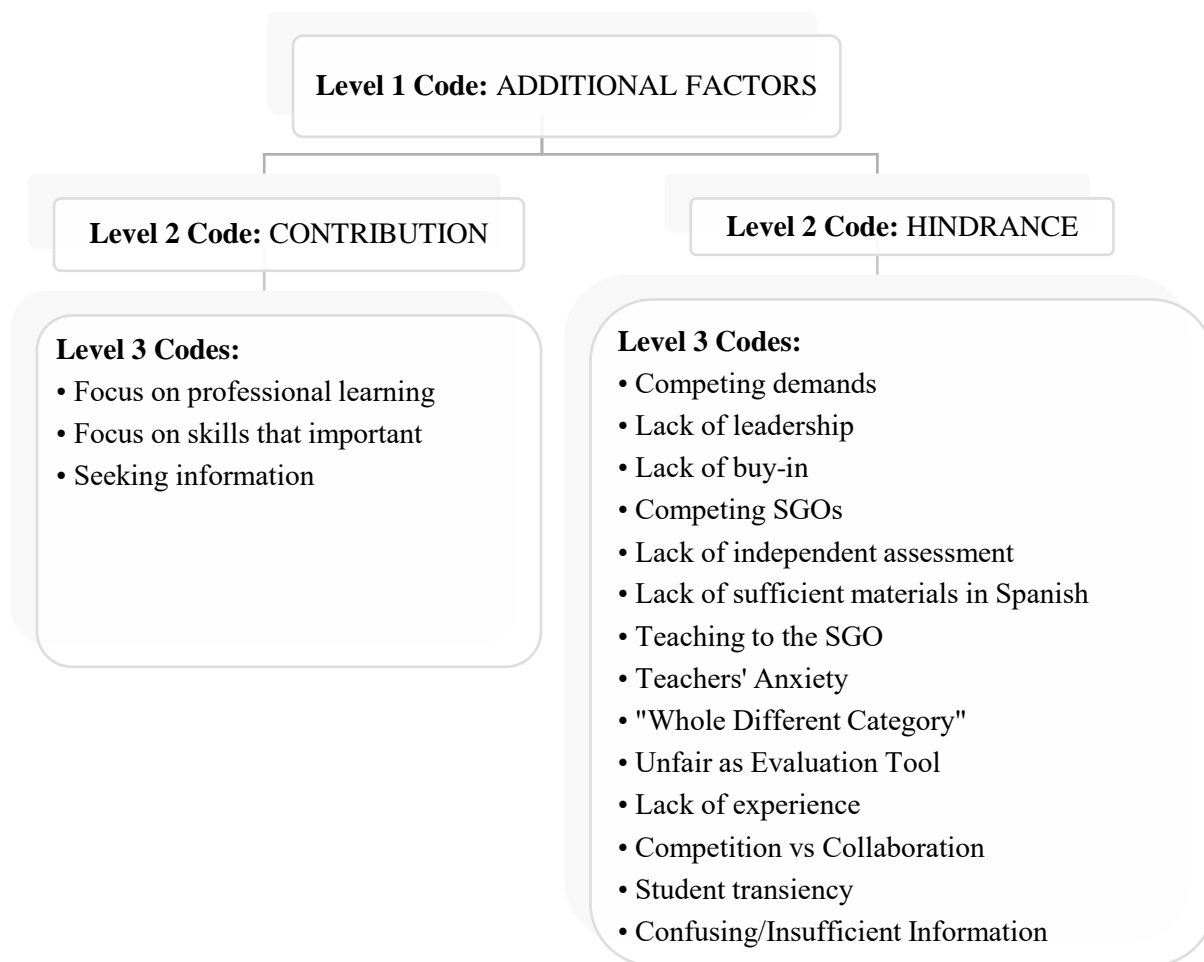


Figure 2. Example of Axial Coding for Additional Factors Affecting Implementation.

I chose to describe the architecture of the axial coding scheme, giving an example of the code Additional Factors Affecting Implementation, because of the extended work on defining this code. Through an iterative process of describing each of the three levels of codes, and specifically looking through and writing up the code's application rules in the coding manual, I realized that all of the factors, included in this "miscellaneous code" were more or less related to aspects of the respondents' practice over which they had little control. Going over the excerpts coded under this code, I realized that the reason

why participants had little control over them was because the majority of these factors were to a certain extent institutionally determined, or bound by the culture of the school. Following a major restructuring of this code, it was transformed to accommodate the various themes it encompassed. Figure 3 reflects the transformation of the code.

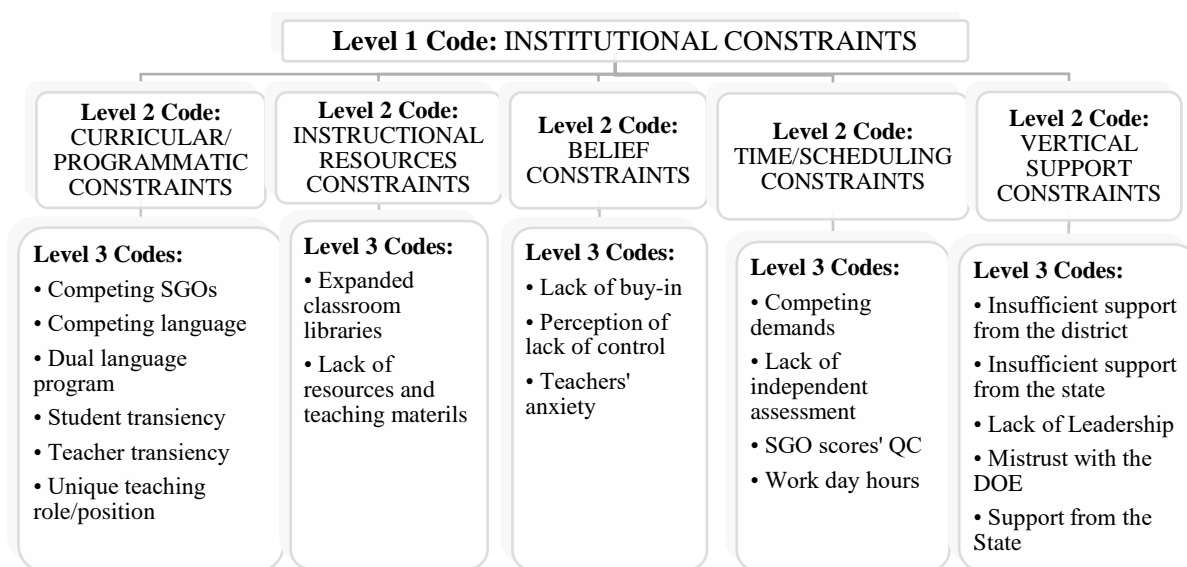


Figure 3. Institutional Constraints – Architecture of the Three Levels of Codes

Following the re-structuring of the Institutional Constraints code, a process of further cleaning and merging of codes followed. Consideration of the codes' descriptions and application rules resulted in merging a number of codes (mostly Level 3) which were referring to the same type of information. For example, the information about professional learning opportunities provided to educators through the school's partnership with the state university was captured by two separate codes – one under the previously restructured Level 1 code on Additional Factors, and under a Level 1 code referring to Professional Learning. Overall the process allowed developing a cleaner

coding scheme, through which excerpts were optimally organized to provide evidence for the next stage of coding.

### **Selective Coding**

Strauss and Corbin (1998, 2008) describe the process of selective coding as a culminating point of the data analysis process in which a single code or a category of codes are identified as a core variable, to which all other variables can be connected to form a story line. This main finding serves as a unifying theory, for which the coding scheme provides a system of evidence to argue why and how this theory explains the data (Creswell, 1998). For the analysis of this study data, the process took place after the initial coding was completed, and the excerpts under all Level 1 codes was exported into 15 word files, one for each Level 1 code.

Reading through the exported excerpts was useful for identifying the core issues, related to each of the policy requirements. In addition, reading through and annotating the main reported changes in practice described by the participants were helpful in identifying similar patterns of perceived change among groups of stakeholders. The most illuminating sum of exported excerpts was in the file containing excerpts under the perceived purpose of the policy. This document clearly delineated the perceptions of the teachers in contrast to these of the administrators, and the variability among the teachers (more or less evident for some of the other codes), was virtually nonexistent in this code, which gave the first big hint about how the perceptions of purpose of the policy shaped the motivations and the goals of the stakeholders.

To better understand the specific differences, and inquire more deeply about participants' experiences and reported perceptions, individual summaries were produced for all of the participating educators. These not only demonstrated that teachers' and administrators' input with respect to key policy requirements was different, but provided evidence about how and where they differed the most. The Dedoose platform supports export to an Excel spreadsheet of the number of excerpts under each of the codes, and allowed these frequencies to be parsed among the research participants by utilizing their unique ID descriptor. The generated spreadsheet provided a type of map of the types of codes that were most frequently used to apply to respondents' excerpts. This map was helpful in identifying patterns of feedback by the respondents. The summaries started with a short description, based on the demographics and background information shared each educator, then summarized their feedback with respect to each of the policy requirements and its effect on the implementation process, in addition to perceptions of policy purpose and changes in practice.

Based on the summaries written for each of the participants, further patterns of feedback emerged, specifically with respect to how research participants spoke about their experiences in the implementation process. As summaries of their perceptions were compared, it became evident that the behaviors and attitudes described in the interviews were motivated by the participants' goals, which turned out to differ significantly between the teaching staff and the interviewed administrators. The next chapter begins by presenting the stakeholders' theories of implementation, and then goes into explanations of how these theories relate to and explain the many aspects of the SGO implementation



process – from the selection of learning targets, choice of assessment practices, collaborative efforts, professional learning, to incorporating specific changes in practice, interpretation of data, formative assessment approaches, and handling of documentation.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Findings**

In this chapter, I describe the IAs' goals and how they motivated participants' interpretations, actions, and adopted changes to practice. The implementation goals of teachers and administrators diverged in how they affected IAs' understanding of the various elements of the implementation process, such as the selection of learning targets, identification of appropriate assessments, collaborations, and professional learning. Findings are presented in terms of individual participants', as well as group's (i.e., teachers versus administrators) understandings and interpretations of the policy purpose, and highlight differences between the teachers' and the administrators' understanding of the purpose of the SGOs. Additionally, both groups developed different opinions and approaches to implementing what they saw as needed changes in practice. The chapter begins with a section on theories of implementation, providing a succinct description of how IAs' goals with regard to the SGOs defined their actions and attitudes in the implementation process. In subsequent sections and throughout the chapter I present evidence on how teachers' and administrators' understanding of the policy purpose affected their goals, and ultimately the balance between form- and function-based changes, adopted in instructional and organizational practices at the school. The presentation of the research findings is supported by a number of participants' quotes (both teachers and administrators) throughout the chapter. It is written in a way to best set the stage for the discussion of the findings (in Chapter 5), as they relate to the research questions of the study and inform the extent to which intended implementation outcomes were reached.

The first year of SGO implementation included new policy provisions calling for distinct changes in established school practices in several major areas (Figure 4).



Figure 4. SGO Implementation Components

I present evidence for each one of these areas separately using them as headings to structure the chapter: a) articulation of learning targets for students, b) accounting for learning growth (i.e., selection and use of standards-based assessments), c) collaborative efforts and d) professional learning. Changes to practice, as understood by the teachers and the administrators were to be implemented in accordance with their own (i.e., the teachers' and administrators') interpretation of the recommendations stated in the SGOs guidebook, consisting of practical advice on making modifications to existing practices.

## **Theories of SGO Implementation**

The work on generating individual profiles of the study participants helped in generating trends and patterns of ways in which participants developed tentative understandings of SGO implementation. The profiles revealed that while different stakeholders have developed different theories of the purpose of the policy implementation, they consistently used common phrases to talk about the SGOs. While trying to understand and write out the various interpretations that led to outlining the purpose and their theories, it became evident that the common vocabulary which teachers and administrators used often carried different meanings which were deeply embedded in the IAs' goals, priorities, and concerns. As such, because the requirements of the policy carried different meanings and acquired different values for teachers and administrators, they ultimately led these two groups of professionals to generate very different theories of the purpose of the SGOs. This was particularly important to establish, since the IAs' beliefs about the purpose of the SGO policy affected the types of goals they set for themselves, and the types of actions they took to enact changes to practice (e.g., form-focused versus function-focused). Table 7 presents a breakdown of teachers' and administrators' beliefs, goals, and types of changes to practice they considered and adopted. The alignment among stakeholders' beliefs, goals, and actions are described in detail in the following sections of this chapter, by emphasizing differences between teachers and administrators, regardless of the common language they used to talk about the implementation process.

Table 7 –

*Stakeholders' SGO Beliefs, Goals, and Adopted Changes to Practice*

	<b>Beliefs about Policy Purpose</b>	<b>Stakeholders' Goals</b>	<b>Action Steps</b>
Teachers	To be used as a performance evaluation measure	To showcase teaching talent and ensure all students reach SGO target	-Set achievable targets -Select familiar assessment(s) -Collect evidence of learning growth -Follow proper procedures (participate in training, focus on student data, participate in collaborative practices)
Administrators	To support improved learning outcomes of students (by targeting specific skills)	To add pressure to teachers to ensure improved assessment outcomes	-Set rigorous targets -Select standardized assessment(s) -Review with staff evidence of learning growth -Follow proper procedures (offer training, focus on student data, organize and participate in collaborative practices)

The leveled design of the coding scheme, as described in chapter 3, helped to organize the data to find evidence for the patterns of interpretation and assess whether each group's (teachers and administrators) theory would robustly hold for all aspects of the implementation process. When writing up the tentative theories of implementation, excerpts coded under various codes were fused to describe participants' contrasting perspectives on the implementation process, and what it really meant for the different stakeholders. The writing of the tentative theories of both groups involved continual checking on categories of codes to assess their potential to explain all of the data describing the multiple aspects of implementation, as seen by the participants. At the conclusion of the process, it was determined that indeed the generated theories provided a good explanation of the data.

Once defined, the theories put into perspective all of the different participants' feedback with regard to the implementation process. It became clearer that the teachers and the administrators had significantly different beliefs and understandings, which motivated their actions and perceptions. Formulating these differences helped explain much of the interviews' input, which previously seemed disconnected from the issues. To examine in depth, the different aspects of the policy implementation, as set out in the study's proposed theory of change, the generated stakeholders' theories of implementation were applied to all of the various required components of the policy. For each of the requirements, a separate section was developed to examine the extent to which the theories applied to the data and helped further explain participants' reported attitudes and behaviors. The process included incorporation of appropriate (sometimes substantial) quotes from participants, which provided evidence for arguing for the fit of the theories, while also provided evidence for types of common language and common descriptors they used to talk about the adopted changes to practice. The writing process was based on fusing various codes to look for the most relevant quotes, illuminating each of the issues discussed by the participants in relation to the implemented requirements of the policy. Ultimately, evidence from the participants' interviews is presented to illustrate how the divergence of IAs' goals affected all aspects of implementation (shown in Figure 4).

### **Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Purpose of the SGOs**

Tracing back to the divergent goals of teachers and administrators, and role of these goals in the actual steps taken in the implementation process, it is important to begin by

articulating the differences in the IAs' perceptions of the policy purpose. This section delves into the details of these motivations, and refers to actual quotes from the research participants to illustrate their viewpoints and attitudes.

From the principal's perspective, the policy offered an important opportunity to relate with urgency the need to ensure that students receive ongoing, systematic, and targeted support in achieving learning targets that would eventually support performance on the state's standardized assessment. In fact, the school principal (from here on also referred to by his pseudonym – Neal) declared the entire first year of SGOs implementation to be focused on literacy and language arts. The school has historically performed well in math; however, students have done less well in literacy. To Neal, the SGO policy offered a timely and important mechanism to encourage teachers to focus on literacy, including emphasis on both reading and writing skills for the students. Having a strong sense of the entire district's urgent need to improve students' achievement, for Neal it made sense to zero in on a set of skills that, based on the school's historic performance on the state test, has been consistently lacking among students.

*Our school seems to score well in mathematics so I kind of encourage teachers to develop SGOs in reading and writing, to have two, but have reading and writing and again, if you wanted to do mathematics then do either reading or writing and do a math. But based on the historical data of NJ ASK, our school does pretty well with the mathematics so I want to expose them to develop learning those SGOs based on the data that we have on the literacy. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 2)*

Both the principal and the vice-principal (Ashonda) acknowledged that writing is particularly difficult to teach, but is a critically important skill, especially for EL students, and as such both ESL teachers in the school shared that they were very strongly encouraged to focus on learning targets in writing instruction. Describing the focus on writing, and its impact on learning, Neal spoke about his hope that not only students will benefit from the emphasis on writing, but teachers will also become better at teaching writing:

*There's a constant need and a reminder that writing has to be done every day and that's why as we now develop our professional development plan and new title work plan we take all this information from this SGO because we're trying not to do things in isolation, but connecting the dots and using this data to plot out how we'll do this next year. As far as teacher effectiveness, what I would like from this experience is that they develop more of their writing teaching skills because of the fact that students are becoming better writers. Writing is not an easy skill to teach, that they become more familiar and more comfortable with the process of teaching writing. Again, some of us are not as effective as writers, but this process has not only helped the students, but the staff as well. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 2)*

As the school leader, Neal saw his role as critical in driving instructional change, and he grasped the opportunity to utilize the process of SGOs implementation to support an academic area which in his view was important, especially in supporting the large EL population in the school. Knowing that because of the high-stakes profile of the SGO



policy, and its direct impact on teacher effectiveness ratings, he seized the opportunity to emphasize the need for a wide-spread focus on literacy. He encouraged teachers, regardless of their own instructional aspirations, professional focus, and teaching background to consider supporting students' learning in language arts by selecting either a reading or writing learning objective. The high profile of the new policy would ensure, in his view, the systematic, ongoing, and focused instruction in literacy, advancing students' knowledge and the potential to improve performance on the state's standardized assessment at the end of the academic year. Speaking about the teachers in his school, he said:

*Some are having difficulties changing certain ways and some are doing quite nicely with the flow, but it's not easy to change and not easy to teach something when they're not the experts. It definitely has impact and right now we're developing their professional development plan and you see more teachers asking for reading and writing workshops; so this has created interest. Either forced interest or something where they feel is not as difficult and has given me an appreciation of writing and encouraged me to continue my own self to become a better writer. So the right amount of pressure from different angles has influenced different people's state of mind. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

The principal acknowledged his awareness of the anxiety of the teachers, resulting from their perception of the summative purpose of the policy, and talked about how this anxiety can be used to ensure that students learn. In this respect, he showed that his primary concern is in fact the progress of the students. However, he did not have a

problem using the idea of the dual purpose of the policy to pressure teachers into working harder with students, reflecting, and developing professionally in order to do better (compared to previous years) in literacy.

*The teachers are having an awakening that the SGO is going to make an impact on their rating system as far as being effective or ineffective, distinguished, or somewhat . . . It was more of the teachers having mistrust with the state than anything else. Not seeing it as something where we want accountability, and it's a product-based industry so are the students learning, are we doing what we need to do to help the students learn, if not, are we going back, are we reflecting and doing professional development, are we taking the step above. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 3)*

Similar to his perception of the potential of the SGOs policy to bring about measurable change in students' performance and learning was to a large extent echoed by the other two administrators in the sample. Ashonda reiterated the role of SGOs as a powerful engine for driving up performance scores and advancing students' knowledge in language arts. She also spoke about the role of literacy for lifelong learning in a broader aspect, addressing the need for a more focused instruction in spoken language, presentation, and expression skills:

*I think we've lost sight of being all inclusive, because we have to have something on paper, got to have something to grade, where we lose touch with those other areas of literacy, and by that I mean the speaking and listening portion that by the*

*time our students are getting a little older and you're expecting them to be ready, willing and able to stand in front of a room and make a presentation and give a strong voice and pay attention to diction and pitch and making eye contact with their audience, they haven't been accustomed to doing that from an early age.*

*(Ashonda, vice-principal, Interview Round 3)*

The district-level administrator reiterated a similar perception of the SGOs policy as a tool to promote accountability among teachers and ensure that students are offered differentiated support in achieving learning growth objectives and demonstrating improved performance. She spoke at length about various approaches to standardization of assessment practices that would ensure common, vertically aligned (across grade levels), and rigorous learning expectations. The three administrators talked about the potential of the policy to bring about measurable change in student performance and focus on students learning gains, rather than focusing on it as an evaluation tool for employment decisions. This idea is well described in Neal's understanding of the accountability aspect of the policy, and its capacity to highlight the specific learning needs of every student and track the progress made through the teaching and learning process:

*For instance, if you were looking at me, if the school didn't make the SGO you have to look at the principal. If the students haven't met their SGO you have to look at the teacher. They have put the light on the instruction more than in years past because it eliminates a lot of "excuses" – now you can't blame the students anymore because the teachers have to look at themselves and say, how can I best*

*meet this child's needs. The SGO is a spotlight but it adds accountability to the instruction. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 3)*

In addition, all three administrators made an explicit link between the policy implementation and its impact on professional learning, expressing hope that in the long term SGO results will help identify areas, in which professional learning may be needed. The district-level administrator summarized this trend: *“I think the SGOs definitely are informing professional development. I know last year, the teachers that I worked with requested to attend certain workshops based on the goals of their SGO”*.

Overall, administrators acknowledged the potential of the SGO policy to drive instructional change by adding a level of pressure on teachers to ensure students perform well on assessments. Although all three administrators acknowledged the increased pressure on teachers, they chose to focus on the importance of supporting student learning and the level of accountability attached to the SGO policy. The understanding of the potential of the SGOs to improve learning and instruction showed at least some level of functional understanding of the purpose of the policy.

In contrast, the policy was understood differently from the teachers' perspective, because their goals differed from those of the administrators, and most notably from the principal's goals. Teachers saw the SGOs as an additional measure adding to their teaching effectiveness score. They perceived the SGOs as a teaching performance evaluation tool, and as such it had a potential to be misused for employment purposes, detached from students' actual learning gains, or from supporting professional learning.

In their view, a tool that was designed to provide an evaluation rating used for merit-based employment decisions had a lot of risk associated with it to be used fairly and objectively. Speaking about the purpose of the policy, as it pertains to evaluation of the quality of his teaching performance, one of the two ESL teachers in the sample – Orlando shared:

*I had to make sure that I kept my job and so I looked at how the SGOs were going to be assessed, again which was provided for by the district, and in light of that I developed my lesson plan to ensure that the students would be more effective writers according to the standards to the rubric. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 3)*

The idea that the SGO provided an opportunity for teachers to showcase aspects of their teaching in order for performance review was echoed by the English monolingual teacher - Ellen. She spoke about the SGOs in terms of simply collecting data to “look good”:

*With the data, I get to show that . . . to me it's just smoke and mirrors, just put something in a binder and make it look good. (Ellen, English monolingual teacher, Interview Round 1)*

Concurrently, teachers understood and acknowledged the potential of the policy to support low achieving students but thought that this potential was compromised by its high-stakes purpose. Teachers saw the policy as being misused by both teachers and administrators, and spoke directly about the gap between its official branding as a tool

intended to help focus instruction by revealing areas of students' learning need, and its actual use as a superficial measure of learning growth.

*The purpose of the SGOs is to set a goal for a specific number of students in your class for what those students are going to learn. Monitor it through the year and then determine the final outcome to see whether they've learned it. Through this process to modify your teaching so in fact they can learn it. That is the stated goal. In the most positive of words I believe that is a goal. A secondary goal however, I think from a political standpoint at the state level, is more like a punishment or a way to make sure teachers are really doing something valuable.*  
(Sandy, ESL teacher, Interview Round 1)

The perception of the dual purpose of the policy is also described by the other ESL teacher. He spoke about it in terms of the conflict it presents between the effort to provide a quality learning environment for the students, and the effort to ensure students' high performance on the SGO assessment.

*It depends on the personal philosophy of that teacher. I'm someone who is willing to throw away the rulebook and veer off the curriculum and SGO in order to improve my students if I feel we should step back and focus on what I think the students really need. At the same time, that conflicts with the whole purpose of the teacher accountability and the new policy surrounding that which demands such a narrow focus. And of course, I have a family, I have to be employed, and have to put food on the table so I will be compliant in that sense. It's kind of a*

*tightrope; and the lines get blurred sometimes because you want a job and you need a job and you want to do what's best for your students. Sometimes they correlate and sometimes they conflict. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 3)*

In the same vein, the other ESL teacher addressed the punitive purpose of the policy, and the fact that because it is implemented at the school-level, closely supervised by the school-level administration, it presents a way to justify employment decisions.

*I think the materials they [NJDOE] have tried to provide, have tried to make it clear. It's still very much a school-based initiative. The evaluation of whether or not you made your SGO, acceptance of whether or not your rubric and process is sufficiently rigorous is still school-based. . . I feel it is punitive. Laced with punitive language and a way to catch us out. (Sandy, ESL teacher, Interview Round 1)*

One of the two bilingual teachers – Nina also addressed her perception of the implementation of the policy as a way to comply with professional requirements. Her understanding of the purpose of the policy, similar to the other teachers, was based on the pressure to show compliance with a new initiative, and because of the overwhelming emphasis on the high-stakes it is associated with, in her view completely excluded the focus on improving student learning:

*I think of it as compliance with authority. Right now, sadly, that's how it feels. I would say most of the teachers are feeling they are just compliant. Especially the first year; maybe it will change, but right now nobody's thinking about how it's*

*helping kids, there's nothing positive about it. It's just something else a teacher needs to do and teachers are very resistant to things like that. We're a difficult population, we like to complain a lot and so whenever teachers are told to collect more data or assess or whatever, it's always resisted; like, now I have to do something else. You don't look at it as a chance to improve the quality of my instruction. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 3)*

The idea that because of the high stakes of the policy and its effect on teachers' professional performance, another teacher questioned the officially stated purpose of the SGOs to raise student achievement:

*Whenever you have something that is mandated from the state it just changes everything. It becomes something you feel you have to do and after being in education for so many years, unfortunately what tends to happen is, at least for me, is to become annoyed when you have so many different things that you are supposed to find out and then next year you find out it is no longer in existence. I think what is different with the SGOs is trusting whether or not this is going to be a valid form of assessing our students. Are we going through all these motions and what are we doing it for? Are we really doing it for the kids? That's what we are supposed to be doing it for but it seems like another thing we have to do for the administration as opposed to our own personal goals for our children. My regular instructional objectives are more personal and they come from just learning to know your kids. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 1)*



**Stakeholders' perceptions summary.** The presented evidence supports the claim that on the whole, teachers perceived the purpose of the policy quite differently from administrators. The fact that students' performance on the SGOs was bearing weight in the teachers' end of year evaluations, and consequently played a role in their professional performance assessments, almost completely dominated teachers' understanding of the policy. They felt threatened by the SGOs, and approached implementation with the goal of using the measure to showcase teaching quality and ensure they produce high SGO assessment scores. Each one of the interviewed teachers spoke on multiple occasions about the purpose of the policy in terms of compliance with mandated requirements, and while administrators saw it more as an accountability measure, both ensuring teachers' focus on students' achievement while also providing a tool to track and measure said achievement, they also acknowledged that teachers see the policy as a threatening requirement affecting their evaluations. Further, the administrators saw SGOs as a tool to improve students' overall performance and motivate teachers to work toward this goal, as the SGO was not only a measure of student learning, but also a measure of teaching quality. Although administrators spoke openly about SGOs' connection to accountability, they all focused on the potential for supporting student achievement, rather than emphasizing the use of SGOs as a punitive measure for teachers.

The perceptions of the purpose of the policy played an important role in the types of activities stakeholders engaged in, and the types of changes to practice they considered. As they failed to see the purpose of the policy in terms of improving instruction and learning, it made sense for the teachers to consider only surface-level (i.e.,

form-focused) changes to practice, which would cover the issues of compliance. The administrators acknowledged the potential of the policy to support improved instruction and provided evidence of some rudimentary function-based understanding.

### **Selection and Interpretation of SGO Learning Targets and Assessments**

The development of SGOs consists of several components, most notably the selection and interpretation of assessments. Teachers, in collaboration with peers and supervisors select appropriate assessments to measure and track student learning gains. Assessment selection occurs at the beginning of the school year, as teachers must establish a knowledge and skills baseline for their students and based on them, set ambitious yet achievable learning targets. Assessments are then used to track learning gains after instruction, and determine progress towards the selected learning target. In this sense, selection of assessments is a crucial part of the process, and consideration of various commercially available assessments, teacher-developed tests, or state-generated assessments must lead to identification of assessments which allow for making valid inferences about a teacher's ability to contribute to students' achievement along selected learning targets. As both selection of learning targets and assessments to measure gain toward them are complementary, in this section I present evidence for the implementation of both, beginning by describing the teachers' and administrators' perceptions regarding selection of learning targets, and then moving to describe the evidence of the issues regarding the implementation of the assessment administration, scoring, and data interpretation.

**Selection of Learning Targets.** The selection of learning targets was an important milestone that defined some of the groundwork of the implementation process. The focus on literacy learning targets was supposed to help teachers define goals for their students in both reading and writing. With the exception of Nina, who teaches only math (and science and was therefore set to select learning targets in math), the rest of the third grade teachers were asked to develop SGOs based on specific learning goals in ELA for their students. The teachers were supposed to look up an appropriate grade-level standard in either reading or writing, translate the standard into an achievable literacy skill, and then select an assessment that appropriately measures progress along this skill. This section describes how the stakeholders developed their understanding of the importance of selecting learning targets, and presents evidence of the main issues for both groups of IAs, such as perception of control over selected learning targets, appropriateness with respect to supporting both student learning and provision of meaningful evidence of teaching effectiveness.

As with other components of the SGO implementation, the selection of literacy learning targets highlighted the diverging goals of the principal and the teachers. As the goal of Neal, the principal, was to ensure higher performance scores on the state's standardized assessment, the SGOs' learning targets provided him the means to focus the instructional focus in the entire school on literacy learning targets. To him this was a unique opportunity to bring forth the impetus for an overall improved ELA instruction.

*We get data based on the summary data of the NJASK. We get some data from what they have experienced in the classroom. The process has been a bit loosey-*

*goosey where there hasn't been a connective-ness across grade levels. Even though we have our curricular maps, there has always been some loopholes in some areas where the students have been dropping out. So this process at least has started the conversation and there is accountability between teacher and teacher. So when the receiving teacher gets the information and it is used appropriately, it eliminates a lot of the steps where they know exactly where the students are academically, their strengths and challenges. It raises a sense of urgency of connective-ness in this accountability between the teachers, and the administration, and the school. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

The principal was very open about his intention to use the SGO mandate to bring “the right amount of pressure” (Interview Round 2) on teachers to focus on a broad area of instruction where he felt the students are struggling. The new policy in his view presented a mechanism to ensure that teachers are meeting the needs of the students, and although he emphasized the accountability aspect of it, he also acknowledged that teachers’ perception differs in that they see more of the summative purpose of the policy. Teachers’ perception of their students’ performance direct connection to their evaluation rating contributes to a lack of trust in the policy:

*The biggest challenge was again the roll-out. Why is the state doing this; why does this factor in, there was a big concern. It looks like the state's changing everything; it was more of the teachers having mistrust with the state than anything else. Not seeing it as something where we want accountability . . . are we doing what we need to do to help the students learn, if not, are we going back,*

*are we reflecting and doing professional development, are we taking the step above. It was more than anything else, convincing of why this, why that, from the teachers. . . That was basically it, a little mistrust with the state by some teachers - that was the biggest roll out, the biggest challenge. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 3)*

Indeed, the teachers' perception of the policy as an evaluation tool shaped their attitude toward selection of learning targets. The process of selection of learning targets was described by the teacher respondents in terms of their perceived control over the choice of learning targets, and some of the teacher respondents developed a sense of negativity because of the perceived lack of choice in selecting SGOs for their students. The English monolingual teacher spoke broadly about the notion of student growth and the fairness of only focusing on an area of learning where students are historically underperforming:

*We were told with the SGO that in the past the students did very well in math at [name of school], so you can't use mathematics as part of your SGO, we want to focus on literacy. So they wanted to do reading and writing and I just found that to determine the student's growth on just reading and writing was difficult for me because I might have students that are really good in math. (Ellen, English monolingual teacher, Interview Round 1)*

Addressing the same lack of choice in selection of learning targets, one of the ESL teachers, who was encouraged to select learning targets in writing, spoke about how

this decision (to focus on a narrow aspect of instruction in ELA) affected his students' learning outcomes:

*Their parents will be happy, they'll have higher scores in standardized tests, the school will be happy, but, are the students going to be better off because I've essentially made myself into a writing teacher or I can't say I made myself - it was kind of thrust upon me. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 3)*

The lack of control over selection of learning targets was related to the lack of the teachers' buy-in. The sense was that teachers were given a teaching focus through a top-down selection of a learning target, which was detrimental to their perception of control over the learning goals for their students. Teachers complained that they were asked to implement a high-stakes policy, about which they were provided insufficient information and training on the policy requirements. All teacher respondents spoke about the frustration of having limited information, and even Neal admitted that teachers have "come up with a lot of great questions and we do not necessarily have the answers". The teachers' sense of having insufficient information and expertise on a mandate that affected directly their teaching evaluation added to the lack control over selection of SGOs, and by extension of buy-in the SGO implementation. One teacher, who felt that the administrators had all of the control over relevant information about implementation and choice of SGOs, pointed these limitations as a hindering factor in teacher buy-in:

*I don't think there's a strong sense of buy-in from anywhere or anyone at any level. That's a big piece to be missing. I don't think anyone has really bought in*

*because we're being told different things and put in different directions and it's happening now, all at once. (Amanda, bilingual ELA teacher, Interview Round 1)*

Elaborating on the lack of buy-in, this teacher also spoke about the presentation of information to the teachers and the fact that confusing or contradictory information given at faculty meetings and other professional learning opportunities alienated teachers, rather than supported their enthusiasm for implementing a new policy.

*I don't think it has to be this complicated. We know what the goal is but the presentation and expectations are contradictory and confusing. How are we supposed to get on board?" (Amanda, bilingual ELA teacher, Interview Round 1)*

In fact, the lack of clear directions and clear response to teachers' questions and inquiries regarding implementation, in addition to the lack of choice in the actual selection of SGOs, was seen by teachers as a major pitfall of the implementation process. The same teacher described how the lack of understanding of how the policy would affect student learning had a negative impact on buy-in:

*You see their assessments, you see them and give them post-assessments but with the SGOs because it was something that just felt forced, and since it wasn't clear so many people didn't have answers to the questions early on that we all had it made the process very confusing. (Amanda, bilingual ELA teacher, Interview Round 1)*

***Selection of learning targets summary.*** The presented evidence in this section supports the claim that the process of selection of learning targets reflected the diverging

goals of the teachers and the administrators. In part, this process further alienated teachers, as they felt that the decisions were made without their contribution and this undermined their buy-in into the officially stated purpose of the policy to support student learning. Teachers felt that this was a mechanism to find fault with their teaching and use an unfair measure of teaching effectiveness to evaluate their professional performance. This aspect of the implementation process played an important role in developing and using SGOs, and it caused a deep rift between the goals of the teachers and those of the administrators.

Despite the similar language with which teachers and administrators talked about learning targets (i.e., “rigorous, yet achievable”), which mirrored the language from the SGO guidebook (NJDOE, 2012), teachers focused on “achievable” versus the administrators who emphasized the need to targets to also be “rigorous”. Administrators, who focused on the importance of improved student performance, seized the opportunity to bring instructional focus to a historically known academic weakness in the school – language arts. However, for the teachers, who wanted to make sure that they could produce high SGO assessment scores, the lack of control over the selection of learning targets for their own students felt unfair. The presented evidence from both teachers' and administrators' interviews illustrates teachers' and administrators' attitudes. The excerpts from the research participants' interviews highlight the pressures of the implementation and the resulting imbalance between form- and function-focused changes to practice.

In terms of the actual changes, the lack of buy-in to the officially stated purpose of the policy resulted in teachers developing a compliance-only attitude toward the



implementation of the SGOs. This attitude promoted form-focused understanding of what needs to be done so at least on the surface it resembles the types of changes called for in the policy. For the administrators, who were interested in students' improved performance on the state test, the selection of learning targets in ELA provided evidence for some level of function-focused understanding of the policy, which supported improved instructional practice, through ongoing assessment of student ability to help target instruction.

**SGO Assessments.** The selection of appropriate assessments to set learning baselines and measure learning gains is an important aspect of the SGO process, aligning selection of learning targets to tools to track change measures. Assessments also play an important role in identifying relevant sources of evidence of learning, and using it for instructional planning purposes. For the most part, research participants provided factual information about the selected assessments, and the process through which they administered them, including procedures for scoring. However, after addressing the factual information, many of the participants expressed concerns about both the quality of the actual assessments, the low expectation for growth, and the procedures through which assessments were scored. This section offers detailed accounts of how teachers and administrators spoke about assessment selection and procedures, and how they perceived the larger implications of these issues.

***Types of assessments.*** The selection of assessments was important in the process of developing SGOs, because the actual assessments provided scales which often helped determine how learning goals were identified, as many educators worked the challenges

of the process backwards and found it easier to select learning targets, based on the scales of the assessments that would be used to measure them. To streamline the process, teachers thought of the SGOs in terms of a learning gain, a measure of change from the beginning of the school year to the end. For many of them, it made sense to operationalize the SGO as a progress of one or more level(s) on a regularly used assessment (e.g. Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) levels for reading, or a level in the 6-point WIDA writing rubric – 1. Entering, 2. Beginning, 3. Developing, 4. Expanding, 5. Bridging, 6. Reaching). To better understand the role of assessments in the process of developing of SGOs, the different types of assessments used for measuring SGO growth are described below. This is important because for most of the teachers the specific assessment and its scoring process provided the basis of the SGO implementation process.

*Reading.* In the case of reading, which teachers were encouraged to select as one of the two areas in which to develop student growth objectives, teachers took a straightforward approach to developing SGOs. Instead of going through the process of unpacking standards for learning growth in reading in third grade, teachers decided to use the DRA assessment, said to be aligned to the CCSS. Based on their experience with the assessment, which they use annually to track reading progress of the students in the school, teachers estimated that students will on average grow about one or two DRA levels during the entire third grade. Based on this estimate, they developed a straightforward SGO in reading, which they felt confident implementing, as they framed it in terms of growth on an assessment they had prior experience with.

Administration of the DRAs was completed during regular instructional time by the teacher who developed the SGOs for her students. Administration and scoring of DRAs was left to the best ability of the teacher to conduct and score the test, without external checks or review. This was one of the frequently addressed concerns of the teachers, who addressed discrepancies in DRA scoring and shared that they had not received formal training on DRA administration. Teachers learned to administer the assessment by observing other teachers and reading the scoring criteria, which some of them said was pretty straightforward and easy to understand.

*Writing.* In the case of writing, teachers also took a straightforward approach to selecting student growth objectives. Teachers decided on having students complete an essay, based on a writing prompt for both a baseline assessment and a follow up post assessment. Growth was measured by using student progress along either the WIDA writing rubric or the New Jersey NJ Holistic Writing Rubric. Similar to the SGOs in reading, both these rubrics have been used by the teachers in previous years, prior to the implementation of the SGOs, and teachers felt relatively confident using these measures of student learning.

As in the case of the DRA assessment, writing prompts were given to students during regular class time, and the essays were scored by teachers. Administration of the assessments was left to the discretion of the teachers and the actual scoring of the essays did not go under external review. Teachers were trusted to score essays fairly and to the best of their ability, by applying the criteria of both the WIDA rubric and the NJ holistic rubric. Interestingly, many of the interviewed teachers questioned the quality and

consistency of the assessment scoring process, as the majority of them admitted limited or no formal training on either the WIDA assessment kit or the NJ Holistic Writing Rubric.

*Math.* The only teacher who selected a math SGO was Nina, as she did not teach reading or writing. In her case, SGOs were also selected around a specific math assessment rather than resorting to interpretation and unpacking of mathematics standards for third grade. The assessment selected by the teacher was in fact a district-developed math assessment. In order to measure growth, the same assessment (with changed digits) was used as a post-assessment at the end of the school year. Nina administered this assessment by herself during regular instructional time. She collected the completed assessments and scored them herself. Her scoring did not undergo external review or checking of the students' result.

For clarity, Table 8 provides a summary of the participating teachers' SGOs with corresponding assessments. It is noteworthy that some of the teachers (the two dual language teachers and the English monolingual teacher) had SGOs in both reading and writing, unlike the rest of the teachers whose SGOs were in a single discipline. All seven of the teachers had two SGOs, as per the implementation requirements.

Table 8 –

*Types of SGOs and Respective Assessments*

Teacher	Number & Type of SGOs	Selected Assessment
Orlando	Two SGOs in writing	WIDA Writing Prompt
Adriana	One SGO in reading, one SGO in writing	DRAs in Spanish, Writing Prompt
Amanda	Two SGOs in reading	DRAs
Nina	Two SGOs in math	District Math Assessment
Tanisha	One SGO in reading, one SGO in writing	DRAs, Writing Prompt
Sandy	Two SGOs in writing	WIDA Writing Prompt
Ellen	One SGO in reading, one SGO in writing	DRAs and Writing Prompt

**Assessment selection.** The process of assessment selection, much like the selection of learning targets, was defined by the stakeholders’ goals. Interestingly, the selection of SGO assessments may have been one of the few aspects of the implementation process, which although driven by different motives, the teachers and the administrators approached similarly. Based on the goal to improve students’ overall performance in literacy, Neal encouraged the use of quality assessments that would mimic the tasks on the state’s standardized assessment. To this end, the use of standardized and already available assessments (i.e., WIDA, DRA), in conjunction with widely used rubrics (i.e., NJ Holistic Writing Rubric) ensured that learning criteria, similar to the state’s standardized test is being used to monitor learning gains. For the teachers, based on their goal to show that all students performed well on the SGO assessment, it made sense to select assessments they were familiar with, knew how to administer and score, and had to do anyway.

For both the administrators in the school and several of the teachers “not reinventing the wheel” was an often used phrase for selecting the DRA assessments for

all of the reading SGOs including the Spanish version of the DRA for the Spanish portion of the dual language program, and a writing prompt in conjunction with the NJ Holistic Writing Rubric for the writing SGOs. The ESL teachers used the writing prompts from the WIDA assessment, and the bilingual teacher used a district-developed math assessment. The DRA assessment was individually administered and scored by the teachers, as was the scoring of the essays based on the writing prompts. For the math assessment, the teacher used an assessment that was available in the district. The same assessment with changed digits was used both for the pre- and the post-assessment, and the teacher administered and scored the assessment by herself.

Both ESL teachers indicated that the WIDA model was chosen and brought in by the district and was made available to teachers to use for the pre- and post- writing assessment. Similar to the expressed concern about the lack of choice with respect to the selection of learning goals, teachers were concerned about the lack of choice in the selection of assessments. They did address the lack of control over choice of assessment. For example, both ESL teachers shared that, for the ESL students, the district has selected the WIDA assessment to be used district-wide. Speaking about this selection of assessment, Orlando said:

*It was provided for by the district. So the district central ESL or Language Office decided that we were going to buy into the WIDA SGO package. So it is pre-packaged - pre and posttest for the SGO so we simply bought into that and it was made available to us. Whether we had the freedom to move away from that and develop our own SGOs? I think we could have . . . but I think being that the*

*district bought into it, it was expected that we just use the district-approved.*

*(Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 1)*

Echoing some of the same sentiment, the English teacher in the dual language program, Tanisha, spoke about the inadequacy of using the standardized assessment for the purposes of the SGO for the EL population she is teaching:

*Many of the assessments that we were encouraged to use, because they were branded as valid assessments are too rigorous, and are not necessarily developmentally appropriate for our children. Yes, they have expected reading levels for third grade, but the language development of many of our EL students is not comparable to the average third grade language development. Some of the language skills that are natural for a native English speaker in third grade are extremely difficult for a Spanish speaking child, who may not acquire this particular skill until much later. The math assessments are different, and may be more appropriate, but the assessments of the reading level were inadequate for my students. We always talk about testing them where they are at, but in reality they may not be at third grade level for some of the skills, and at grade level for the others. The assessments are not sensitive to these variations. (Tanisha, dual language - English teacher, Interview Round 3)*

In her statement, the gap between her goal as a teacher (as it relates to supporting students to achieve an attainable learning objective) and the goal of the principal to use rigorous assessment criteria to support teaching to the standardized test is evident.

Interestingly, the principal's take on the issue of control over the selection of assessment is strikingly different. In his opinion, teachers were heavily involved in the selection process:

*One of the instruments that we used, that the teachers have familiarity with, is the DRA. So most teachers, based on the prior experience knowing the DRA, chose it for their English Language SGO assessment. Most of the selection process of the SGOs was based from contribution of the teachers. Nothing was mandated from the school-based leadership as a determining factor for one assessment or another. You have a pre-assessment, midway and final so it was a natural fit to have something as the DRA be their SGO assessment. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

However, the administrators' goals with respect to SGOs assessment, and its purpose in supporting teaching to the standardized yearly assessment is shown in the vice-principal Ashonda's quote:

*Well, considering we're now taking a look at SGOs and the results of SGOs for the first time this year and how it's going to impact standardized testing, I would like to believe it's going to be positive results yielding from the SGO process. I think because the teachers have been able to provide more saturation in strategy and structured support, I think the students will feel more confident going in because of the time they've been able to spend on different areas because of the Common Core. (Ashonda, vice-principal, Interview Round 1)*



Obviously, Ashonda is ultimately concerned with the ability of the students to perform well on the state's test. Interestingly she also talks about instructional alignment with the CCSS as a factor directly related to supporting standardized assessment performance. This is an important aspect of the difference between the teachers' and administrators' understanding of the connection between the CCSS and the SGOs. For example, Alexa, the district-level supervisor gave a brief account of the integration:

*At first, professional development –I've noticed this coming year focused on PARCC, district-wide, professional development because that will be a new thing for us. The thing about PARCC if they're teaching from the standard and selecting standards as part of their SGO goals, it should all tie together. It shouldn't be PARCC is here, Common Core standards are here, SGOs are here; it shouldn't be segmented like that because one definitely supports the other. It's intertwined as far as being connected. (Alexa, district supervisor, Interview Round 3)*

This quote exemplifies the administrators' understanding of the integration of the CCSS and the SGOs as complementary initiatives. This was in contrast to teachers who saw the implementation of the SGOs as an additional and disconnect initiative. One of the teachers, Adriana, expressed her understanding of the CCSS implementation as completely separate from the SGOs:

*I think it was just enough with introducing the Common Core and suddenly there is this other thing and not a lot of information. The teachers, as a community, has*

*not had the training on the Common Core and then we're doing a new thing called SGOs. (Adriana, dual language - Spanish teacher, Interview Round 1)*

The same misunderstanding of the connection between CCSS and SGOs was evident in another teacher - Ellen's understanding of the CCSS, which was in contrast to her impression of the SGOs. She approved of and "loved the CCSS", unlike the SGOs, which she spoke about as a distinctly separate initiative. These examples show how teachers do not make a direct connection between both initiatives (CCSS and SGOs), and show the extent to which teacher's understanding of these connections differed from the administrators'.

In summary, the process of assessment selection was defined by the diverging goals of the stakeholders. Teachers saw assessment selection as a top-down process to which they made little contribution. Although they acknowledged that using familiar assessments with which they had experience was a positive aspect of the SGO assessment implementation, they also addressed the fairness of having to use measures of student growth which they had not independently selected. In this respect they felt forced to teach to the SGO assessment, just as they do with preparing students for the summative state assessments.

The selection of SGO assessments was one of the aspects of the SGO development process marked by a straightforward form-focused approach to implementation. Rather than thinking about the process in terms of customized learning assessments that would capture specific needs of the students and use the assessment data

to plan and prepare targeted and differentiated instruction to students, both teachers and administrators were on board (however for different reasons) to use already adopted assessment practices (i.e., DRA, WIDA, district math assessment, etc.) and just brand them as SGO assessments.

***Expectations for growth.*** An important issue was the latitude given to the teachers to choose the expected amount of student growth for their SGOs. While using various assessments for measuring selected learning targets, based on the level of proficiency of the students, teachers often selected the least possible assessment increment to estimate yearly growth. This means that SGOs were formulated in terms of expected growth in terms of percentages of students who would undergo a change of one or two assessment levels (i.e., “80% of the students will grow a single level on the DRA assessment and 20% will grow two levels on the same assessment”), and not in terms of the specific levels of achievement. This approach allowed to accommodate varying levels of proficiency within the same grade level and even within the same class, highlighting the amount of learning growth versus reaching a certain level of proficiency which may or may not be realistic for particular groups of students (e.g., ELs).

This issue of selecting very modest growth targets was addressed at length by the district-level administrator. What she meant by this was that teachers using the same assessments were able to select and articulate different growth targets for their students. For example, some of the teachers estimated that the majority of their students would only grow a single level on the DRA assessment, while other teachers estimated that students would grow two or more levels on the same assessment. In many respects, this

aspect of the SGO implementation process seemed the most surface-level decision made by the educators. On the surface it looked appropriate to select a single level of growth on a standardized assessment and the action seemed in compliance with the SGO requirements. However, it also shows the teachers' mistrust with the SGO mandate and the fact that they did not feel safe selecting more than minimal growth expectation for their students.

Speaking about the issue of teachers selecting low growth targets, the district-level administrator spoke about the different levels of rigor for the SGOs and how these levels of rigor might affect the implementation process. Although she addressed the fairness of the use of student measures for evaluating the teachers, she was also concerned about how the variability in the teachers' SGO-formulated expectations affect students' learning:

*I do have a little concern with the SGOs as far as whether some assessments are more valid than other assessments. Each teacher selects their own measure, and I have a little problem with that because you can have two teachers working in the same field, but one's SGO is a little more rigorous because she has higher expectations for her students growth, where the other may just say my students will come up two levels and the other teacher would say my students will come up three levels in reading and at the end of the year, teachers are scored on the student's growth, whether they have met those measures or not. So, teacher A, because she only picked two levels might have met the measure and scored*

*effectively and teacher B who had a really rigorous measure of student growth might not score as well. (District-level administrator)*

Speaking of the same issue, the principal of the school, similar to the district-level administrator, was also ultimately concerned about how the rigor of the SGO projection compares to the actual learning needs of the students:

*There was a concern where teachers wanted to make sure they were meeting their SGO, because based on the conversation, it's going to impact a lot. That was a concern at the beginning of the year but as the year progressed, all that went away. The concern of being able to do it wasn't a major obstacle, but in the years to come, it's going to be a concern. Most of the General Ed population, former ELs, will be the majority in General Ed population, especially at our school where again, for example, we have 500 students; 250 are ELs and 250 are former ELs. No matter where you are – the bi-lingual or general situation – you have a large number of ELs and former ELs so how best to instruct and support those ELs? You're going to have to make a conscious effort when developing your SGO, keeping your rigor in your assessment high, but keeping your percentage reasonable so that everyone is meeting the expectation. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 3)*

Being familiar with the assessment instrument, and understanding the process of estimating how much students would be able to grow in terms of DRA levels or categories on a writing rubric allowed the teachers to select “safe” and achievable SGOs.

For teachers, having the security to work with a familiar assessment and teach to an estimated minimal growth projection, as measured by it, virtually eliminated the possibility of students' failing to achieve the SGO. This view is well captured in Orlando's quote:

*I'm pretty confident that I can get the great majority of my students to move up a level. But is it a fair assessment? I would say no. . . . Because it is just a little slice of a bigger pie. It is making me focus my instruction on that one small piece of the pie. What should be a smaller piece is actually dominating the plate because it is going to reflect on me as far as my evaluation as a teacher and those students at the same time. As far as NJ ASK or the PARCC assessment, which is heavy on the writing as well as reading, we're sort of teaching to the test. That's how I feel. If standardized testing wasn't enough, SGOs are forcing us to teach to the test more than before. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 1)*

For this teacher, the entire instructional process was flawed because of the high stakes attached to the SGO process. Not only does he get to select minimal SGO estimates for his students, but his entire instruction is focused on this projection just to ensure he will be able to show that his students have grown as much as he had estimated. He felt that the process was unfair to the students, but from his perspective he was left with little choice in his approach to instruction. In this aspect of the SGO implementation process, the form-focused approach is also evident.

The teachers, who felt the pressure of making sure all of their students reach the estimated yearly growth, did not engage in genuine cycle of assessment and calibration of instruction based on students' learning needs. Rather, they completed the SGO documentation and conducted the selected assessments simply to cover the minimum requirements for the process, while ensuring compliance marks were met. The motivation for selecting minimal projection of learning growth by the teachers was tied directly to their SGO implementation goals, and it made sense to ensure they select achievable goals, ultimately helping their performance ratings.

The administrators acknowledged that the SGO's purpose should ultimately be about improved learning opportunities, showing at least some level of function-focused understanding of the policy. However, they also spoke about the pressures experienced by the teachers and focused on issues of the SGO validity as a measure of quality instruction. For the administrators, modest growth estimates meant that even if the SGOs are achieved, the students would have shown minimal learning growth, thus defeating the purpose of the SGO. The district-level administrator questioned the validity of the SGOs as a measure of teaching effectiveness. On one hand it seemed to her that teachers who picked more rigorous objectives and expected larger growth for their students had harder time achieving the SGO, but on the other hand these teachers had higher estimates for their students' learning gains and were willing to invest more time and effort teaching to support their students' estimated growth.

***Integrity of assessment administration and scoring.*** The issues around assessment administration and scoring was addressed by both the teachers and the

administrators. The integrity of assessment administration, as well as the scoring of the assessments were important to all of the interviewed educators, as it related directly to issues of fairness of the policy implementation. This was true for both teachers and administrators as the assessments played such a central role in measuring fairly the learning growth of students. While for both groups of IAs the consistency of assessment administration and objectivity of scoring was important, their concerns were based on entirely different interpretations.

Following the discussion of the lack of a systematic approach to creating uniformly rigorous SGO estimates, the district-level administrator addressed the issue around potential manipulation by the teachers of student measures that contribute to the overall SGO score with the intention to obtain a higher evaluation rating. This possibility was concerning to her because of its potential to hurt educational opportunities for struggling students:

*I worry about the validity of the SGOs, teachers could manipulate it to their advantage, especially if it's not a state assessment they could manipulate that. I have a teacher who is a supplemental teacher and I'm responsible for the supplemental teachers; there's one in each school. Right now hypothetically, say she has 20 students; she's trying to tell me that 5 of her students have a learning disability and they shouldn't count as part of her SGOs. That really concerns me that teachers are going to be over-classifying students, so the students who are really struggling in their class would no longer be part of their SGOs, they would*



*be referred to Special Ed or some other thing. (Alexa, district supervisor, Interview Round 1)*

Although the issue of validity and consistency of SGO measures concerned the administrator with regard to the potential of the SGOs to systematically and uniformly (across the district) prepare students and boost their overall literacy performance, the same issues of validity and consistency came up in teachers' interviews with regard to the fairness of the SGOs as a measure of teaching effectiveness. When asked about the consistency of assessment scoring, Neal indicated that "it was more or less consistent", but admitted some discrepancies with the writing assessments and scoring, in addition to familiarity with the DRA:

*We had some teachers that were not familiar with the process of scoring with the DRA so that also raised a couple of eyebrows, but in general, the consistency of the DRA was more consistent, but with teacher-made assessment, that's where we had some difficulties with seeing the same consistency across the grade level. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 3)*

Teachers spoke more openly about the lack of training on assessment administration and scoring, and addressed the variation among their colleagues. Speaking about the received training on assessment administration and scoring (or lack thereof), Orlando said:

*It's arbitrary to a certain extent, there was no formal training... Here's the WIDA kit – good luck. And that was it. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 2)*

Speaking about whether he was trained on administration and scoring of the DRAs, the same teacher described his experience with the process:

*Very informally. It's kind of hands-on, from colleague to colleague, asking for help and sitting next to someone who will show you how to grade the DRA, but there's no training center that classroom teachers go to for help with the DRA. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 2)*

Other teachers described the discrepancies among teachers in scoring DRA assessments. Speaking about specific cases of discrepancies in DRA administration and scoring, the English monolingual teacher shared her concern about teachers (in this case the school's reading specialist) applying the scoring criteria arbitrarily:

*The DRAs I administer myself, and again, I saw a little bit of a discrepancy because some students went to a reading specialist, so for example, the other day the reading specialist came upstairs and she had [student name]'s DRA. I had tested [student name] myself and I gave him a score of 28 on the DRA and when she gave me hers, it was a 34. I looked at her and . . . I asked why she gave him that. She said he did read a little slow, but he was able to read the text but it took him a while, and I said well to administer the DRAs you have to be able to read a certain paragraph in a certain amount of time and do the report later. I said you gave him too much time; you have to do it in a two-minute period. She prompted him a lot and with the DRA you're not supposed to prompt a child. I saw a big discrepancy between what she gave him and what I gave him. So, I'm not too*

*sure if the DRA is a good assessment to use because right there, that proves to me that one teacher scored it one way and I scored it another way. So I'm not sure that's a good assessment to use for the SGO. (Ellen, English monolingual teacher, Interview Round 2)*

Addressing the same issue of arbitrary application of DRA scoring criteria, Adriana shared the following:

*For example, I've done DRAs in English for certain kids, that's with the whole referral process to the child study team and it differs way too much. I can assess a student at an 18 and she [the reading specialist] can say that the child is approaching level 30. It's a huge difference. That shouldn't happen. (Adriana, dual language - Spanish teacher, Interview Round 2)*

The issue of fair and consistent application of learning criteria to score students' written work was addressed by Sandy who spoke about applying the New Jersey Holistic Rubric to grade assessments for the writing SGO:

*There are guidelines and examples and then you compare what the kids did, where did they fall within the examples. Was it closer to this one or that one? Maybe two out of the three categories are closer to a one, but they're showing that they're closer to a two in that third category, so then you can mark them up from that. So yes, you have to work at it. It's a lot of individual work to make sure you are using the scoring information correctly; it's not cut and dry. (Sandy, ESL teacher, Interview Round 2)*

While the discrepancies in scoring of assessments might be discussed in terms of the teachers' experience and expertise in dealing with accommodating ELs (e.g., consideration of allowing for additional assessment time, prompts, etc.), the inconsistencies in scoring of assessments (the results of which are ultimately used for teacher evaluation purposes) show problems with the teachers' perceptions of having adequate training in assessment administration and scoring, and ultimately about the validity of the assessment data. And since the data was to be used for teacher evaluation purposes, collaboration on assessment scoring, or even sharing of assessment data among teachers or between teachers and administrators became a touchy issue, ultimately undermining collaborative efforts among IAs.

***External checks and quality control.*** In addition to reliable and consistent application of scoring criteria for both reading and writing assessments, the teachers brought up the issue of control over the student growth scores. Teachers were concerned that because of the high stakes profile of the SGOs, and because of the fact that the scores do not go through an external review, the process ultimately enables teachers to “fix” the growth scores' numbers, if they wish to do so:

*... and the other problem is that it's a teacher-made assessment and I'm giving it and grading it; the way I look at it is if the teacher wants to look good, she can fudge the numbers because no one checked the kids' work. If in school they got a 1 on their essay and if you're worried about your scores and you are being judged on your SGO, if you were dishonest you could fix the numbers up a bit to make it look good. I'm grading the essay also, and I may say it's a 4 where*

*another teacher would say it's a 2. It's based on the teachers and no one else.*  
*(Ellen, English monolingual teacher, Interview Round 1)*

The concern with respect to provision of independent assessment of student growth, measured by the teachers for their own students, was also brought up by other teachers. Orlando described how the lack of independent assessment defeats the purpose of implementing measures of student growth, if these measures are potentially arbitrary and biased:

*. . . who's going to monitor the SGOs? You leave it up to the teachers to monitor their own students' performances, so you're almost guaranteeing that all students are going to meet the SGO performance. They will show the progress that we said they would. That's 100% guaranteed. Who will check that? The administration could try and nit-pick but there's no way they can verify all the teachers.*  
*(Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 2)*

As seen in both quotes, the main concern of these two teachers was the evaluation rating based on the assessments' growth scores. The teachers addressed the lack of built-in checks and balances as an essential flaw in the objectivity in the SGO policy, and by extension to its potential to provide fair and accurate measures of teaching effectiveness.

This same question was addressed also by the district-level ELA supervisor, Alexa, who acknowledged that the lack of external assessment was problematic in terms of fairness of the evaluation aspect, but ultimately she saw this issue as contributing to student performance, as this seemed to be in line with her main understanding of the

purpose of the SGOs as a tool to ensure enhanced student performance on the state's standardized assessment.

*Now, when we talk about validity, going back to it, the teachers really got to choose their own assessment. Different schools, different grades may have selected different assessments. They also had the opportunity to check their own growth with these assessments, so I don't see how that's a fair measure across the district. . . . It's a problem, not for me, if it wasn't tied to their evaluation because they're selecting their own goals, that's great. But when it's tied to an evaluation, what happens to the teacher at Jefferson vs the teacher at Evergreen where one teacher may have selected a more rigorous goal. . . . So I think this year is just a big learning curve for the district. As far as even the NJ ASK is this year and PARCC is next year, how are we measuring that from one year to the next? (Alexa, district supervisor, Interview Round 1)*

When asked about the same process of reviewing the teachers' SGO data, Ashonda described the SGO data review as a process that had to be squeezed in at the end of the school year, and one for which the teachers were responsible for uploading their data. Although some type of review went on, none of the interviewed teachers or the district-level ELA supervisor were aware of:

*The process of debriefing and documenting scores, each teacher was responsible for the initial evaluation of their data to determine scores based on the rubrics that were set from the beginning insofar as effectiveness is concerned. So they*

*were responsible, they were the first line of scoring. In our end of year conversations, there were discussions about the results and there was the data review that took place, briefly, because there were so many end of the year conversations, so many components of conversations that take place, SGOs just became an entirely different bag of tricks to have at the end of the year as well. It did get time-consuming per person, but reviewing the data, the teachers were in a position to upload their proof, so to speak, their documentation or data results of the SGOs. There was an opportunity for them to upload that information in Teachscape and scores were updated in Teachscape by the administration.*

The lack of awareness about the external SGO data review speaks to the superficial character of the process. Because neither the teachers nor the administrators believed that the SGOs have a true potential to improve practice, either in terms of student learning or professional learning, they simply went through the motion of seemingly reviewing the data. However, no deep conversations about interpretation of assessment results and what they mean in terms of next steps ever took place. As for other aspects of the policy implementation, this component of the process shows surface-level, form-focused approach to implementation.

***SGO assessment summary.*** The SGO assessment process was a central issue discussed by interviewees because assessment played a central role in setting up and measuring student growth objectives. Many aspects of the assessment process such as the consistency of expected growth on the same assessment across teachers, as well as the entire process of administration of the assessments, including scoring of student work,

were approached and implemented haphazardly at the school. Teachers rushed to create the SGOs, linking them directly to existing assessment tools they knew were already being used at the school. Many of the teachers went about the process by selecting minimal expected growth for their students, ensuring that the SGOs will be “safely” achieved. The overall perception of the teachers was that because the SGOs were implemented in a rush, confusion and existing tools and procedures were branded to serve a purpose in the SGO implementation with lack of consideration for consistency and systematicity.

For the majority of the teachers the SGOs had a superficial meaning, because these measures did not represent a fair account of teaching effectiveness and were not useful in terms of ensuring student learning growth. Administrators, although acknowledging the potential of the SGOs to bring about change in teaching and assessment, as well as in professional learning and development, were aware of the many of the shortcomings of the implementation process, but more importantly of the burden of the regulatory pressure of the policy and its effect on teacher buy-in. In this respect, the entire assessment aspect of the SGO implementation process bore the stamp of compliance-only implementation, with many surface-level changes and existing practices, that were only re-named and re-branded to provide a cursory response to the SGO policy message.



## **Collaboration efforts**

One of the central principles in the SGOs policy was that the implementation process would be both strengthened by collaborative efforts, and that it would further promote more collaborative conversations about student learning and professional learning, all of which would be grounded in student assessment data. In the official SGOs guidebook (New Jersey Department of Education, 2012) the role of collaborations between teachers and their direct supervisor, as well as among peer-teachers is one of the aspects of the policy suggesting that the collective expertise of the educators would be put to a good use in designing learning experiences for students. As instruction would be based on concrete learning goals and on hard assessment data, educators would be able to collaboratively figure out and plan for addressing existing and emerging learning needs of the students. Ultimately these collaborations would help teachers plan for and deliver meaningful instructional interventions, tied to the specific learning needs of the students. Collaborations would also promote professional learning and thus strengthen educators' professional growth and development.

In this section, accounts of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the opportunities for collaborations are organized to describe both groups' understanding of the purpose of collaborative practices. The section describes in depth the issues of the competing pressures teachers felt, which was a major collaboration hindering factor. The divergence of the teachers' viewpoints from those of the administrators leads back to the motivations of both groups of stakeholders and their understanding of what the purpose of the SGO policy truly was.

**Purpose of collaboration, as seen by teachers and administrators.**

Collaboration was another aspect of the SGO implementation process that was very differently perceived by teachers and administrators. One of the few points on which teachers and administrators seemed to agree was on a form-focused practice, which was introduced as a direct response to the policy message – both teachers and administrators underlined the fact that time for collaboration was made available. Although Neal, the principal, acknowledged that not all teams were as collaborative as others, both he and the vice-principal of the school highlighted the fact that time was allocated to facilitate collaborative work among the teachers and between the teachers and the administrators:

*The teachers had the opportunity to meet during their grade levels and also during their unassigned prep period. There were many times, rather than have a formal staff meeting, when teachers were able to meet by grade level as teams and were able to work on SGOs during grade level meetings which are every other week when they meet with the administrative team and the opposite week, they meet amongst themselves. So every other week they had the opportunity to get together during the school day to meet about preparation of SGOs or just following up on progress and looking at progress indicators . . . Those times were available and [principal's name] and I were always available to them if they just wanted to stop in during their prep or if they wanted to stop by after school we were available to make sure they were on the right path. Some teachers just wanted to read it to see if it sounded right because something wasn't quite*

*buzzing right in their ears so we were always here for them. (Ashonda, vice-principal, Interview Round 1)*

The same issue of time being allocated for collaboration was confirmed by three of the teachers – the two ESL teachers and the monolingual English teacher. Orlando talked about time being made available for teachers to meet, although his specific schedule did not allow him to take advantage of these opportunities. Sandy described the availability of time as follows:

*I think there was sufficient time. There was time available at the staff meetings. The time with [Rutgers training] for our special group was available. The district gave us time to work on SGOs together as ESL in the district. I feel they made an effort to give us that time. In the meetings we had with the principal and the VP. (Sandy, ESL teacher, Interview Round 1)*

However, when asked about how productive the collaborative meetings were, teachers did not find the meetings very helpful in engaging in actual collaborative work. This perception is captured well in the Spanish teacher in the dual language program quote, who talks about what kinds of tasks get accomplished during the meetings:

*To tell you the truth, not much [gets accomplished] because we have so little time to meet that when we're all together in one room, it's not that we're talking about other things but we are catching up and seeing where everyone is and we're talking about "I found this lesson did you try this?" and we are trying to copy from each other about what worked and what didn't. But the task we are*

*supposed to accomplish - sometimes we run out of time and did not finish. Not a lot gets done. (Adriana, dual language - Spanish teacher, Interview Round 1)*

In addition, because collaborative opportunities followed an allocated time through a top-down scheduling, teachers did not always feel comfortable attending and participating. The bilingual math teacher spoke specifically about this issue:

*When we get together it's rare that we're discussing what's going on with our SGOs other than, "Oh my gosh, there's a deadline coming up!" Let me rephrase that - there are times we have grade level meetings that are with the administrator, where he asks us to have what he calls "data chats" and we're supposed to talk about our data and he listens to us. . . . It seems very inauthentic simply because we're in front of the administrator and that wouldn't normally happen if we were just sitting together. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 2)*

Focused on the work done in implementation of SGOs, as it relates to preparing students for state assessments, Neal saw meetings in which student data were discussed as critically important. In addition, because Neal encouraged teachers to actively seek relevant information, he focused on the efforts of the teachers to gain understanding of SGOs' implementation. Therefore, he spoke about numerous opportunities for teachers to meet and work collaboratively. The meetings he described were focused on "review of data", and he stated that "the SGO was a constant topic". Neal described how collaborations and conversations helped as "the teachers were able to discuss and

research it so it was an easier process as the year went by”. The principal also spoke about providing opportunities for the teachers to work collaboratively with administrators:

*Basically what we have done at the school is, giving the opportunity to have time to do the research and have conversations, present some information, sharing.*

*Provide them [the teachers] with examples - how you use your data, how do you know what you're doing is being effective. Keeping it simple to the point that's all we've been talking about - generating conversation on a single talking point.*

*(Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

Ashonda also addressed various tasks that were collaboratively approached by the teachers, such as “*shared evaluation and analysis of writing assignments and writing assessments to kind of make sure they were all in line with how they were looking at their scoring rubrics and again, starting to collaborate on how they are scoring so it doesn't seem random and scoring is aligned with the Common Core*”.

Neal understood his own and Ashonda's role in terms of generating conversations, providing samples and materials, and generally disseminating information. He described meetings with the teachers in which they were able to come to the table with their materials and share their work.

*We have dedicated time via the faculty meetings to have conversations and make presentations of the SGO literature the state has given us. We have made that available. Some have done it on their own and looked for the information. Some*

*has been presented as it was the first time they were seeing it. But they all have to develop the SGO. That has forced them to open up and have conversations. From the faculty meetings it is transferred into the grade level meetings where they sit as grade levels and talk about it and decide what tool they can use. That's where they selected the DRA as the most common assessment that everyone used. For English Language Arts it was a no-brainer of incorporating something they already do because the essence was not to re-create the wheel but using what you have to develop anyway. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

In addition, Neal admitted that as a first year of implementation, many questions were raised, and he and the vice-principal of the school did not necessarily have all the answers. He saw the process as explorative, and a learning opportunity in progress.

*This year, since we are all going through the process of learning, is something that has given us a lot of questions and hopefully based on being collaborative we could probably answer those questions as we go through. But this year is something with mostly questions, reflection and it has been a growing process for us to look at. They come up with a lot of great questions and we do not necessarily have the answers. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

However, from the teachers' perspective this was interpreted as a lack of leadership, and avoidance of committing to a straight answer on issues, which had very high stakes attached to them. This was well captured by a quote from Nina:

*I think time was given but without leadership. . . The time we were supposed to collaborate would have been better utilized if we actually had the first training as a full staff, almost like a step-by-step, elementary, making it super easy like “This is what an SGO is and this is what we understand it is” . . . Again because I think those in leadership are still confused, and not just in my building but across the board, it just trickles down to everybody else. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 1)*

Interestingly, Neal admitted knowing about the teachers’ frustrations about the lack of clear information and transparent answers, and spoke about this issue as a true paradigm shift in the profession.

*On that last point there is a paradigm shift with the teachers with the Common Core and the SGO’s. You cannot go back and be successful by doing the same things you have done in the past. The whole process has given us accountability with the product as best as we could. Everyone has to understand this is a process of learning but you have to seek that learning as well. It cannot be given to you. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

The principal reiterated several times throughout his interviews the need for a new understanding of professional learning, requiring a pro-active attitude from the teachers:

*Teachers have to be vigilant and be able to reflect and identify their strengths in areas of concern so they can become better at what they do. Support is out there.*

*All of the states are developing SGO's so the information is out there. You have to look for it. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

Neal's understanding of collaboration was broad and open and he honestly saw himself as an equal partner:

*This year, since we are all going through the process of learning, is something that has given us a lot of questions and hopefully based on being collaborative we could probably answer those questions as we go through. But this year is something with mostly questions, reflection and it has been a growing process for us to look at. They come up with a lot of great questions and we do not necessarily have the answers. This has forced us to look for answers and seek the information. If I make their lives a little bit easier in providing them information it also gives me the opportunity to learn and share that learning with them and vice versa . . . (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

However, the principal's understanding about these issues was quite different from the teachers' view of professional learning and development. Teachers, for the most part saw Neal as the person who will evaluate them, and needed him to be very clear about his expectations, so that the evaluation process was straightforward and fair. An example, illustrating this issue was given by Nina:

*So I got a new student in January who had never taken the pre assessment, but I gave him the midpoint and it was the same as the pre anyway and now I will have only had him from January to June and still he never made it into any of the*



*official forms and I never got a clear answer from my administrator about what I'm supposed to do – he said something like, oh yeah see if he grew at all, but I don't know what that means at the end of the day in terms of the data. I also lost some kids that I had invested a lot of time in and I don't know once they leave, what happens to them and their SGOs. The new girl that I got doesn't speak any English and I don't honestly know what I'm going to do about her yet. I think those are questions that a lot of people have. I also had a child classified in the process who wasn't classified in September and now he has all these modifications and extra time and I honestly don't know how that's going to factor in either. Those are questions I still have. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 2)*

The ESL teacher Orlando, speaking about the role of the principal in relation to his own role in the implementation process, made a comparison with his military background and said that he needed to follow clear objectives from his captain, “because ultimately he’s going to determine my employability”. This view of the purpose of the SGO in terms of teacher evaluation rather than professional improvement is well reflected in one of Orlando’s quotes:

*I have to say that it seems like something that was forced upon us, rather shortsightedly and I felt as if the administrators were behind the eight ball the entire time, and as evaluators or providers/facilitators of us to getting that professional development, in light of the SGO they were always trying to play catch-up and the professional development component of it was left as an*

*afterthought. The way I viewed it, the SGO was kind of like a game of “gotcha” and professional development was sort of an afterthought. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 3)*

On the whole, from administrators’ perspective the collaborative meetings were scheduled and teachers were given opportunities to bring up issues focused on the actual work on implementing the SGOs (from discussion of the requirements, to consideration of assessments, and review of student data). Although this might have been a form-focused activity, it was a direct response to the policy message. In Neal’s view the open-ended character of these meetings was conducive to a true collaborative forum in which issues are brought up and answers are pursued in collaboration. However, teachers felt like asking questions might hurt their reputation if they admit lack of expertise. These differences in perspective on the issue of collaboration can be directly traced back to the difference in motivations between the teachers and the principal.

**Competing pressures that hinder collaboration.** When addressing collaboration efforts aimed at approaching and working out issues around developing SGOs, one of the recurring themes that kept coming out in the teachers’ interviews was associated with the challenges of working together toward resolving the issues. Although this theme came out with different nuance based on the specific issues that teachers encountered, the majority of the teachers spoke the issue of competition, brought up by the SGO policy. This was the case when teachers shared the same group of students, but had identified different SGOs for them. Because of how the school programs (e.g., dual language

program, bilingual program) were set up and the curricular specifics, teachers in the third grade classrooms often shared the same group of students.

This was true for both ESL teachers, whose SGOs differed from the regular class teachers' SGOs. The same situation was described by the teachers in the dual language program, who shared the same class, but one had her SGOs in Spanish, and the other one - in English. These teachers found themselves carefully considering the time they had with the students and planning for the opportunities they had to teach the students to their specific SGO. Over time, the conflict of SGOs led to a reconsideration of how teachers could best provide support to students to ensure that their own growth objectives are reached. Some teachers spoke more openly than others about competition of SGOs (in such cases as the ESL teachers' SGOs versus the general education teachers' SGOs, and the dual language program teacher's Spanish SGO versus her partner's English-language SGOs), but there was an overall sense that collaboration was difficult in a climate when teachers are set to work against each other to ensure that the same group of students are well prepared to perform on each individual SGO assessment. The issue was described well by Tanisha:

*Another issue is that I am teaching in a dual language program. I only have my students for 50% of the time, but both teachers want more control over the homeroom. It's very divisive. Everyone is working toward their own SGO. And what is really sad and unfair to students is the fact that we as partners in the dual language program are no longer supporting each other. My partner, who is teaching the Spanish portion is a very strong teacher, she has different strengths*

*than I do. But we are not supporting each other as we did in the past, because we are working for the stupid SGO. And my sense is that we are actually doing well. Other teachers in the school are even less supportive of one another. (Tanisha, dual language - English teacher, Interview Round 1)*

Her concern about the divisiveness of the SGOs and the lack of collaboration was motivated by the impact on students' learning rather than her own loss as a professional trapped in a dysfunctional partnership. Interestingly, her partner - Adriana - also saw herself on the losing side of the partnership. Speaking about the competing aspect of the SGOs, she shared:

*Some people say I am at an advantage because it's me and I can just focus on mine [SGOs]; you would think you'd have more time to focus on your goals, but it's really not true. It's a disadvantage because first of all everything we get in school as far as resources and books, we rarely have everything in Spanish, so it's a lot of translating and sometimes even when you translate, they're not developmentally ready for that in Spanish. Spanish is not an easy language to write - the verbs, conjugations. I think they benefit from the English every time they hear when they have art and just listening to other teachers and my kids - it's only me. They get it the way I'm teaching it, or they just don't. So I would say overall - a disadvantage. I think it's a legitimate complaint. . . So my situation was hard because everything that counted for my SGO was solely provided by myself, whereas my co-workers who have SGO in English benefit from the ESL teacher, gym teacher, librarian who also teaches a class every week, all the other*

*classes are in English so it's a different scenario. I'm doing mine in just one language and I'm the only one teaching it. That's how it's different. (Adriana, dual language - Spanish teacher, Interview Round 2)*

A very similar account of the way the SGOs' competition played out, was given by Orlando. He spoke about how SGOs' negatively affected collaboration and how he felt the general education teachers worked toward their own SGO during his extended absence while administering ACCESS testing in early spring of 2014. While absent from the classroom he was not able to provide direct instruction toward his SGO and for the purpose of his SGO, this time was lost:

*The system is kind of broken in that sense where ideally the classroom teacher and I would sit down and have a course of action; we would lay out where I could help them, with their deficiencies and support the classroom teacher by teaching them areas where they have lost focus and concentration. So that tends to be skills like building vocabulary and phonics and basic writing skills so that would free them up to go ahead and work on techniques and different sorts of writing, essays and narratives, and whatnot. . . . The classroom teacher has their own agenda and their own SGOs and preferred use of their own curriculum and I think they took advantage of my absence to catch up on DRAs and other curriculum. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 2)*

The issue of competition versus collaboration generated by the policy was also addressed by other teachers, and the fact that some felt more strongly about having

control over the process of documenting growth happened to constrain work on collaboration. It felt intimidating to the novice bilingual teacher, who spoke about the lack of collaboration as a direct result of competition:

*Teachers are not always willing to share their work. In meetings they come with these huge binders and everything is done, but again, they worked on it after hours. They took 3 or 4 hours a day to prepare themselves and then if you have 1 ½ hours to commute and you didn't get prepared for whatever reason - we have other responsibilities to do. You're not at the same level as everyone else and they feel like they've done all this work and you haven't done anything - you can see the different personalities and you see whose work is there and who's not willing to share and it's like a competition always. (Amanda, bilingual ELA teacher, Interview Round 3)*

Tanisha shared that beyond joint work on identifying appropriate assessments, collaboration was virtually non-existing:

*I and my partner, we have always collaborated when it comes to planning instruction, because we share the same group of children. We are a team and it is important to support each other, because teaching the same skills to the same students makes life easier. But this has been true even before the SGOs. But beyond that, collaboration is virtually non-existent. (Tanisha, dual language - English teacher, Interview Round 3)*

On the whole teachers felt overwhelmed admitting that they felt like working against each other, because genuinely they believed they could support one another. This was explicitly stated by Tanisha. For many of the teachers, collaboration was difficult to achieve, because they felt as though they were on their own trying to prepare students to do well on the SGO assessment. Time spent on SGO test preparation was very important, as in the case with Orlando, who felt that his absence during the ACCESS testing (he was out of the classroom for over a month) was critical for his students' preparedness for his SGO writing assessment. He explicitly mentioned that he knew the regular teacher in his classes would not spend time teaching and preparing students to do well on his SGO assessment, as he would. In his situation there wasn't room for collaboration, and as another teacher stated, collaboration beyond selection of SGO assessments was "virtually nonexistent".

In light of this tension between competition and collaboration, the form-focused character of the scheduled collaborative meetings was obvious. While the teachers addressed explicitly the challenges of collaborating among themselves as part of the scheduled meeting times, they participated in the meetings, seemingly engaging in the types of activities the policy directives called for. Although the collaborative meetings did not serve the purpose to support work on data interpretation and instructional planning, they were conducted in compliance with the SGO policy call.

**Collaborative support from administrators.** As collaborative practice between teachers and administrators was officially recommended as an approach to SGO development and administration, both IAs addressed the quality of collaborative efforts in

the school. However, collaboration as seen by teachers looked very different from the administrators' perspective. For the teachers, who had an understanding of the SGOs as a tool for summative evaluation, the expectation for collaboration between teachers and administrators implied that administrators would provide clear and specific guidance with respect to assessments, analysis of student data, and selection of appropriate learning targets around which SGOs were to be structured. For the administrators, who understood the entire process of developing of SGOs as an opportunity to improve student performance, collaboration was a process in which everyone comes to the table with ideas, information, and professional expertise. In contrast to the teachers, administrators did not see the requirements for collaboration as a one-way street, in which they dictate the steps and recommend single-solution procedures. In many cases, this divergence in perspective led to miscommunication and open frustration.

To exemplify how teachers thought about this aspect of SGO implementation, a quote from Sandy shows the extent to which the purpose of the SGOs is seen solely as a tool for evaluation. This teacher saw the administrators' motivation behind engaging in collaboration and supporting the teachers' work on developing SGOs as way to ensure their high evaluation ratings:

*The principal and the VP are very supportive because they have SGOs too. They want to make sure they're meeting their SGO from our meeting of our SGO. I think they try to be as helpful as they can be. (Sandy, ESL teacher, Interview Round 1)*



Other teachers, when addressing the question about collaboration with their supervisor, also acknowledged the good intentions of administration to support them. Teachers spoke about the opportunities that were available to collaborate, however some teachers shared that they did not feel supported in terms of having specific questions answered or having help in articulating SGOs. Tanisha addressed the question about collaborating with administrators:

*Administrators have been somewhat supportive, and certainly have been trying to be collaborative. I know that the intent was there and believe they really wanted to help. But the problem was that everyone felt flying blind. And time was lacking. Administrators don't necessarily want to admit that. (Tanisha, dual language - English teacher, Interview Round 3)*

A similar account of the collaboration was given by the bilingual teacher who also complained about the lack of clear answers to implementation questions. Speaking about the principal of the school, she shared:

*He did set up a meeting in February right before the mid-point check and he did see the data and that's when we chatted, but again, I think they don't really have the answers to questions that we have, so he was not able to clearly give me any guidance as to what I needed to do next. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 2)*

Adriana also spoke about missed opportunities for collaboration and the lack of information, which she saw as frustrating and impeding the implementation of the policy:

*I think in my heart that I did the best with what I knew and what I had but I think there was a lot lacking as far as having meetings with peers to see what they were doing, we didn't have time and I wasn't even able to discuss this with my administration and that's not good. You don't really hear feedback. So I think I did a good job, because this was my first year but I don't know that; I wish there was more feedback from the administration or co-workers – some time to go over this and time to help each other . . . Being able to collaborate with our peers will make this process a little easier. (Adriana, dual language - Spanish teacher, Interview Round 3)*

Overall, a range of factors were perceived as challenges to engaging in true collaborative practice. In the case of collaborating with peers, a major challenge addressed by teachers was the fact that some of the teachers' perception was that they are not working toward a common goal, but are rather competing against each other. In the case of collaboration and support from administration, teachers saw administrators as evaluators rather than partners who can work with them toward resolving challenges associated with students' needs and instruction.

Teachers shared they needed more specific information about the expectations with regard to the features of the SGOs. They needed this information simply to have the needed peace of mind that they would be rated high by the administration. In this sense the lack of feedback and clear directions were perceived as unfair and the meetings with the administrators felt unproductive and empty of substance. The opportunities to meet and discuss SGOs with administrators were again form-focused and compliance-driven

activities adopted by the school leaders as a direct response to the policy call but with little in-depth understanding of the true purpose of the collaboration.

### **Professional Learning**

Teachers and administrators held contrasting views about the opportunities for professional learning that supported the implementation process. This partly due to the diverging understanding of the purpose of the policy, and the contrasting goals of these two groups of professionals, but also because of the dual role of professional learning in the implementation process. On one hand the quality of professional learning prior to and during implementation was seen differently by teachers and by administrators, based on their motivations. On the other, the IAs also held contrasting beliefs about the potential of the SGO to create conditions, conducive to meaningful professional learning opportunities tied to specific student needs. This section addresses IAs' contrasting beliefs about both these issues related to professional learning, and offers evidence from the interviews that illustrate the types of viewpoints from both groups. The evidence from the interviews offers specifics in how teachers and administrators differed in their beliefs about the capacity of the SGOs to advance professional learning.

Teachers' expectations from the needed professional learning associated with the SGO policy implementation were reasonable considering the potential risk of failing to demonstrate adequate student growth. Because of this, teachers were not interested in engaging in discussions, collaborative planning, or independent seeking of answers. To them, the evaluative purpose of the SGOs overshadowed the intent of the policy to

support professional learning, and consequently teachers did not focus on the potential of the policy to really support struggling students, but rather on the consequences of failing to achieve the SGO. This issue was framed by Sandy:

*I also think what does it mean if you don't make your SGO. Not only the fear about what does that mean for your performance review, but what does it mean about you as a teacher? (Sandy, ESL teacher, Interview Round 3)*

The principal of the school talked about the connection of the SGOs to professional learning in terms of the pressures the policy was bringing about, and the fact that the teaching profession is changing, and with this trend the role of the teacher was no longer to simply deliver the curriculum. He spoke about the urgency that the SGO policy raises in terms of forcing teachers to be active seekers of information, and challenging them to be proactive in professional learning.

*That [the SGO policy] has brought, in my opinion, the perfect things that teachers needed to do because this is not just an 8-3 or 9-4 job anymore. You need to develop your craft. The information is there, you have to seek it and make it your own. You can't expect the school, state or district to put it in your hands. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 1)*

On the other hand, the way professional learning was provided to the teachers was in line with Neal's idea of having the SGOs bring about different attitudes toward professional growth. He thought about the high stakes of the policy as a great motivator for teachers to become actively involved in their own professional learning. Similar to his

approach toward collaborative efforts in the school, Neal spoke about the paradigm shift which in his view was brought about the SGOs. Educators, in his view, must realize that information cannot be just given out. Educators must become active participants in their own professional growth and they must look out for opportunities to learn, and to engage with new information. In his view, his responsibility was to provide materials, samples, and opportunities, but the teachers had to reach out and grasp the information, adapt it to their own needs, and use it in ways that made sense for their own classrooms.

*So the literacy part impacted the learning. Now, with the testing grades, hopefully we'll see some type of positive results when we get the NJASK back. . . . we can only give them so much as far as training professional development but they themselves have to make an honest and conscious awareness that they have to reflect and seek professional growth on their own. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 3)*

Neal hoped that the high stakes of the policy would add a push for the teachers, and would motivate them to do better in terms of educating themselves, looking for information, and supporting their students' learning by becoming better professionals. However, his message with regard to professional development was considered inadequate by the teachers, because for them independent learning and active exploration of available information could have led to failing to achieve SGO estimates, which professionally could have had dire consequences for them.

Overall, when speaking about the SGO policy, and its connection to professional learning, teachers and administrators described the same types of professional development events (specific to the implementation of the SGOs) that they attended. While these descriptions converge in terms of the types of training attended, they painted a very different picture in terms of adequacy of the information received to support quality implementation. When IAs described the issue of professional development, they seemed to focus on two distinctly separate issues. The first one focused on the IAs' perception of the PD and its adequacy in supporting the implementation process, while the second addressed the policy's potential to support professional growth and ultimately – better learning opportunities for the students. These two aspects of professional development, while complementary were talked about as separate aspects in terms of professional learning, and are thus described separately in the next two sections.

**Perceptions of PD adequacy.** When asked about the content and format of the professional learning experiences that supported understanding of the new policy, teachers and administrators described the same opportunities they have engaged in – the faculty meetings, the workshops, and the PD aimed at understanding the technical steps articulating the implementation phases of the policy. To a large degree the same PD opportunities were described by all interviewed participants. It was the perceptions of effectiveness and adequacy of the described PD where teachers and administrators differed. Neal described the policy as a catalyst for professional learning and talked about it as an opportunity for teachers to engage in a process of active learning. Through

professional conversations educators had the opportunity to interpret available information on policy requirements and engage in decision-making:

*If it meant for teachers to have a sense of urgency, it definitely met its goal. The teachers are more aware . . . that this is part of the new process, it's here and it's going to be here for a while. It's just really forcing them to re-think their profession and how are they going to either take this professional step beyond or it will force a lot of people to reconsider entering the profession, leaving the profession, but it has changed the conversation at grade level meetings – at least we talk about it and discuss it, we reviewed some SGOs, not only New Jersey but the Denver school system has a good website with information. So we did a lot of things – at least had strong conversations and a background to this. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 3)*

On the other hand, some of the teachers felt the information about the SGOs implementation that was provided to them was unclear and not sufficiently explained. Ellen, the English monolingual teacher, addressed the quality of training she was provided with, and spoke about the lack of concrete recommendations for actual steps she was given in order to complete the process:

*... as far as putting the SGO together and the wording and trying to figure out your scoring plan, that was a little difficult and there should have been more training, maybe a book that we could have read that would have explained things more. For me at least, I like material that I can read and have explained more in-*

*depth, what I needed to do; it was just a little confusing for me; just maybe training, or people coming in to help you would have been a big help. (Ellen, English monolingual teacher, Interview Round 1)*

Addressing the lack of clear recommendations, one of the two bilingual teachers spoke about this issue in terms of support from both the school-based administration and from the district:

*I'm not pleased with the district or school-level administration. I feel that on so many levels they have dropped the ball. The district in my opinion has offered nothing other than a deadline. . . In terms of our school administration to be completely honest, they are a mess too. They are so busy and running around and all they can do is give words. There is no support and if I could give them constructive criticism and allow me to do that, respectfully I would say that this is the area you need to work on. . . I am not pleased at all with how the district and school administration handled the SGO process. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 1)*

Speaking about the same issue of providing concrete support and recommendations to teachers to help their efforts to implement the SGOs, Alexa (the district-level supervisor) spoke about the challenge of having meaningful opportunities to support teachers who use different assessments and different SGOs.

*. . . but when all the teachers have different SGOs, it's very difficult to develop a district-wide professional development when one teacher is focusing on writing,*



*another may be doing oral reading fluency, another site word assessment, one is doing DRAs, one is using the New Jersey model curriculum end-of-unit assessments as their goal - when so many teachers in the district are using so many different assessments for their SGOs, as a district supervisor, it's very difficult for me to plan a PD or to support school-wide support for that because everyone is so individualized. . . . To sit down at a table and have a meaningful conversation makes it very difficult. (Alexa, district supervisor, Interview Round 3)*

One of the teachers also articulated a related issue that directly addressed the teachers' perception of the policy ambiguity. The fact that the SGOs provided a measure used for teacher evaluation defeated the alternative purpose of the policy to support student learning. The following excerpt from Nina's interview illustrates the thought process linking the need for concrete PD supporting changes in practice that will be used for evaluation purposes:

*I think the biggest challenge with the SGOs this year was the ambiguity of it all. I think because it was new, there were too many questions that no one had answers to in the beginning; so that sort of set it off. It wasn't introduced well, in the beginning we had the whole staff in the gym in [district name] High School; they showed a PowerPoint, they gave everyone a thick packet of what Achieve NJ was about and it was all so vague. It was still very vague in November. I think that was the biggest challenge this year - not understanding really what it meant, how to do it. . . . Also no one knew how this data was going to be used against them*

*potentially, so everyone was afraid. But then when it became evident that they could never check everyone's SGO, then it was like, well everyone will meet their SGO because they can manipulate the data. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 3)*

The issue of the lack of SGOs quality control was addressed by almost every teacher in the sample. To them the fact that no one would check their SGOs' data defeated the accountability purpose of the policy and invited manipulation of the data to affect evaluation ratings. Orlando addressed this issue in terms of time constraints and opportunity to perform external assessment of the SGO data:

*It's impossible for teachers to do, but we're doing it somehow. There is no way the administration would be able to keep up with all of that. It's the SGOs, who's going to monitor the SGOs? You leave it up to the teachers to monitor their own students' performances, so you're almost guaranteeing that all students are going to meet the SGO performance; they will show the progress that we said they would. That's 100% guaranteed. Who will check that? The administration could try and nit-pick but there's no way they can verify all the teachers. (Orlando, ESL teacher, Interview Round 2)*

As the perceived lack of external assessment of the SGO data affected widely the respondents' beliefs about the policy's potential to inform PD. The excerpts from the teachers show their frustration with the "ambiguity" of the SGO. Teachers felt as though the professional development goals and conversation addressed explicitly issues of

supporting student learning, while implicitly they were about a rigid process that was not about helping students, but rather about putting in place a system of procedures to help account for student learning in a systematic way. The ambiguity of the policy message was threatening to the teachers as they did not feel prepared to either adequately support students' learning through the SGO, or to put in place an accountability system, tracking their own teaching effectiveness through the use of student data. The perceived lack of external assessment of the SGO data also hindered the second issue of professional development – the potential of the policy to support professional growth. The next section describes the different perspectives of teachers and administrators with regard to the purpose of the policy and how IAs' understanding of it informed their implementation efforts.

**Fostered professional learning: SGOs potential to inform PD.** After many months of implementation ups and downs and mismatched expectations from both sides, the fact that the information from the SGOs was left unused and was deemed inconsequential was a blow to the teachers. They were told over and over about the importance of successful attainment of the SGOs, and the need to use the SGOs data for driving instruction, but also for driving professional development goals. Over the course of the three rounds of interviews, several of the teachers spoke about their belief that the SGOs data will eventually inform in some way professional development plans for the school and for them individually. So when at the end of the school year, they did not have an SGO exit interview with the principal, and did not hear back about the SGO

information they had submitted, the teachers felt that this was unfair to the hard work they were encouraged over and over to do well.

The bilingual math teacher felt that the lack of any use of the SGO data was inconsistent with the initial message about the purpose of the policy:

*No. We had that for the mid check-in, but we never had the post, which is why I find it so amusing that it all was such a big deal in the beginning and even at the mid-point, but I don't know what happened at the end. It could be just the craziness of the end of the year and kind of the rush of it all but at least from my understanding, we didn't have an SGO post-meeting, nobody talked to me and quite a few of the teachers didn't have a formal talk about what happened with the SGO data. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 3)*

The information teachers had collected, scored and organized would never be used for its intended purpose – to inform PD, and ultimately support specific shortcomings in instruction. Following her previous statement, this teacher continued:

*I'm not confident that it will be used the way it probably should be used simply because I think the way the SGO process kind of culminated didn't have as much fanfare as it did for the first time; in other words, there wasn't real accountability about getting it collected and looking at the final data so I found it interesting that it ended in a kind of lackluster way. That sent a message to me that perhaps they're either going to scramble in September to look at last year's data or I'm not really sure what's going to happen; so I 'm not really certain how it's going*

*to inform professional development. I know some other teachers taught reading or used the DRA scores for their SGOs, those DRA scores had to be posted on an on-line system we have . . . but again, supposedly in September they were thinking looking at the data from that and kind of inform the teachers for the next year where the kids are at; but in terms of our math assessments, nobody said a thing or collected anything, so I'm not confident that professional development will be informed by it. (Nina, bilingual math teacher, Interview Round 1)*

The principal Neal's take on this was very different. He shared that because it was the first year of implementation, the SGO process presented a steep learning curve for all. Therefore, he felt that the data from the SGOs would not be included for decision-making (teacher evaluation) purposes. However, this message from the principal was lost between him and the teachers. Neal called the first year of implementation "a practice year", and characterized the process of developing SGOs as "trial by error", pointing out that the second year of implementation "will be for real". He spoke about the first year of SGOs roll-out in terms of learning how to use the data to both inform PD and teacher evaluations:

*The PD piece is going to be very important and again, on the teachers themselves, taking ownership of their own professional learning and how they're going to roll it out this year and in years to come. . . Based on the conversation we had with the state, there's a learning process but eventually the trial is going to run out and it will be for real next year as far as keeping everything documented and SGOs, developing a student growth percentage more focused in years to come.*

*The teachers are having an awakening that the SGO is going to make an impact on their rating system as far as being effective or ineffective, distinguished or somewhat. (Neal, principal, Interview Round 3)*

However, from the teachers' perspective, the implicit message was that their efforts were left unacknowledged and their hard work on the implementation of the SGOs was wasted. Not only their efforts to ensure their students reach the projected learning growth of the SGO were left unrecognized, but the entire SGO information was not used to inform PD plans. Tanisha expressed her disappointment:

*. . . SGOs did not affect any professional development plans for me or my colleague. Maybe because this is the first year, and we did not have time to finish up at the end, but we did not spend a whole lot of time looking at the end data. My students met the goals I wanted them to meet, but we did not have time to process the information. There was some pow-wow at the end of the year, I met with my partner to talk about some things that we will be working on next year, but neither of us met with administration. It was in no way different than any other year. Frankly, I put all of the information in Teachscape, and waited for some sort of conversation to be initiated with administration, but it did not happen. (Tanisha, dual language - English teacher, Interview Round 3)*

A similar sentiment was expressed by the Ellen, who felt that not only the implementation was based on unclear directions, but the process lacked the appropriate closing process at the end of the year:

*. . . it's aggravating to me to do all this work and no one is looking at it. Why am I really doing this? I just do what looks good on paper, put into a binder and there you go. I don't even know if it's right, it's so new, I don't think anybody knows. (Ellen, English monolingual teacher, Interview Round 1)*

The perception of disregard for the SGOs data at the end of the year was also connected to the teachers' apprehension with respect to the high stakes of the policy. Teachers expected that this data would provide a type of measure to be added to their summative review. Sandy addressed this issue and spoke about her sense that the process was left unfinished:

*One of the things it was very difficult to gauge from people was the emotional impact of the SGOs. I think people are afraid because we don't know – we left the year without knowing - and it's all a very hazy kind of thing. My summative review was like three paragraphs on Teachscape; and I don't know what that meant about my rating or anything. It wasn't a problem rating, because if it was, I believe [the principal] would have said something to me. So I'll see how I feel about it next year. Maybe I'll feel better. (Sandy, ESL teacher, Interview Round 3)*

The evidence presented in this section highlights the teachers' perspective on the true purpose of the SGO, and how this perspective differed from the principal's. All along, teachers were worried about their students' ability to all reach the SGO targets. Like other teachers, Orlando spoke about how his instruction had become a lot more

narrowed. He spoke about having the opportunity (because of his SGO) to really hone on his writing instruction skills, however, he felt that narrowing the focus of his teaching, took away the complexity of the teaching process, as he focused his instruction on writing to ensure his students are well prepared for the SGO post-assessment. The language teachers used about having the opportunity to offer “focused instruction”, and “hone in” on certain instructional areas, was largely mirrored by the administrators. Interestingly, the two groups of IAs had widely different perspectives on the importance of these changes with respect to improving practice. While teachers fumed about being ineffective in their teaching, administrators saw the benefits of it.

**Professional learning summary.** As with all other aspects of SGOs implementation, teachers and administrators had different perceptions about the professional learning that needed to be done. This was directly connected to the stakeholders’ understanding of the purpose of the SGOs policy, which informed their goals in a policy implementation climate. This was true for both the professional learning opportunities of teachers and administrators with regard to interpreting the policy message, as well as with respect to using outputs from the SGO process to inform and plan meaningful professional development events in the future. The use of common language by teachers and administrators only highlighted the differences in perspective and understanding of importance.

In the case of interpreting the policy and building understanding about what the process of developing SGOs, teachers’ perception of the professional developing opportunities was that these events were not targeted and were not enough. Even the



teachers who reported that in their view the opportunities to learn about the SGOs were enough, shared their dissatisfaction with the level of clarity and precision of the policy recommendations for implementation. This was because they truly hoped that with a high-stakes policy they would be provided with much clearer guidance as to what effective SGOs should look like. Administrators, who spoke about the same events, with strikingly similar language expressed their belief that quality of implementation depends on contextualized meaning-making, mutual understanding, and collaborative inquiry, not on top-down directions to be followed regardless of local needs.

In the case of the potential of the SGOs to inform professional learning needs, teachers acknowledged that such potential is part of the conceptual idea of considering SGOs as measures of student learning, but were not optimistic that this potential could be effectively used. This was linked to the teachers' perception that the SGO's main purpose was to evaluate teachers and the fact that educators would take advantage of using SGO data to just "look good on paper" rather than having SGOs point to shortcomings in the instructional process or the professional effectiveness of the teachers.

The notion of the policy's purposes related to professional development was considered as a surface-level practice, which was seemingly implemented in response to the policy call, but in reality had little to do with the actual data or the extent to which SGOs were reached. Part of the reasons why this happened was the fact that in the first year of implementation, the quality of the SGO data was questioned by the administrators and for them the true take-away from the implementation was learning how to go about the process, rather than the actual collected data. However, this was not communicated

well, and the perception of the teachers was that there was no follow up to their effort and the implementation was an empty activity, lacking substantive consideration of student learning data and what it meant in terms of academic achievement. In their view, the SGO initiative was driven by compliance and focused on changes, which only seemed to respond to the policy's intent.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings of the study, describe how the motivations and beliefs of the IAs played out in terms of their constructing practical understanding of SGO policy requirements. Following their goals, and bound by their beliefs, IAs adopted mostly form-focused changes to their practice as a direct result of the strong regulatory pressures associated with the policy. Although the teachers' and the administrators' beliefs were different in many respects, they were often expressed through common language. In this chapter I connect these common phrases, and the meanings they carry, to the intended outcomes of the study Theory of Change (p. 10) and offer discussion on the extent of their overlap. Each of the officially intended outcomes (as shown in the Logic Model) is discussed separately with regard to specific and relevant changes in instruction, assessment, and organization adopted in response to normative and regulatory policy pressures (Coburn, 2004; Scott, Ruef, Mendel, & Caronna, 2000; Scott, 2005).

The discussion of the results in terms of adopted common descriptors opens up the research beyond the context of the local implementation and re-examines the adopted form-focused practices to cast them into the larger context of reform implementation. The chapter includes a section discussing some of the rudimentary function-focused understandings (Spillane and Callahan, 2000) of policy intent (specifically with respect to the IAs' understanding of the SGO usefulness for supporting professional learning), and concludes with re-visiting the research questions of this study to provide a concise review of the findings and suggest implications for policy implementation and further research. The discussion emphasizes the process in which IAs in different roles construct divergent

meaning based on prior knowledge, experience and position, as well as on social interactions based on negotiation of policy interpretations (Spillane et al., 2002; Spillane and Callahan, 2000). The discussion further centers on how teachers and administrators package different meanings (based on their specific goals and motivations) into common terms and phrases, which language-wise connected back to the policy message. The implementation response for each of the stated outcomes is discussed in terms of how IAs negotiated between form-focused and function-focused understanding of the policy intent.

IAs used the common language of the policy's official documents and intended outcomes to serve as "cognitive hooks" that anchor adopted changes to practice in the language of the official policy documents. Cognitive hooks (Kolodner, 1983) are based on familiar descriptors, articulated by IAs in response to mandated changes to practice, and are often linked to form-focused understandings of the policy requirements. Cognitive hooks are similar to Spillane's (2000) description of common "handles" referring to policy ideas, translated into familiar descriptors used by IAs to process new knowledge and transform the policy ideas into familiar terms, based on existing cognitive schemas (Spillane, 2000). Ultimately, IAs develop common language, which they use to describe their own interpretation of the policy requirements. While these cognitive hooks, used to describe adopted changes as a response to the policy requirements, and seemingly link directly to the policy language, often the actual changes to practice remain on a surface level and support form-focused understanding of needed changes.

The findings of this study are consistent with other policy implementation research (Spillane, 2000; Spillane and Callahan, 2000; Coburn, 2004), which finds that policy implementers, facing strong regulatory pressures, feel compelled to adopt new forms of practice that clearly demonstrate their implementation efforts. The IAs, participating in this study, adopted specific practices based on their understanding of the purpose of the policy, as well as on their own goals with respect to the implementation process. Their actions and related actual changes in practice were informed by how they saw their own role in the implementation process. In addition to well-defined form-based understandings, implementers developed rudimentary understanding of function-focused purpose, but because of the strong regulatory pressures from the institutional environment, they were only able to enact the form-focused ones.

In Table 9, I summarize findings with respect to both form-focused and rudimentary function-focused responses to the policy message as they pertain to each of the intended policy outcomes (listed in first column). The second column summarizes adopted common descriptors (i.e., cognitive hooks) that link back to the policy's ideas and language from official documents. The third column highlights specific practices introduced in the school as a response to the policy requirements. The fourth column of the table links the newly introduced practices to the IAs' motivations. The table allows to track the IAs' similar vocabulary used to talk about adopted changes to practice and show how these new practices, motivated by the distinctively different goals of teachers and administrators, satisfy both groups' interests.

Table 9 –

*Response to Policy Message and Introduced Forms of Practice*

<b>Intended Policy Outcomes (as per Logic Model)</b>	<b>Cognitive Hook</b>	<b>Introduced Practice</b>	<b>Motivation by Participant (Teachers/Administrators)</b>
<b>Outcome 1</b> Increase in the quality of discussions surrounding student growth	Work with student data	Data-chat meetings	<b>Administrators:</b> to increase awareness of connections between assessment results and targeted instruction
<b>Outcome 4</b> Deeper Understanding of the Academic Strengths and Weaknesses of Students	Differentiated and targeted instruction		<b>Teachers:</b> to adopt ways in which data points can be represented to show teaching effectiveness
<b>Outcome 2</b> Opportunity for Teachers to Engage in the Evaluation and Creation of Assessments	Use of standards- based assessments	Selection of CCSS- aligned Assessments	<b>Administrators:</b> to ensure growth in academic areas covered by standards- aligned state test
<b>Outcome 3</b> Increased Knowledge and Focused Use of New Jersey's Curriculum Standards			<b>Teachers:</b> to ensure achievement on SGO assessment
<b>Outcome 5</b> Clearer Indications of When and How to Adjust Instruction to Meet Students' Needs	Rigorous, yet achievable SGOs	Mid-point SGO Adjustment	<b>Administrators:</b> to bring up all students' achievement on state's test
<b>Outcome 6</b> Increased Opportunities to Reflect on Student Performance and Teaching Practice			<b>Teachers:</b> to bring up all students' scores on the SGO assessment, even if this means excluding low achievers from the SGO group
<b>Outcome 7</b> More Thoughtful Professional Planning for the Next School Year	Focus on professional learning	No actual introduced practices	<b>Administrators:</b> to potentially support teaching quality and ensure students' achievement on state's test
			<b>Teachers:</b> to eventually improve instructional quality and support low performing students

\* Rudimentary functional understanding, suppressed by regulatory pressures.

Seemingly, the form-focused practices addressed specific policy messages, by adopting cognitive hooks connecting to language from the SGO policy. However, the adoption of these form-focused practices did not support shifts in functional understanding of the policy message as it relates to all seven of the intended outcomes. On the surface, a number of practices were introduced, as a direct response to the policy's call – teachers and administrators engaged in regular “data-chat” meetings dedicated to discussion of evidence of student learning. In addition, educators held mid-year review meetings, aimed at calibrating learning growth estimates, as defined by the SGOs guidebook – the main source of the policy guidelines. These meetings were in line with the policy message, however they only superficially addressed differentiation, and were focused on surface-level considerations with regard to the SGO process. Both these types of interactions, as well as a number of other responses to the SGO policy are described in subsequent sections. Similar to other findings in recent policy implementation research, all of these practices reflect surface-level responses to the policy intent, lacking the depth of true change and functional understanding of the prescribed shifts in practice, which could be defined as function-focused responses to the SGO policy. The mapping of the intended outcomes over reported changes to practice is further extended in the following section (Table 10) to track teachers' and administrators' perspectives and attitudes, further illuminating the comparison between the policy's official intentions and the actual implementation.

### **Adopted Practices in Response to SGO Policy Call**

Teachers and administrators developed distinctly different implementation goals, based on their interpretation of the policy's purpose. Teachers approached the implementation process with the goal to showcase teaching talent and obtain high evaluation ratings to protect themselves. The principal of the school, as well as the vice-principal and the district-level elementary-level supervisor for ELA, saw the policy as an opportunity to focus on and increase students' performance on standardized assessment. As a direct result of these goals, and the consideration of the new policy as a tool to achieve them, the implementation efforts of the different stakeholders in the school were bound to diverge. In the next several subsections, adopted practices are compared to the intended outcomes. The gap between the actual reported practices and the intended ones can be explained by the overwhelming regulatory pressures of the policy, which created the urgency of focusing on compliance-driven implementation. For clarity, I examine intended outcomes separately to discuss the dimensions of the actual reported changes versus the intended ones.

Intended outcomes related to collaboration among teachers (Outcome 1 and Outcome 4) address the SGO's intended potential to bring about improved understanding formative assessment and introduction of collaborative efforts to understand how evidence of learning might be used to continually inform targeted instructional practice. Likewise, intended outcomes pertaining to understanding and use of standards and assessments (Outcomes 2 and 3) are grouped as they both address IAs' familiarity and use of learning standards (e.g., CCSS) and quality of assessment practice. Intended



outcomes addressing collaboration between teachers and administrators (Outcomes 5 and 6) rely heavily on the potential for effective collaboration between teachers and their direct supervisors, and therefore the discussion of these is also merged together. Finally, intended Outcome 7 addresses SGOs potential to improve professional learning, and as such is discussed in terms of the IAs' beliefs about the policy's potential to support relevant insights for PD.

Table 10 provides a breakdown of connections between intended outcomes and SGO components, and describes specific distinctions between teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the SGO implementation process. The table illustrates links between intended outcomes and some of the summarized results of the study. It allows to consider the extent to which underlying intentions of the policy were pursued by IAs and how much the actual implementation process reflected these intentions.

Table 10 –

*Connections between Intended Outcomes and Evidence from Implemented SGO Components*

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>SGO Component</b>
<b>Outcome 1:</b> Increase in the quality of discussions surrounding student growth  <b>Outcome 4:</b> Deeper understanding of the academic strengths and weaknesses of students	<b>Collaboration among Teachers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of collaboration: differences in teachers' vs administrators' views             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers struggled finding common ground/common goals among themselves</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Both teachers and administrators agreed that effort for collaboration existed, however, the two groups disagreed about effectiveness of collaboration efforts             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers concerned with the quality of collaborative meetings</li> <li>○ Teachers concerned about competition overtaking efforts for collaboration</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Outcome 2:</b> Opportunity for teachers to engage in the evaluation and creation of assessments  <b>Outcome 3:</b> Increased knowledge and focused use of New Jersey's core curriculum standards	<b>Control over Learning Targets, Assessments, and Scoring</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of assessment – teachers saw it as an opportunity to show guaranteed growth vs administrators who saw it as a way to guarantee growth on yearly standardized test             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers' lack of control over targets &amp; lack of buy-in</li> <li>○ Teachers' lack of control over choice of assessment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Low growth estimates             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers concerned about fairness of effectiveness ratings</li> <li>○ Administrators concerned about inconsistent student preparation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Integrity and consistency of scoring process             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers concerned about fairness of effectiveness ratings</li> <li>○ Administrators concerned about inconsistent student preparation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• External checks and concern about "fixing" results             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers concerned about fairness of effectiveness ratings</li> <li>○ District-level supervisor concerned about lack of validity</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <b>Role of Standards</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of Standards (CCSS and NJ Core Curriculum Standards)             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers thought of standards as separate initiative (disconnect between standards and SGOs)</li> <li>○ Administrators understood connections, at least in theory</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Outcome 5:</b> Clearer indications of when and how to adjust instruction to meet students' needs	<b>Collaboration between Teachers and Supervisors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of collaboration – differences in perspectives             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teachers concerned about the quality of training and information they were provided with</li> <li>○ Administrators (principal) dissatisfied with the level of teachers' active professional learning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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<b>Outcome 6:</b> Increased opportunities to reflect on student performance and teaching practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both teachers and administrators agreed effort for supervisor-teacher collaboration existed (same language for events)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Teachers concerned with the quality of SGO training/information provided</li><li>○ Teachers concerned about lack of leadership and clear direction for implementation</li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Outcome 7:</b> More thoughtful professional planning for the next school year	<b>Professional Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Potential purpose of SGO implementation to support professional growth: teachers and administrators used same language about potential, so understanding existed for both groups<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Teachers concerned about quality of SGO data and its potential for informing PD</li><li>○ Teachers disappointed about lack of use of SGO data for PD planning</li><li>○ Administrators explained lack of use of SGO data for PD planning with “SGO trial year”</li></ul></li></ul>

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### **Collaboration among Teachers: Intended Outcomes 1 & 4**

The intended outcomes, related to collaborative practice among teachers, *Increase in the quality of discussions surrounding student growth*, and *Deeper understanding of the academic strengths and weaknesses of students* were an integral focal point of the policy, as the process of developing SGOs was intended to support stronger professional collaborations, leading to improved data literacy practice. However, evidence presented in chapter 4 shows that the IAs' expertise in understanding academic strengths and weaknesses of students and the existing opportunities to engage in quality discussion surrounding student growth, did not unfold quite as intended in the implementation process. This was largely based on the teachers and administrators' diverging beliefs about the purpose of the SGOs, which lead to poor shared meaning-making. As shown in chapter 4, the increased emphasis on using evidence of learning to support targeted and specific gaps in students' learning growth prompted teachers and administrators to consider implementation of the SGO as an opportunity to talk about the increased focus on student data as a key component of the implementation process. Although teachers and administrators adopted common phrases to describe the practices in which they engaged, these common descriptors, similar to the Spillane and Callahan's (2000) "cognitive hooks", simply played the role of connecting activities to language in the SGO policy guidelines. Teachers and administrators talked about "working with student data" to describe meetings in which they discussed student growth and learning.

Although emphasis on "working with student data" was a key phrase in both teachers' and administrators' interviews, the description of actual practices in which educators engaged, focused on the structure and scheduling of the activities and the

measures that were developed, rather than on how the cycle of purposeful use of evidence of learning informed instructional interventions, and specifically how the SGOs process supported this cycle. Teachers and administrators described with similar language the regularly scheduled meetings that were dedicated on the practice of discussing student data.

While for the administrators it was important to implement specific forms of practice recommended by the SGO guidebook (NJDOE, 2012), such as the data-chat meeting (which on the surface looked in line with the SGOs policy message), the goal of these meetings were not fully consistent with the policy intent. From administrators' perspective, the data-chat meetings were an important part of the implementation process, as they continually emphasized connections between student data and the types evidence of learning it provides. Although the focus on assessment data as reflection of student learning may appear to be a narrow understanding of assessment literacy, for administrators it provided the needed pressure for teachers to ensure students are prepared for the end-of-year assessment.

However, while the data-chat meetings were described by the administrators as regularly scheduled opportunities to discuss data and engage in evidence-based decisions regarding instructional planning, teachers had a different perspective. Not only they were described as inauthentic, but interviewed participants were unable to describe any tasks that were accomplished in those meetings. Teachers were disappointed that the data-chat meetings failed to promote deep discussion of student data and its use in instructional planning, instead focusing on the simple goal of having students improve a single level

on a standard assessment. In addition, the fact that administrators were part of the data-chat meetings made the dynamics of the interactions unauthentic and defeated the purpose of the activity. Consequently, the teachers saw the data-chats as important in terms of compliance with the policy's recommendations, but worthless in terms of supporting a type of function-oriented understanding of student growth and learning.

Another common phrase used by both administrators and teachers when they spoke about the potential of the SGO policy to provide differentiated instruction for students was "meeting the needs of all students". The phrase was aligned with language from the policy and seemed to align with the requirement to support diverse learning styles and students. Although both teachers and administrators used the phrase, it resonated differently in both groups' interviews (see also Halverson, Kelley, & Kimball, 2004).

For administrators, the strong motivation to support teachers' expanded understanding of the connections between assessment data and instructional shortcomings and improve data literacy was directly tied to boosting *all* students' skillset needed for the state test performance. The focus on students' academic performance ability, specifically in ELA, supported assessment-based instruction, which in the long run would improve the school's overall achievement. The principal of the school focused on the SGO policy as a tool to promote data-driven instruction as it related to supporting specific academic skills, ensuring improved test performance. Although administrators showed understanding of the potential of the SGO process to broadly support student learning by making explicit specific gaps in learning, which could potentially warrant

function-based responses to the policy, they felt the pressure to show specific student improvement (i.e., on the state's test) and this overshadowed the broader understanding of student growth. As instruction was narrowed to reflect the content covered by the SGO assessment, functional understanding of learning strengths and weaknesses of individual students or groups of students (e.g., ELs) was limited to making an adjustment of the learning target (at the mid-year review meeting) rather than considering more appropriate teaching interventions to support individual or groups of students' (i.e., ELs) learning needs. The assumption that the SGO assessment served as a good predictor of the end-of-year state assessment, indicating specific learning needs, was not discussed in terms of the evidence of learning gaps that it could potentially show for individual students or for groups of students. The idea of promoting evidence-based support for students was never implemented (or even discussed) at the individual student level. What would have been the goal of the data-chat meeting – consideration of specific learning gaps, as evidenced by the assessment – was not considered by either the administrators or the teachers.

From teachers' perspective, it was again very important that *all* student' needs are met, because teachers felt the urgency of having all students reach the SGO targets that were set in the beginning of the school year. This goal was also supported by the potential to adjust SGO targets mid-year, when the phrase "meeting the needs of all students" was further narrowed to ensure reaching the minimal growth objective. Just as the leitmotif "working with student data", the phrase "meeting the needs of all students" was limited to the goal of ensuring that all students reach the SGO and therefore secure the teachers' teaching performance ratings. The stakes of the policy were too high for the

teachers to allow themselves to focus more broadly on the issue of dealing with student learning and growth and engage in a true data-driven instruction. Rather, they focused on the surface-level objective of reaching the learning target, even if that meant reducing the target to a minimal expectation for growth. The process which ended up being put in place by teachers and administrators satisfied each group's goal: teachers showed that students have reached the (mid-year adjusted) learning targets of the SGO, thus showing effective teaching to the SGO assessment, and administrators ensured that implementation of SGO supported instruction, based on specific shortcomings illustrated by assessment data. While the process that was put in place seemed to satisfy both groups' goals with respect to the SGO implementation, it overlooked the intention for finer-grained assessment data analysis, that could have supported instruction that is directly aimed at individual or small groups' of students' needs.

An additional factor in the IAs' inability to develop common understanding and belief about the purpose of the SGO, comes from the programmatic and curricular constraints in which the teachers operated. In the course of the interviews, a recurrent phrase – “a whole different category” was used by the teachers as a reference to their unique role in the school programs. For the most part teachers felt as though it was difficult for them to collaborate with other teachers, because they had dissimilar teaching situations and thus did not share similar learning goals for their students. This perception of being in a unique teaching role, juxtaposing their own goals against the goals of their colleagues, affected teachers' understanding of potential collaboration. For many of the teachers the implementation of the SGOs promoted more competition than collaboration,



as the conflicts between each other's SGOs became apparent. As each teacher faced limited instructional time with their students, teachers made sure to spend the majority of this time teaching to their own SGO assessment, ensuring that students reach the targets. In this competitive climate, collaboration based on student data or developing shared understanding about shoring up gaps in students' knowledge became unlikely, and compliance-driven meetings took over. Collaboration among the teachers turned into a surface-level practice, laced with the policy language, but completely missing the intended implementation outcome. In this respect, insights regarding the design of SGOs in a school with a large linguistically diverse population were constrained to the teachers' and administrators' meaning-making efforts, defined by their competing goals.

Fundamental conceptual change and restructuring of existing knowledge structures is a significant undertaking (Carey, 1985; Strike & Posner, 1985). Therefore, it seems improbable that in a single year of implementation, IAs would undergo substantial conceptual change and develop epistemologically different understanding of student growth and learning that has as its base evidence of learning in planning targeted instruction. The process is even further affected by the teachers' reported lack of control in the selection of targets for student growth. The lack of control hindered the development of policy buy-in among the teachers and re-emphasized the regulatory character of the mandated requirements. Instead of focusing on the functional aspects of the called-for changes to practice, teachers were pressed to push students to improve skillsets that would support enhanced test outcomes, rather than advance meaningful instruction and deep learning.

Given the regulatory pressures for the teachers, it is surprising that there was any evidence of a function-oriented understanding of the policy's intent, to the extent of acknowledging of the potential of the SGO policy to link assessment outcomes to enhanced instruction. This acknowledgement was more explicitly stated by the administrators, as they struggled to promote and foster discussion of direct connections between assessment data and learning needs.

In summary, the presented evidence in chapter 4 showed that reported practices missed substantially the intended purpose of the policy. The call for "an increase in the quality" of discussions surrounding student growth did not produce the intended outcome. The introduced data-chat practice might have looked as an effort to add depth and quality to the discussion of student learning gains and specific needs with respect to instruction, but in reality failed to produce consistent and relevant conversations about student learning growth. Perhaps, in a context of alleviated regulatory pressures associated with SGOs, IAs could have engaged in practices that were more closely aligned with functional understanding of the policy's guidelines, and which over time would have supported true change in understanding of student growth, including collaborative meetings, focused on analysis of evidence of learning and planning instruction based on addressing obvious gaps in students' knowledge.

**Perception of the Role of Standards and Control over Learning Targets, Assessments, and Scoring: Intended Outcomes 2 & 3**

Intended Outcomes 2 and 3, *Opportunity for Teachers to Engage in the Evaluation and Creation of Assessments*, and *Increased Knowledge and Focused Use of New Jersey's Curriculum Standards*, respectively address IAs' standards and assessment literacy. For purposes of clarity, it should be noted that because IAs believed that New Jersey's Curriculum Standards were strictly following CCSS, it was implied that the state's core curriculum standards were in fact the CCSS.

Stakeholders' understanding of the connections between the implementation of CCSS and the SGOs point to yet another example of adopting common terminology aligned with the policy language, yet not fully aligned with intended policy outcomes. The way educators understood the importance of the CCSS was indicative of the form-focused approach to SGO implementation. The teachers on one hand demonstrated understanding of the need to ground SGOs in grade level CCSS, referring to "standards-based SGOs" but on the other hand referred to the CCSS implementation as a completely separate initiative. This language was indicative of the one of the most obvious misconceptions about the SGOs – that they functioned as a separate initiative to be implemented *in addition* to the CCSS. Probing deeper into their understanding of the role of CCSS in the SGO policy implementation, it became obvious that teachers saw the connection between the SGOs and the CCSS on a surface level, connecting the SGOs to standards primarily in terms of whether the assessments used to measure student growth were said to be aligned to the CCSS. The use of the phrase "standards-based assessment"

was frequently brought up by teachers in connection to the SGOs. In speaking about assessment practice, the argument for using standards-based assessment was used by the teachers and by the administrators to affirm the quality of the SGO implementation process.

Teachers and administrators did not focus much on discussing the CCSS separately from assessment practices, and there is not much evidence of use of common language about learning standards (i.e., CCSS or New Jersey core curriculum standards), there is evidence of the lack of understanding of how implementation of the standards affected the SGOs' implementation, and more prominently on the way teachers and to some extent administrators separated the two initiatives. The CCSS, as an initiative that was around longer than the SGO, was talked about by the teachers with a level of confidence. Teachers confirmed that have already aligned their instruction to the CCSS, but did not elaborate how they went about the implementation process. When asked to describe how they connected the CCSS to the SGO development process, teachers offered the explanation that the assessments selected for SGO purposes were "aligned to the Common Core", the implication being that as long as they've selected standards-aligned assessments, they were integrating CCSS in the instructional process. The fact that the SGOs and the CCSS were two interrelated components of the comprehensive reform that were to be rolled out simultaneously was completely missed by the teachers. Instead of discussing the CCSS as a basis for selecting appropriate learning targets in the SGOs, educators spoke about the extent to which the SGO assessments (e.g., DRA, WIDA writing rubric, etc.) were aligned to the CCSS. In other words, because in the

teachers' view instruction was reduced to focus exclusively on teaching to the SGO assessments (which they were told were aligned to the CCSS), teachers felt confident that they are *de facto* implementing the CCSS along with the SGOs.

This approach to standards implementation, could also be explained by regulatory pressures and the lack of time to engage in deep discussion about what the process of “alignment to standards” would mean for instructional practice. Time was also of the essence and the effort to engage in a process of unpacking CCSS and breaking them down into learning targets was substituted for simply selecting an assessment that was thought to be aligned to standards (and thus complying with the policy’s message). This aspect of standards implementation demonstrates the simplified approach to adopting changes by drawing surface-level, but obvious connections to the policy language. The use of the catch phrase “use of standards-based assessment” evoked language from the SGO policy, and made it appear as though both instruction and assessment were grounded in the CCSS.

For the administrators, the use of this language about standards-based assessments also ensured compliance with the implementation requirements, as understood by them, but importantly this approach to implementation supported students' improved performance on the state test. One of the differences in administrators’ (in contrast to the teachers’) understanding of the connections between CCSS and SGOs is the notion of convergence of standards, learning targets and assessment. However, despite the evidence of understanding of the complementary character of standards, learning targets, instructional approaches, and assessment, there was no evidence of administration

enforcing understanding and true alignment between these different aspects of the SGO process. The lack of such evidence points to the potential for some degree of administrators' rudimentary functional understanding of these requirements.

The IAs' form-focused understanding of the need to demonstrate explicit connections to standards, despite the differences in motivation, was limited by the regulatory pressures of the policy and its assumed purpose. The lack of teachers' understanding of the integration between both suggests that educators had developed only surface understandings of the purpose of both initiatives and the adopted practices were limited to form-focused approaches to implementation. Functional understanding of the role of CCSS in development of learning targets and expected outcomes failed to occur for both teachers and administrators.

In terms of engaging in evaluation and creation of assessments (Outcome 2), IAs missed the opportunity to develop functional understanding of the policy's intent. Consistent with previous findings in policy implementation, IAs incorporated only slight changes to their existing practice (Spillane, 2000; Spillane et al., 2002, Coburn 2004), by utilizing already used assessments for SGO purposes, and labeling these "SGO assessments", implying that they have adapted the assessments to the purposes of the SGO. The commonly used phrase "not to reinvent the wheel" was used by both teachers and administrators to defend the decision to name commonly used assessments "SGO assessments". Going back to the motivations behind the adoption of this form-focused practice, it made sense for the teachers to use assessments they felt "safe" administering, scoring and predicting growth on these assessments, which was important in terms of

their concerns with showing learning growth. For the administrators, although their motivations were different, the solution of adopting this form-focused practice made sense because these assessments showed students' progress in developing a skillset that would support improved results on the state test. This approach to assessments implementation, as they related to the SGOs, links back to the strong regulatory pressures associated with the SGOs, and the implications of the assessment results for evaluation instructional quality.

Another relevant issue is the teachers' perception of the top-down selection of SGO assessment, as it is in direct contradiction with the policy's intention for in-depth engagement with evaluation and consideration of quality assessment to track student learning gains. Not only do teachers not engage in a process of selection of learning targets (which were selected by the school administration), but teachers reported that assessment selection was also done at the school level, denying teachers the opportunity to consider, develop or adapt quality assessments aligned with their specific SGO. Further, the reported lack of control over selected learning targets and assessments to measure student learning was detrimental in terms of buy-in. Teachers' perceptions of not being instrumental in selecting learning targets and assessments, in addition to the reported lack of sufficient information about SGO requirements, contributed to teachers' beliefs about the purpose of the SGO and the mistrust they developed with regard to the potential of the policy to support improved educational opportunities for the students.

Perhaps in response to the fact that they were not involved in the process of selection of learning targets, as well as SGO assessments, teachers selected modest

growth estimates of student growth, which felt “safe” for the student to be able to reach. Given teachers’ motivations, the primary use of the SGO process was to demonstrate and guarantee learning growth. This was in direct conflict to the administrators’ goal – to guarantee students’ growth in terms of performance on the state tests. In this aspect of the SGO implementation process the conflict between regulatory versus normative pressures is particularly obvious. Because of their beliefs about the purpose of the SGO, teachers were less motivated by their commitment to ensuring students’ learning gains, and focused on achievable targets.

The same concerns and motivations were demonstrated by the IAs with respect to their approach to scoring assessments, and more specifically their concerns about the reliability of the scoring procedures. These inconsistencies, added to the fact that there was a complete lack of external checking of the SGO assessment results were bothersome for the IAs. Both teachers and administrators talked about their deep concerns about the level of consistency of assessment scoring. As with other aspects of the implementation process, both groups of stakeholders used common vocabulary to express their concerns. Both the teachers and administrators talked about the “validity” of the process, describing minimal or no assessment scoring training. Interestingly, teachers were concerned that scoring was at the discretion of their colleagues, leaving many opportunities for “fixing” the assessment results and thus invalidating the SGO ratings. Administrators, on the other hand, were more concerned that the inconsistent assessment results would be less predictive of the students’ performance on the state test. The teachers’ and



administrators' contrasting beliefs about the purpose of the SGOs, led consistently to mismatched interpretation of the components of the SGO process.

The case of implementing form-focused assessment practices, is perhaps one of the most obvious surface-level changes to practice resulting from the regulatory pressure of the policy. After stating that the SGOs policy has significantly changed their practice, both in terms of teaching, and assessment, teachers were able to name only minimal changes they had adopted as a response to the policy message. Not only did they utilize data from assessments with which they were familiar and had administered before, but their instruction only shifted in terms of narrowing the scope of the skills taught to directly link instructional practice to the SGO assessment.

### **Collaboration between Teachers and Supervisors: Intended Outcomes 5 & 6**

Similar to the issue of collaborative practice among teachers, which was the focus of intended outcomes 1 and 4 (i.e., *Increase in the quality of discussions surrounding student growth*, and *Deeper understanding of the academic strengths and weaknesses of students*), the collaborations between teachers and administrators were an important focal point of the SGO policy. Intended outcomes 5 and 6 (i.e., *Clearer indications of when and how to adjust instruction to meet students' needs*, and *Increased opportunities to reflect on student performance and teaching practice*) addressed the need of a teachers' and administrators' joint effort to engage in meaningful instructional consideration and planning, based on evidence of student performance.

The teacher-administrator collaborations were described differently by the two groups of IAs. The administrators spoke about differentiation of learning needs in terms of how the SGOs helped promote accountability by allowing teachers to adjust the growth estimates for students while still setting rigorous expectations of performance on the assessment. Teachers on the other hand, spoke about the possibility of adjusting the SGOs in terms of setting realistic and achievable learning expectations for students.

Overall, because of the top-down manner in which the SGO implementation was rolled out, including administrator-selected learning targets and assessments, the activities and practices adopted as a result of SGO implementation were to an extent inadequate to support the instructional process. As with other top-down initiatives with broad recommendations for how intended practices should play out in local contexts (including preexisting curricular and programmatic constraints as well as teachers' prior experiences, beliefs, and attitudes), true change in teaching practice was difficult (Darling-Hammond, & Berry, 1988). Following a culture of instructional policy roll-out, educational policies have traditionally emphasized putting in place control systems, constraining opportunities for teachers to collaborate or invest in quality policy implementation (Darling-Hammond, 1989, 1990).

The issue of adopting a top-down approach to implementation is also an issue of defining more and less powerful voices of authority. As Coburn (2006) observed, “all voices are not equal in the social negotiation of meaning” (p. 373). Studying one school's response to the California Reading Initiative, she concluded that meaning-making is shaped by school leaders’ “contingent authority”, creating powerful frameworks within

which educators roll out new policy initiatives. Similar to Coburn's (2006) findings, the implementation of the SGO measures was defined by the administrators' voices of power which provided a contextual narrative for the need of the SGOs. Further, administrators shaped the immediate goals of implementation and "strongly encouraged" specific choices of learning targets, assessments, and collaborative activities. Although beyond the scope of this study, voices of power, both in terms of "teachers versus administrators" dynamics, as well as other dynamics of power (e.g., general education versus ESL teachers) are a useful lens to apply to the study of policy meaning-making.

With regard to comparisons of teachers' versus administrators' perspectives, referring to the same practice - the mid-year SGO adjustment meetings, administrators focused on how this process helped keep teachers accountable for student growth, and teachers focused on the possibility to show adequate growth as a measure of teaching performance. The mid-year review as a response to the policy call for adopting differentiated approach to learning needs entirely missed the intended consideration of differentiating various instructional interventions to support individual or groups of students so that they can be kept on target. The mid-year review was rather a re-action to the obtained performance scores of the students, rather than a pro-active consideration of targeted interventions used to support students who are failing to meet the initially set targets, which would be based on the evidence of the available assessment data. It not only excluded consideration of differentiated instructional interventions, but in some cases actually entailed teachers' demanding the exclusion of students from their SGOs, based on either requests for Special Education services, or on the basis of limited school

attendance. In this respect the form-based understanding of what it meant to focus on students' differentiated needs emphasized teachers' goals to "look good on paper", rather than plan for and supporting the diverse learning needs of the students. Interestingly, this was to an extent true for the administrators, who rather than focusing on consideration of instructional interventions to keep students on track, saw the process as a regulatory requirement, which they (i.e., the principal) implemented in its most basic form. A potential reason for this was described by one of the teachers, who noted that the administrators' motivation is affected by their own performance evaluation rating, because the principal had "his own SGO to complete".

An important issue raised with regard to the mid-year opportunity to reflect on student performance and adjust learning growth estimates was the concern about over-referral of students to special services. As with other aspects of surface-level adjustment of SGO learning growth estimates as a mechanism to ensure high attainment of the SGO target, there was evidence presented that some teachers dealt with the challenge of supporting all students' attainment of the SGO by eliminating low performers from their initial SGO pool. Students were excluded from the SGO through the mid-year SGO adjustment based on concerns about special needs and insufficient time spent in the classroom. This response to the pressure of preparing all students for satisfactory performance on the assessments, was deemed by administrators to be in direct conflict with the intent of the policy to meet the needs of all students and introduce a form of accountability to the performance of even the lowest achieving students.

Similar to the case with the data-chat meetings, the mid-year review meeting was based on the educators' prior beliefs about and experience with implementation of accountability measures. Instead of engaging in deep collaborative efforts to implement true differentiation based on evidence of student growth in mid-year, educators gravitated toward familiar practices. They used the mid-year meetings to adjust growth estimates so that students would reach the SGO targets, and ensure that based on these student achievements they receive the highest evaluation ratings. The so called "data-chats" were regularly scheduled meetings to discuss data, but from the teachers' perspective these meetings were ineffective and superficially conducted. Instead of focusing on interpretation of student academic needs, the administrators (the principal and the vice-principal) focused on the idea that assessment results show specific gaps in students' knowledge and discussed ways to address these gaps in order for students to improve assessment performance.

In terms of teacher-supervisor collaboration, the data-chats seemed to be an adequate response to the policy's call for working with evidence of learning to support students' growth, and like the administrators, teachers described the "data-chat" meetings as a way to connect assessment performance results to instruction, but this work seemed deeply embedded in the teachers' goal to support improved SGO assessment scores, even if this meant to narrow their instruction to simple teaching to the SGO assessment. In this respect, although form-focused in their essence, the "data-chats" were useful for the teachers, and provided an opportunity to focus on pursuing their goals with regard to the policy.

Supporting evidence for some level of rudimentary function-oriented understanding of the policy comes from interviews of the two ESL teachers in the sample, who expressed regret that there are not engaging in broad and complex instructional practice, because they are constrained by the need to show learning growth in a very specific and narrow area of instruction - writing. Addressing these issues, the teachers commented on the potential of the policy to uncover and support instruction in specific learning gaps by looking at evidence of student learning. Moreover, the teachers acknowledged that the process could be especially beneficial for low-achieving students. However, because of the high stakes attached to the SGO policy, they could not afford to engage in this type of work and felt compelled to adhere to more form-focused approaches to implementation.

Although the teachers felt the regulatory pressure to adopt a form-focused response to the policy, at least some of them spoke about a more function-focused understanding, which they felt they could not act upon because of the strong pressures associated with the SGO measures. In particular, two teachers spoke about the good intentions of the policy, which they saw as impossible to implement because of the high stakes implications. Making a comparison with the *No Child Left Behind* initiative, one teacher spoke explicitly about the contradiction of normative versus regulatory pressures similar to the ones described by Coburn (2004).

Overall, the teachers and the administrators felt that the regulatory pressure of the policy was forcing them to engage in actions which at least on the surface complied with the requirement for joint teacher-administrator effort to assess student progress, revise

expected growth along the SGOs, and support the learning progressions of the students. Due to the strong need to be in compliance with the policy's official timeline for review and revision of the SGOs, the educators engaged in the mid-year meetings despite their diverging understanding of the purpose of these meetings. Because of time constraints and the fluid understanding of what the mid-year review should entail in terms of actual revisions, many of the teachers had a brief meeting with the principal, in which they stated their preference for either lowering the SGO's expected growth for their students, or if they felt students were adequately progressing and on target, to keep the initially stated expected growth. In reality, the process was as simple as scaling back from two DRA levels to selecting a single level on the same assessment. As the evidence presented in chapter 4 suggests, an in-depth, functional understanding of the use of adjusting instructional practice and targets to offer optimal educational opportunities, did not correspond to the high stakes character of the SGOs and IAs focused exclusively on compliance-driven activities.

### **Professional Learning: Intended Outcome 7**

The last intended Outcome, *More Thoughtful Professional Planning for the Next School Year* addressed the idea of connecting professional development planning to the SGO results. As with other intended outcomes of the policy, the meaning of using SGO data for professional learning purposes was only hypothetically considered by the educators. The administrators saw the potential of the policy to inform teachers' professional learning and growth (Delvaux, Vanhoof, Tuytens, Vekeman, Devos, & Van Petegem, 2013), and spoke about specific (although hypothetical) ways in which this could be done

by looking at assessment results (Coggshall, Rasmussen, Colton, Milton, Jacques, 2012). However, in reality they did not reach this stage of implementation. When speaking about the potential of the SGOs to inform planning for professional learning, both teachers and administrators spoke about using evidence from the SGO to plan focused and specific PD. However, despite the common language they used, teachers and administrators saw the actual efforts to use SGO data for PD planning very differently.

The only actual activity, somewhat relative to this intended outcome, was the requirement for the teachers to upload their SGO data into the Teachscape platform (used for management and organization of evidence of teaching quality), for the purposes of teaching evaluation. In this respect, the evidence collected through the SGO process could potentially be assessed and used for professional development purposes (or purposes other than teacher evaluation) in the future. This activity, while in compliance with policy requirements was limited to the mechanics of data storing, and did not entail any type of data review.

This was not surprising, given that implementation of deep changes to practice, such as engaging in SGO data interpretation, required a considerable level of conceptual change, needed to support deep understanding of the intent of the policy. Similar to other studies of policy implementation (Coburn, 2004), the IAs (and particularly the teachers), were more likely to respond to the policy's call in ways that assimilates the policy message into their preexisting instructional frameworks than to significantly change their beliefs about the purpose of instruction and student growth itself.



Despite the lack of any significant adoption of practices in response to the professional learning aspect of the SGO policy, teachers and administrators addressed the potential for the SGO measures to inform professional development planning in the future. In this sense, I argue that the data shows some evidence of function-focused understanding of the professional learning aspect of the SGOs. This is perhaps related to the fact that teacher evaluation as a part of the educational reform is described as a tool to improve instructional practice and ultimately support learning in the classroom. Given that the SGO measures are an integral part of teaching effectiveness evaluation, educators have been given many examples and explanations of how the use of quality evidence of teaching and learning shortcomings could inform and potentially support targeted professional development.

In this respect, educators possessed the language to describe the potential of the SGO data to be used for professional development purposes. Similar to other aspects of the implementation process, educators were equipped with common descriptors, or cognitive hooks that were used to talk about the potential connections between SGO data and its role in informing gaps in instructional process, which in theory could lead to recommendations for professional development. However, because of the pressures associated with the SGOs and the issues with systematicity and validity of the measures, educators were skeptical about the quality of the SGO data and thus its ability to provide useful information for professional development.

Perhaps in a situation, less focused on the regulatory pressures associated with SGOs, IAs could have considered the use of SGO evidence to interpret possible teaching

gaps and use the information to plan for professional learning, thus acting on their functional understanding of the policy's guidelines. However, because of the pressures associated with the purpose of the SGO results, teachers could not afford either documenting or discussing gaps in students' learning or the quality of their teaching, as this evidence would have been detrimental to their teaching quality ratings.

### **Adopted Practices in Response to SGO Policy Call - Summary**

The findings of this research are discussed in terms of the overwhelming evidence of form-focused understanding of the SGOs policy's. The adopted practices, reported by IAs, were limited to surface-level approaches to implementation. The study's main argument is that this is a direct result from the regulatory pressure of the policy's purpose, as understood by the teachers, and to some extent by the administrators.

Educators, and especially the teachers, did not develop sufficient buy-in in the SGOs to begin to consider function-focused aspects of the policy. Although the data show some basic acknowledgement of some of the normative aspects of the policy, IAs focused on regulatory pressures. Some educators articulated the potential of the policy to play a game-changing role in how they understand teaching and learning, as well as using evidence of student needs to plan for professional learning. However, the teachers pointed out that because of the purpose of the policy, related to evaluation of teaching practice, the potential of the policy to improve the practice of using evidence of learning to plan instruction was unfeasible.

The balance between form- versus functional understanding of the policy's intent was examined for all of the intended outcomes of the policy, and evidence of the use of

common language was discussed in terms of the beliefs and motivations of the IAs and their actual attitudes toward implementation. To some degree their attitudes were constrained by their role in the school (e.g., teacher or administrator), but also by the curricular context (e.g., ESL versus bilingual program versus dual language program etc.). Findings from this study converge with other research on policy implementation, especially in terms of the effects of regulatory pressures on policy implementation. As with other reported research, there was little function-focused understanding being developed in the initial stages of implementation (i.e., the first year of the roll-out). Constructivist models of information processing explain this minimal change in conceptual understanding (Spillane et al., 2002, Carey, 1985; Strike & Posner, 1985) with the need for continuous engagement with the deeper considerations and policy intent, as well as with ongoing cycles of positive feedback from adopted practices.

### **Study Limitations**

It is important to consider that this study employed a qualitative case study approach to inquire into the processes through which implementation agents engaged in policy meaning-making, and thus the findings are situated in the context of the local implementation, including the specific institutional constraints relative to the school setting, curricular requirements, and school programming. In this respect, although findings are discussed in the larger context of high stakes policy implementation, and specifically in relation to other recent findings from the cognitive approach to implementation research, the results of this study have limited generalizability to other districts, states, or the nation. However, the lessons from this study may help others

understand the conditions surrounding similar types of policy implementation efforts, as the results of this study not only confirm existing findings from the cognitive framework for policy meaning-making (Spillane, 2000, 2002; Spillane and Callahan 2000; Coburn, 2004, 2006; Hill 2001; Hill and Ball 2004), but also extend some of the main theoretical propositions about how teachers and administrators' beliefs and motivations with regard to implementation shape their meaning-making.

Discussion of research findings' convergence with existing theoretical propositions, helps strengthen these theories and expand their practical applicability (Firestone, 1993). Certainly, schools that have similar demographic make-up and provide similar curricula and programs, and are in the initial stages of policy implementation, might show similar implementation outcomes with respect to the educators' meaning-making process. With consideration of specific findings, highlighting how policy interpretation was approached by the teachers and the administrators, the findings of the research could be extended to policy meaning-making of educators in other school settings, serving diverse students, either ELs or with other diverse learning needs. Despite its limited generalizability, the study provides a level of understanding of uniform issues, especially in understanding of the practical implementation of complex networks of related policies (Honig, 2006). The study's insights allow to generate hypotheses about the process of new policy meaning-making and implementation as it informs participants' understanding of the policy's purpose, which ultimately affected participants' implementation efforts. Moreover, the various aspects of the implementation were disentangled to the extent the data allowed, and insights from the data analysis were

cast into the larger context of policy implementation. Specific issues in policy implementation were discussed with respect to wider trends in high-stakes policy implementation in educational settings.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions of this study are framed around the research questions, and have the goal to provide a distilled summary of the findings as they relate to the wider context of high-stakes policy implementation. Although the formulation of explicit recommendations for practice are beyond the scope of this work, some of the conclusions package practical implications for policy implementation, especially as they relate to the types of motivations of key IAs. As many of the findings of this study are grounded in the IAs' beliefs about the purpose of implemented policy, the section also includes considerations of further inquiry about mechanisms for development of IAs' buy-in and articulation of factors affecting IAs' belief systems.

**Understanding of SGO requirements.** The first research question, guiding this research study, raised the issue of how IAs made sense of the mandated requirements for the SGOs as measures of teaching effectiveness. Converging with findings in other policy implementation studies conducted within the cognitive framework for policy meaning-making (Hill, 2001; Hill & Ball, 2004; Coburn, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006; Coburn & Stein, 2006), understanding was shaped by IAs' prior experiences, existing beliefs and by their role in the implementation process. In addition, IAs developed understandings about the mandated requirements based on adopted common descriptors of needed changes, or the

cognitive hooks (Callahan and Spillane, 2000) used to attach actual activities to terminology used in the policy documentation.

In addition to the constructivist models, which were used to explain the results of the study, the discussion offers some consideration of the motivations of IAs that played a significant role in interpreting policy requirements. In fact, because of the IAs' beliefs about the purpose of the policy, they developed motivations with regard to their own role in the implementation process. On one hand, teachers were told SGO procedures would support learners by directly connecting instruction to learning progress, on the other – they were apprehensive that SGO results would be used to rate their teaching effectiveness. Thus, although educators showed some level of functional understanding of the policy, they proceeded to implement SGOs with an exclusive focus on attainment of the set learning targets.

The case with the administrators meaning-making was similar. They did acknowledge the need for improved practice in assessment literacy and work with student data to target gaps in instructional practice. However, because of the high stakes of the policy, they struggled to implement collaborative efforts to look at data and engage in the so called data-chats, because the teachers did not believe they could afford to even admit shortcoming in instruction, and were reluctant to discuss openly student learning gains. Although administrators downplayed the role of SGOs for teaching effectiveness rating purposes and ended up not using them at all, there was a complete miscommunication about the reason why. While the principal wanted to give the teachers the opportunity to look at the student data without the pressure of the performance review, and genuinely

engage in interpretation of the evidence coming from the SGO assessment, this decision came late in the process. The overwhelming majority of the teachers were already convinced that the SGO assessment results are at best not valid, and at worse - “fixed”. Therefore, for the teachers it did not make sense to waste time analyzing assessment results which they did not think offered good evidence of student learning.

By including a motivational aspect of the meaning-making process, the study offers important insight into IAs’ fragile sense of buy-in and trust, an important aspect of policy implementation. In this sense, the ambiguity of the policy purpose (e.g., measuring teaching effectiveness versus monitoring of students’ learning growth) was detrimental to the meaning-making process. As pointed out by Cohen and Moffitt (2009), the ambiguity of the policy intent takes away from the strength of the message about its true purpose. Left to their own interpretation of its purpose, teachers and administrators developed diverging understanding with respect to the implementation process. While both groups focused on their own goals, they acknowledged that there might be a deeper dimension of policy purpose, but because of the regulatory pressures, they had little opportunity to focus on in-depth conversation about student growth and use of learning evidence to support student needs.

In this respect, it may be worth further discussing the findings of the study within motivational theory frameworks, which would add additional insights into the processes of meaning-making. Although beyond the scope of this study, social-cognitive approaches to motivational theory (Dweck, & Leggett, 1988, Dweck, 1999) can further help explain IAs’ meaning-making. Interpretation of the needed changes in terms of

incentive theories (e.g., intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations) (Ryan, & Deci, 2000) could possibly connect these motivational dimensions to the notion of form- versus functional understanding of the SGO requirements. The practical implications of known theories of self-efficacy and self-regulation (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman, Boekarts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000) could add to the understanding of the process of reconciliation of external and internal motivators and potentially inform recommendations with respect to high stakes policy implementation. These theoretical frameworks could further frame the study of IAs' meaning-making process and the way meaning of purpose is constructed, planned for, and enacted.

The study reiterated the need to account for IAs' frames of reference, including the importance of contextual factors, such as role in the implementation process and available resources. In addition, it highlighted the role of IAs' motivation, goals, and beliefs. It clearly defined how teachers' and administrators' beliefs determined the types of practical responses they were able to carry out.

**SGO requirements contribution to quality implementation.** The second research question, dealt with the IAs' understanding of the requirements for SGO, and with the extent to which they warranted (from IAs' perspective) quality policy implementation. As a result of the heavy regulatory pressures of the policy, which consequently fostered a compliance-driven approach to adopting changes in practice, the quality of implementation was understood in terms of introducing all required components of the policy, i.e., selection of learning targets, quality assessment, collaborative efforts and professional learning. The evidence on implementing the



required SGO components offered insight into how changes to practice connected with the teachers' and the administrators' goals with respect to the policy. It showed that despite the common language which both groups used to describe the activities, there were deep divides between the teachers' and the administrators' beliefs about the purpose of these components.

Thus, developed interpretations of the policy message, as well as the adopted practices by both teachers and administrators did not engage with in-depth functional understandings of needed changes to practice, but instead focused on surface level, form-focused modifications. Although the data presented some level of evidence of rudimentary function-focused understanding in both groups of IAs, the response to this question is limited to the compliance aspect of implementation, as this was the overall approach by both groups of stakeholders. This is especially notable in the stakeholders' shared vocabulary, which seemingly linked implementation activities to the policy language. The practices adopted in response to the intended outcomes (i.e., learning targets, selection of assessment, collaboration, and use of professional learning for improving instructional outcomes) provide evidence for the compliance-driven approach to implementation. Therefore, in terms of contribution to quality implementation, the IAs' understanding of the requirements, and their meaning in the implementation process, was defined by their respective perceptions of purpose of the SGOs.

In summary, the required SGO components contributed greatly to the stakeholders' perceptions of quality implementation, because the quality of the implementation process was understood in terms of surface-level changes. The presented

evidence from the interviews suggests that the IAs were able to construct learning targets (although based on modest growth estimates), select standards-aligned assessments (although not directly connected to students' learning needs), engage in collaborative practices, which at least formally looked like the ones called for in the policy documents, and discuss the SGO process as a contributor to the professional learning process in the school. From a compliance perspective, the implementation of all required components did bring about an implementation process that not only looked like, but was described by IAs with the language of the policy documents. Based on Elmore's (2005) idea of contradiction between regulatory and programmatic or normative (Coburn, 2004) policy characteristics, the potential of deep functional understanding of the policy intent was unlikely. Interestingly, both teachers and administrators showed some level of such understanding, but acknowledged that the regulatory pressures of the policy were too demanding to allow for opportunities to engage in consideration of these types of changes to practice.

**Purpose of the SGO policy.** The third question of the study dealt with the extent to which IAs' understanding of the purpose of the SGOs aligned with officially intended outcomes, and included sub-questions about additional factors that played a role in the implementation process, such as the challenges of serving a linguistically diverse population of students. The last research question is intertwined with the previous two and informs the interpretation of the data, obtained by the research participants.

The apparent misalignment between intended outcomes and IAs' perception of the policy's purpose, was clearly reflected at the very end of the first year of

implementation, when opportunities for discussion of the SGO data were entirely overlooked. In a way, the obvious disregard for the SGO data confirmed what teachers had come to believe since the beginning of the implementation process – that there was no intention to use insights from the SGO to support planning for professional development, grounded in evidence of student needs. Although reasonable explanations for the decision to skip the review of SGO data were put forth by the administrators, the decision confirmed teachers' beliefs about the purpose of the SGO – that it was intended to supply a portion of their yearly performance rating.

This portion of the SGO implementation process was largely due to a miscommunication between teachers and administrators, and was a result of the principal's struggle to reconcile and effectively communicate the expectations with regard to the two ambiguous aspects of the policy - i.e., the performance review as an accountability pressure to improve the diverse learners' academic abilities, *and* the opportunity of the SGO process to highlight the importance of linking evidence of learning to targeted instructional planning. While he thought it was important for teachers to experience the pressure of the performance rating, he ended up not using the SGO results for performance measuring purposes, inviting teachers to genuinely engage in analyzing and interpreting SGO data. However, the teachers' perceptions about the quality and validity of the SGO assessment data was already compromised. The only purpose teachers saw for it was the evaluation of teaching effectiveness and, unfortunately in their view, it was overlooked.

Overall the adopted changes to practice varied substantially from the intended outcomes of the policy. This was due primarily to the strong regulatory pressures, associated with the policy, and the urgency it created with respect to issues of compliance with requirements. Although understanding and attitudes of IAs varied (based on their roles, attitudes and beliefs), both teachers and administrators focused exclusively on form-focused changes to practice. As the language they used to talk about these changes was anchored in the policy documents, connections to the policy requirements were present, although interpretation of what should be done in response to these requirements widely missed the normative aspect of the SGO policy.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Guide Instruments**

## **Round I Teacher Interview Guide**

### **Advancing Teacher Expertise in the Development of Standards-Based Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) in English Language Arts (ELA) for Elementary School Linguistically Diverse Students**

Research Participant Name:

Interview Date:

#### **1. Demographics**

##### **a). Education background**

- What was your undergraduate major?
- What is the highest academic degree you have earned?

##### **b). Professional experience**

- How many years have you taught?
- Similar or different student population?
- What grade level(s) are you currently teaching?

#### **2. The process of developing of the SGOs**

##### **a). Comparison with previous years: what is different?**



- How did you learn about the requirement for developing SGOs?
- What is your understanding of the purpose of the SGOs?
- In what ways, if any, are the SGOs different from the instructional objectives you've selected for your students in previous years?
- In terms of the requirement for alignment with Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
- In terms of the requirement for the SGOs to serve as indicators of teaching effectiveness?
- Have you changed the process of instructional objectives selection based on the purpose of the SGOs this year?

b). Opportunities to learn about the new policy

- What types of training have you attended?
- Content
- On Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
- On how SGO scores are collected/computed to contribute to teacher evaluation ratings?
- Format: state-funded, out-of-district, school-based?
- Please describe the quality of training attended with respect to your own practice.

- Is there a significant change in the process of selection of appropriate ELA instructional objectives that have been set for students in comparison to previous years?
- How does this affect your instructional practice?
- How do you think this will affect your students' performance on standardized assessments?
- How do you think this will affect your summative teacher evaluation rating?
- During the first year of implementation of standards-based SGOs as a measure of student learning and teacher effectiveness, the NJDOE has made available for school districts a variety of materials to help guide the implementation process. The next few questions ask about the usefulness of these materials.
- Can you describe how various materials and documents (e.g., the SGOs handbook) released by NJDOE have been used in your school to support the implementation of standards-based objectives?
- To what extent was the handbook useful? Please explain your answer
- Please describe the model you are using for ELA SGO's. Which model for ELA SGOs are you using – simple or tiered?
- Please describe how were the ELA pre-assessment(s) selected (self-selected or suggested by administration?)
- How were the pre-assessments administered?

- Are they providing an appropriate assessment baseline for your students' learning in ELA this year? Why or why not?
  - Please describe how ELA post-assessment(s) will be selected (self-selected or suggested by administration?)
  - How will the post-assessments be administered?
  - Will they be providing an appropriate learning end-point to reflect your students' academic growth in ELA this year? Why or why not?
  - Please describe what other materials were available to you in the process of development of SGOs?
  - Can you please describe how useful were they?
  - When you developed your SGOs, did you use ELA materials from the model curriculum web site, available through NJDOE web site?
  - If yes, what kind? Were some materials more useful than others?
  - If yes, how does the content of the model curriculum web site align to the district-adopted ELA curriculum?
- c). What is the biggest challenge that you personally face with respect to the implementation of the ELA SGOs?
- How could this be addressed in your school?

**3. Level of collegiality and collaboration in the process of implementation of SGOs**

a). To what extent are opportunity(ies) for staff to meet and work on the development of SGOs sufficient?

- How do you understand the goals of these meetings?
- Please describe the types of topics discussed?
- Who is facilitating these meetings? What is their role in the school and district?
- To what extent are these meetings productive? What, if any tasks are accomplished?

b). Have you participated in any other collaborative SGO-related efforts in your school/district? If yes, were they helpful? If yes, in what ways?

c). Have you had informal opportunities to share questions/concerns/information regarding the SGOs? How would you describe these opportunities?

- What do you understand is the level of support from the state?
- Types of materials & resources provided
- Types of workshops and training
- What do you understand is the level of support from school-level and district-level administration?
- Clear expectations from school staff

- Provision of relevant training for staff
- What do you understand is the level of support of your immediate professional learning community? Larger community?
- Opportunities to engage in continuous collaborative work to unpack the CCSS?
- Opportunities to engage in continuous collaborative work to establish challenging but attainable instructional objectives?
- What has been the most helpful activity/resource in the process of SGOs implementation?

## **Round I Administrator Interview Guide**

### **Advancing Teacher Expertise in the Development of Standards-Based Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) in English Language Arts (ELA) for Elementary School Linguistically Diverse Students**

Research Participant Name:

Interview Date:

#### **1. Demographics**

a). Education background

- What was your undergraduate major?
- What is the highest academic degree you have earned?

b). Professional experience

- How many years have you worked in your current role?
- In the same district?

## **2. The process of developing of the SGOs**

### **a). Comparison with previous years: what is different?**

- How did you learn about the requirement for developing SGOs?
- What is your understanding of the purpose of the SGOs?
- In what ways, if any, are the SGOs different from the instructional objectives in previous years?
- In terms of the requirement for alignment with Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
- In terms of the requirement for the SGOs to serve as indicators of teaching effectiveness?
- Have you changed the process of instructional objectives selection based on the purpose of the SGOs this year?

### **b). Opportunities to learn about the new policy**

- What types of training have you attended?
- On Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
- On how SGO scores are collected/computed to contribute to teacher evaluation ratings?
- Format: state-funded, out-of-district, school-based?
- Please describe the quality of training attended with respect to your own practice.
- Is there a significant change in the process of selection of appropriate ELA instructional objectives that have been set for students in comparison to previous years?
- How does this affect your responsibilities?
- How do you think this will affect your students' performance on standardized assessments?

- How do you think this will affect summative evaluation ratings of teachers?
- During the first year of implementation of standards-based SGOs as a measure of student learning and teacher effectiveness, the NJDOE has made available for school districts a variety of materials to help guide the implementation process. The next few questions ask about the usefulness of these materials.
- Can you describe how various materials and documents (e.g., the SGOs handbook) released by NJDOE have been used in your school to support the implementation of standards-based objectives?
- To what extent was the handbook useful? Please explain your answer.
- Please describe the model you are using for ELA SGO's. Which model for ELA SGOs are you using – simple or tiered?
- Please describe how were the ELA pre-assessment(s) selected (self-selected or suggested by administration).
- How were the pre-assessments administered?
- Are they providing an appropriate assessment baseline for students' learning in ELA this year? Why or why not?
- Please describe how ELA post-assessment(s) will be selected (self-selected or suggested by administration?)
- How will the post-assessments be administered?
- Will they be providing an appropriate learning end-point to reflect your students' academic growth in ELA this year? Why or why not?



- Please describe what other materials were available to you in the process of development of SGOs?
- Can you please describe how useful were they?
- When developing SGOs, were ELA materials from the model curriculum (available through NJDOE web site) used?
- If yes, what kind? Were some materials more useful than others?
- If yes, how does the content of the model curriculum web site align to the district-adopted ELA curriculum?

c). What is the biggest challenge that you personally face with respect to the implementation of the ELA SGOs?

- How could this be addressed in your school?

### **3. Level of collegiality and collaboration in the process of implementation of SGOs**

a). To what extent are opportunity(ies) for staff to meet and work on the development of SGOs sufficient?

- How do you understand the goals of these meetings?
- Please describe the types of topics discussed?
- Who is facilitating these meetings? What is their role in the school and district?
- To what extent are these meetings productive? What, if any tasks are accomplished?

b). Have you participated in any other collaborative SGO-related efforts in your school/district? If yes, were they helpful? If yes, in what ways?

c). Have you had informal opportunities to share questions/concerns/information regarding the SGOs? How would you describe these opportunities?

- What do you understand is the level of support from the state?
- Types of materials & resources provided
- Types of workshops and training
- What do you understand is the level of support from school-level and district-level administration?
- Clear expectations from school staff
- Provision of relevant training for staff
- What do you understand is the level of support of your immediate professional learning community? Larger community?
- Opportunities to engage in continuous collaborative work to unpack the CCSS?
- Opportunities to engage in continuous collaborative work to establish challenging but attainable instructional objectives?
- What has been the most helpful activity/resource in the process of SGOs implementation?

## **Round II Teacher Interview Guide**

### **Advancing Teacher Expertise in the Development of Standards-Based Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) in English Language Arts (ELA) for Elementary School Linguistically Diverse Students**

1. The SGOs as used to measure teaching effectiveness are designed to show evidence of student growth. In this respect, can you please define what student growth means to you?
2. Is the definition of student growth under the SGO initiative different from your own understanding of what it should entail? How? [PROBE about achievement]
3. To what extent is student growth as measured by the SGO indicative of teaching effectiveness?
4. For the groups of students who are being assigned similar SGOs in language arts, have you used similar baseline assessments? What were the kinds of baseline assessments used?
5. Can you please describe how similar your SGO pre- and post-assessments are?
6. How do you think your students will do on the SGOs post-assessment?
7. What opportunities have you had to discuss and debrief the process of monitoring of students' progress through the year with your principal/supervisor?

8. What opportunities have you had to discuss and debrief the process of monitoring of students' progress through the year with other third grade teachers?
9. Were you offered an opportunity to modify your SGO mid-year? Did you modify the SGO?
10. Can you please describe the reason why you modified the SGO?
11. Was the decision based on the mid-year benchmarks or other assessments?
12. Was it suggested by your supervisor?
13. Can you please describe the process by which you modified the SGO?
14. How has the SGO initiative changed your practice, if at all? Please be specific.
15. How has the SGO initiative changed practices among the educational professionals in your school, if at all? Please be specific.
16. To what extent are any changes contributing to improvements in the quality of instruction that students are receiving?

## **Round II Administrator Interview Guide**

### **Advancing Teacher Expertise in the Development of Standards-Based Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) in English Language Arts (ELA) for Elementary School Linguistically Diverse Students**

1. The SGOs as used to measure teaching effectiveness are designed to show evidence of student growth. In this respect, can you please define what student growth means to you?
2. Is the definition of student growth under the SGO initiative different from your own understanding of what it should entail? How? [PROBE about achievement]
3. To what extent is student growth as measured by the SGO indicative of teaching effectiveness?
4. For the groups of students who are being assigned similar SGOs in language arts, have you used similar baseline assessments? What were the kinds of baseline assessments used?
5. Can you please describe how similar SGO pre- and post-assessments are?
6. How do you think the students will do on the SGOs post-assessment?
7. What opportunities have you had to discuss and debrief the process of monitoring of students' progress through the year with central office administration?

8. What opportunities have you had to discuss and debrief the process of monitoring of students' progress through the year with the third grade teachers?
9. Were SGOs in third grade modified mid-year?
10. Can you please describe the reason why SGOs were modified?
11. Was the decision based on the mid-year benchmarks or other assessments?
12. Was this suggested by central office administration or the teachers?
13. Can you please describe the process by which SGOs were modified?
14. How has the SGO initiative changed teaching practices, if at all? Please be specific.
15. How has the SGO initiative changed practices among the educational professionals in your school, if at all? Please be specific.
16. To what extent are any changes contributing to improvements in the quality of instruction that students are receiving?

### **Round III Teacher Interview Guide**

#### **Advancing Teacher Expertise in the Development of Standards-Based Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) in English Language Arts (ELA) for Elementary School Linguistically Diverse Students**

1. In light of your work on the implementation of SGOs in the academic 2013-2014, to what extent did the new policy reach its goal of improving learning outcomes for students? How do you know?
  - What would take to do this well?
2. To what extent are the SGOs informing your professional development plan for next year?
  - To what extent did it help identify areas in which you need to improve? If yes - what are they?
  - To what extent did it help showcase areas in which you are highly effective as teacher? If yes - what are they?
3. To what extent are the SGOs supporting the learning of EL students?
  - To what extent did SGOs help EL students learn better than previous years?
4. To what extent did SGOs support quality instruction?

- How did SGOs impact quality of assessment and monitoring of learning?
  - What does it mean to have a good assessment in ELA? How did you align the pre- and the post-assessments with formative assessment practices you use in the classroom to track students' progress?
  - How did SGOs impact quality of assignments in ELA?
  - What does it mean to have a good task/assignment in ELA? What kinds of tasks did you use to support learning along the SGOs?
5. To what extent did SGOs help building a better/stronger professional community in your school this year?
- In terms of collaborative learning?
  - In terms of shared knowledge?
  - In terms of transparency?
6. To what extent did SGOs help develop accountability among teachers?
- In terms of compliance with policy requirements?
  - In terms of teaching and assessment quality?
7. Do you feel that there are any important components that have been missing from your work this year? Please explain.



### **Round III Administrator Interview Guide**

#### **Advancing Teacher Expertise in the Development of Standards-Based Student Growth Objectives (SGOs) in English Language Arts (ELA) for Elementary School Linguistically Diverse Students**

1. In light of your work on the implementation of SGOs in the academic 2013-2014, to what extent did the new policy reach its goal of improving learning outcomes for students? How do you know?
  - What would it take to do this well?
2. To what extent are the SGOs informing professional development plans for next year?
  - To what extent did it help identify areas in which teachers need to improve?
  - To what extent did it help showcase areas in which teachers are highly effective?
3. To what extent are the SGOs supporting the learning of EL students?
  - To what extent did SGOs help EL students learn better than previous years?
4. To what extent did SGOs support quality instruction?
  - How did SGOs impact quality of assessment and monitoring of learning?

- What does it mean to have a good assessment in ELA? How were SGO pre- and the post-assessments aligned with formative assessment practices used in the classroom?
  - How did SGOs impact quality of assignments in ELA?
  - What does it mean to have a good task/assignment in ELA? What kinds of tasks did teachers use to support learning along the SGOs?
5. To what extent did SGOs help build a better/stronger professional community in your school/district this year?
- In terms of collaborative learning?
  - In terms of shared knowledge?
  - In terms of transparency?
6. To what extent did SGOs help develop accountability among teachers?
- In terms of compliance with policy requirements?
  - In terms of teaching and assessment quality?
7. Do you feel that there are any important components that have been missing from your work this year? Please explain.
8. Do you feel that there are any important components that have been missing from teachers' work this year? Please explain.

## Appendix B

Data Collection by Interview Round.

<b>Date</b>	<b>In person</b>	<b>By phone</b>	<b>Interview Round</b>
2/26/2014	Orlando		Round I
2/27/2014		Adriana	Round I
2/28/2014		Amanda	Round I
3/4/2014		Nina	Round I
3/5/2014	Tanisha		Round I
3/10/2014		Neal	Round I
3/17/2014	Sandy		Round I
3/17/2014		Ashonda	Round I
3/25/2014		Ellen	Round I
3/26/2014		Alexa	Round I
5/13/2014		Amanda	Round II
5/20/2014		Nina	Round II

5/29/2014	Adriana	Round II
5/30/2014	Sandy	Round II
6/4/2014	Orlando	Round II
6/12/2014	Neal	Round II
6/13/2014	Ellen	Round II
6/19/2014	Tanisha	Round II
6/25/2014	Amanda	Round III
6/26/2014	Adriana	Round III
6/28/2014	Ashonda	Round II
6/29/2014	Nina	Round III
7/1/2014	Sandy	Round III
7/7/2014	Alexa	Round II
7/17/2014	Orlando	Round III
7/17/2014	Neal	Round III
7/18/2014	Tanisha	Round III

7/24/2014	Ellen	Round III
7/30/2014	Alexa	Round III
8/3/2014	Ashonda	Round III

## Appendix C

### Dissertation Coding Scheme, April 20 2015

Requirements in LM	1 <sup>st</sup> Level Codes	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level Codes	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level Codes
Compliance with DOE timeline	Implementation timeline	Understanding	
		Contribution	Opportunity for discussion of data
			Opportunity to adjust SGOs
		Hindrance	Adds to anxiety
			No closing meeting
Adequate PD and training in terms of amount and quality	PD/Training	Understanding	
		Contribution	Data Chats
			PD focus in SGO area
			Work with SGO forms
		Hindrance	Insufficient support from the state

		Insufficient support from administration	
		Competing PD requirements	
		Insufficient training	
		Unclear expectations from administration	
Meaningful collaborations with supervisor	Teacher-Supervisor Collaboration	Understanding	
		Contribution	Good intention
		Hindrances	Limited Support
			Lack of feedback from supervisor
			Lack of sufficient time
			Rushed meetings
Meaningful collaborations with peers	Peer Collaboration	Understanding	
		Contribution	Clear directions
		Hindrances	Inauthentic
			Contradictory/incomplete information

			Frustration
			Competition
			Lack of collaborative culture
			Limited opportunities for peer collaboration
Adequate selection of number and type of ELA SGOs (reading, writing, speaking, etc.)	Number/Type of SGO	Simple	
		Tiered	
		Specific	
		General	
		Math	
		Writing	
Compliance with DOE requirements for SGOs (i.e., standards-based)	Alignment to Standards	CCSS	
		NJCCCS	
		NJELP	



Adequate consideration for EL students	EL Needs	Competing language	
		EL/ESL Assessment	
		EL/ESL learning target	Unrealistic learning targets
Adequate selection of standards- aligned pre- and post-assessments	Assessment Process	Understanding	Administration of DRAs  Assessment adequacy  Conflict with standardized assessment  Quality evidence of learning  Referral and Classification for Special Ed  Scoring  Validity of SGO assessment
		Contribution	
		Hindrance	Quality of assessment process  Quality of assessment

	Assessment		Selected in collaboration
	Selection		Created by the district
			Selected by administration
			Commercial
			Self-developed
			Self-selected
<b>Additional Codes</b>	<b>1st Level Codes</b>	<b>2nd Level Codes</b>	<b>3rd Level Codes</b>
To track interview rounds	Round 1		
	Round 2		
	Round 3		
To track respondents' perception of change to their practice as a	Change from	Considerable	In instruction
	Previous Years	change	In assessment
			In instructional planning
			In collecting evidence of learning

result of SGO		In students' learning	
policy		In evaluation of teaching	
		In standards	
		In pressure to show growth	
		Paperwork	
		Awareness of reading levels	
		No Change	
		In instruction	
		In assessment	
		In students' learning	
		Conversations with peers	
To track	Purpose of SGO	Compliance	Compliance with authority
perception of	Policy		Control over showing student growth
policy purpose			Covering the topic
			Documenting growth
			Evaluative piece

			For administration
			Game of “gotcha”
			Higher teacher evaluation ratings
			It’s new and it’s due
			Summative purpose
			Yet another responsibility
		Enhanced learning opportunities for students	Focus on math skills
			For each specific child
			For low achieving students
		Enhanced learning opportunities for teachers	Focus on important skills
			Learning growth
Explore additional	Additional Factors Affecting Implementation	Contribution	Focus on professional learning
			Focus on skills that important
			Seeking information

factors that may	Hindrance	Competing demands
be involved		Lack of leadership
		Lack of buy-in
		Competing SGOs
		Lack of independent assessment
		Lack of sufficient materials in Spanish
		Teaching to the SGO
		Teachers' Anxiety
		"Whole Different Category"
		Unfair as Evaluation Tool
		Lack of experience
		Competition vs Collaboration
		Student transiency
		Confusion

## Coding Manual

### Purpose

The coding manual's purpose is to define a set of rules, which could be applied to ensure reproducibility of the data findings, including definition of what constitutes an excerpt, description of the coding scheme, and codes' application rules. The coding manual provides transparency with regard to the coding process and brings a level of validity to the data analysis process.

### Definitions

**Excerpt:** A portion of the interview transcript, consisting of an interviewer question and the complete responder's answer. Excerpts may extend over more than one exchange between interviewer and respondent, only in cases when:

- a. Interviewer clarifies a statement made by the respondents,
- b. Interviewer follows up on the same statement by further inquiring about the same issue (e.g., how- or why-questions),
- c. Interviewer re-states the respondent's answer either to clarify meaning or elicit further statements,
- d. Respondent asks for question clarification,
- e. New exchange would not make sense without the context of the previous exchange.

### **Inductive Codes: Level 1**

The first category of codes is connected directly to the research questions of the study, as well as to the study design.

- The first three Level 1 codes were applied to track interview rounds – (1) Round 1, (2) Round 2, and (3) Round 3.
- The fourth Level 1 code was (4) Background and demographics, which allowed to identify the excerpts containing information about the respondents' educational background, the grade level they were teaching at the time when the research took place, their instructional practice, and professional experience.
- Level 1 codes 5-12 reflect the policy implementation requirements, articulated in the Logic Model, and pertained to the (5) the number and type of the created SGOs, (6) the assessment process, (7) the implementation timeline, (8) the professional development and training relevant to the implementation process, (9) the peer collaboration, (10) the collaboration between teachers and supervisors, (11) the learning standards, and (12) the consideration of EL needs.
- Level 1 codes 13-14 were created to keep track of the respondents' feedback with regard to the third research question - (13) perceived purpose of the policy and (14) additional factors.
- Level 1 code 15 emerged from the data, as participants often referred to (15) actual changes (or lack thereof) in their practice.

## **Deductive Codes: Level 2**

Level 2 codes were not created for the three rounds of interviews, and the respective Level 1 codes for these. However, Level 2 codes were created for the Level 1 code referring to background and demographics:

1. Educational Background
2. Grade level currently teaching
3. Instructional practice
4. Professional Experience

With respect to the policy requirements, respondents often talked about each in terms of its contribution or hindrance to the implementation process. For each of the Level 1 codes, associated with the policy requirements the same Level 2 codes were created to track respondents' statements about requirement contribution or hindrance. Excerpts in which respondents described policy requirements without making a judgement of contribution or hindrance, were coded as requirement understanding. So for the majority of the eight Level 1 codes (5-12), associated directly with policy requirements, three Level 2 codes were created:

1. Contribution
2. Hindrance
3. Understanding



The Level 1 code associated with the assessment process required a fourth Level 2 code (beyond contribution, hindrance, and understanding) associated with the actual assessment selection.

An exception Level 1 code was the requirement for number and type of SGO (5), for which the level 2 codes used were as follows:

1. District-selected
2. General
3. Math
4. Oral Fluency
5. Reading
6. School-selected
7. Simple
8. Specific
9. Teacher-selected
10. Tiered
11. Writing
12. in Spanish

Another exception was Level 1 code on learning standards, which listed the three mentioned sets of standards by the respondents:

1. CCSS
2. NJCCCS

### 3. NJELP

A third and final exception was the Level 1 code, which covered EL considerations, for which two separate Level 2 codes were created:

1. EL assessment
2. EL learning targets.

For Level 1 codes associated with the purpose of the policy and the perceived change of practice, the creation of Level 2 codes also followed an inductive approach, based on the way respondents talked about these topics. A set of three Level 2 codes were created under the purpose of the policy:

1. Compliance with policy
2. Enhanced learning opportunities for teachers
3. Enhanced Learning opportunities for students

For perceived change in practice, two Level 2 codes were created:

1. Change
2. No change

Finally, the Level 1 code on additional factors was re-structured to capture the institutional constraints which respondents talked about and had a total of 5 Level 2 codes:

1. Curricular/programmatic constraints

2. Instructional resources constraints
3. Belief constraints
4. Time/scheduling constraints
5. Vertical support constraints

### **Deductive Codes: Level 3**

All Level 3 codes were developed as a sub-category to Level 2. Level 3 codes helped keep in the coding scheme actual descriptions and references, supporting both Level 1 and Level 2 codes. However, not all level 2 codes required a “supporting” Level 3 code. In this section the categories of Level 3 codes, associated with level 2 are listed.

As the entire coding scheme has a 149 Level 3 codes, instead of listing them separately, I have included them in the next section, under the Level 2 code where they belong, along with the application rule.

### **Codes Application Rules**

Code Level	Code Label	Application Rule
Level 1	Round 1	This code is applied to all Round 1 interview questions.
Level 1	Round 2	This code is applied to all Round 2 interview questions.
Level 1	Round 3	This code is applied to all Round 3 interview questions.

Level 1	PD/TRAINING	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about professional learning related to the implementation of SGOs, including general information as well as value judgments about things contributing to policy outcomes and hindering policy outcomes.
Level 2	PD Contributions	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about professional learning events that in their view contribute to policy outcomes.
Level 3	PD focus in SGO area	This code is applied when respondents talk about how a focus on PD training in the area of their SGO contributed to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Data Chats	This code is applied when respondents talk about Data Chats as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Work with SGO forms	This code is applied when respondents talk about work with SGO forms as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Professional Conversation	This code is applied when respondents talk about professional conversations as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.

Level 3	Rutgers PD	This code is applied when respondents talk about Rutgers PD as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	PD focus on DRAs	This code is applied when respondents talk about training on DRAs as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Use of examples of SGOs	This code is applied when respondents talk about the use of SGO examples as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Resources on DOE web site	This code is applied when respondents talk about resources through the DOE web site as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	PD Hindrances	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about professional learning events that in their view hinder policy outcomes.
Level 3	Insufficient training	This code is applied when respondents talk about insufficient or lack of training as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Insufficient support from the State	This code is applied when respondents talk about insufficient or lack of support from the state department as hindering policy implementation outcomes.

Level 3	Competing PD requirements	This code is applied when respondents talk about competing PD requirements as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Unclear expectations from administration	This code is applied when respondents talk about unclear expectations from administration as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Overwhelming amount of requirements	This code is applied when respondents talk about overwhelming amount of requirements as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Competing time demands	This code is applied when respondents talk about inability to attend training because of competing time demands as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Insufficient support from administration	This code is applied when respondents talk about insufficient support from administration as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Limited or confusing information	This code is applied when respondents talk about limited or confusing information as hindering policy implementation outcomes.

Level 2	PD Requirement Understanding	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about professional learning about the SGOs, including PD on standards, assessments, and the process of creating of SGOs.
Level 3	Resources used	This code is applied when respondents talk about the resources and materials used in the professional learning process.
Level 3	Type of training	This code is applied when respondents talk about the type of training through which professional learning occurred.
Level 1	TEACHER/SUPERVISOR COLLABORATION	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about teacher/supervisor collaborations related to the implementation of SGOs, including general information as well as value judgments about things contributing to policy outcomes and hindering policy outcomes.
Level 2	Teacher/Supervisor Collaboration Hindrances	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about teacher/supervisor collaboration opportunities that in their view hinder policy outcomes.
Level 3	Lack of choice in SGO selection	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of choice in selection of SGOs as a hindering factor in implementation.

Level 3	Lack of feedback from supervisor	This code is applied when respondents talk about limited or lack of feedback from supervisor as a hindering factor in implementation.
Level 3	Limited support and information	This code is applied when respondents talk about limited support and information from supervisor as a hindering factor in implementation.
Level 3	Lack of sufficient time	This code is applied when respondents talk about insufficient time and rushed meetings with supervisor as a hindering factor in implementation.
Level 2	Teacher/Supervisor Collaboration Contribution	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about opportunities for teacher/supervisor collaborations that in their view contribute to policy outcomes.
Level 3	Allocated time	This code is applied when respondents talk about provision of allocated time for teacher/supervisor collaboration as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Clear expectations	This code is applied when respondents talk about provision of clear expectations as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.



Level 3	Support by administration	This code is applied when respondents talk about support by administration as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Productive meetings	This code is applied when respondents talk about productive meeting with supervisors as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	Teacher/Supervisor Collaboration Requirement Understanding	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about opportunities for teacher/supervisor collaborations related to the process of creating of SGOs.
Level 3	Format	This code is applied when respondents talk about the format of the supervisor/teacher collaboration.
Level 3	Topics	This code is applied when respondents talk about the topics of the supervisor/teacher collaboration.
Level 1	CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS YEARS	This code is applied whenever respondents make comparisons between setting learning objectives in previous years to development of SGOs.
Level 2	NO Change	When they say no change from previous years.

Level 3	In instruction	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in instruction as a result of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In assessment	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in assessment as a result of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In student learning	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in student learning as a result of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In conversations with peers	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in conversations with peers as a result of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In learning goals	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in learning goals as a result of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In assignments	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in assignments as a result of the SGOs implementation.

Level 3	In work with data	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in work with data as a result of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In accountability	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in accountability as a result of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In PD planning	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of change in PD planning as a result of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In instructional planning	Code applied when respondents talk about lack of change in instructional planning, as direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 2	Change	When respondents mention change in practice
Level 3	In learning standards	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in learning standards, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In student learning	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in student learning, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.

Level 3	In teaching effectiveness	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in teaching effectiveness, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In peer collaboration (more)	Code applied when respondents talk about more peer collaboration, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In peer collaboration (less)	Code applied when respondents talk about less peer collaboration, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In instruction	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in instructional practice, as direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In assessment	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in assessment, as direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In instructional planning	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in instructional planning, as direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In collecting evidence of learning	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in collecting evidence of learning, as direct effect of the SGOs implementation.

Level 3	In pressure to show growth	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in teachers' pressure to show growth, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In accountability	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in accountability, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	Paradigm shift	Code applied when respondents talk about an entire paradigm shift, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In PD planning	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in PD planning, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In professional conversations	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in professional conversations, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	Tried new things	Code applied when respondents talk about trying new things, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In assessment literacy	Code applied when respondents talk about change in assessment literacy, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.

Level 3	Organizational or administrative changes	Code applied when respondents talk about organizational or administrative changes, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In learning objectives	Code applied when respondents talk about change in learning objectives, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	In evaluating teaching effectiveness	Code applied when respondents talk about changes in evaluating teaching effectiveness, as a direct effect of the SGOs implementation.
Level 3	Teaching to the SGO	This code is applied when respondents talk about teaching to the SGO as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 1	NUMBER/TYPE OF SGOs	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about the type of SGOs created.
Level 2	Simple	Code is applied when the respondent indicates that the simple form was used to create the SGO.
Level 2	Tiered	This code is applied when the respondent indicates that the tiered form was used to create the SGO.
Level 2	District-selected	This code is applied when the respondent indicates that the SGOs were selected at the district level.

Level 2	General	This code is applied when respondents indicates that SGOs are general.
Level 2	Math	Code is applied when the respondent indicates that the he or she selected SGO in Math.
Level 2	Oral Fluency	Code is applied when the respondent indicates that SGOs were selected in Oral Fluency.
Level 2	Reading	Code is applied when the respondent indicates that SGOs were selected in Reading.
Level 2	School-selected	This code is applied when the respondent indicates that the SGOs were selected at the school level.
Level 2	Specific	This code is applied when respondents indicates that SGOs are specific.
Level 2	Teacher-selected	This code is applied when the respondent indicates that teachers self-selected their SGOs.
Level 2	Writing	Code is applied when the respondent indicates that SGOs were selected in Writing.
Level 2	in Spanish	Code is applied when the respondent indicates that SGOs were created in Spanish language.

Level 1	ASSESSMENT PROCESS	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about assessments related to the implementation of SGOs, including general information as well as value judgments about things contributing to policy outcomes and hindering policy outcomes.
Level 2	Assessment Process Contributions	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about aspects of the assessment process that in their view contribute to policy outcomes.
Level 3	Formative use of data	This code is applied when respondents talk about the formative use of assessment data as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Quality of assessment tool (contributing)	This code is applied when respondents talk about the quality of assessments used as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	Assessment Process Hindrances	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about aspects of the assessment process that in their view hinder policy outcomes.
Level 3	Insufficient Assessment Literacy	This code is applied when respondents talk about assessment literacy as a hindrance to policy implementation outcomes.



Level 3	Quality of assessment tool (hindering)	This code is applied when respondents talk about the quality of assessments used as a hindrance to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Quality of assessment process	This code is applied when respondents talk about the quality of the assessment process as a hindrance to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Scoring reliability	This code is applied when respondents talk about scoring reliability as a hindrance to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	SGO validity	This code is applied when respondents talk about SGO validity as a hindrance to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	Assessment Selection	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about what type of SGO assessment they used.
Level 3	Selected by administration	Code is applied when the assessments are selected by administrators.
Level 3	Created by the teacher	Code is applied when the assessments are created by the teacher.
Level 3	Created by the district	Code is applied when the assessments are created by the district.

Level 3	Post-assessment	Code is applied when the respondent describes selected post-assessment(s).
Level 3	Pre-assessment	Code is applied when the respondent describes selected pre-assessment(s).
Level 3	Selected by district	Code is applied when the assessments are selected by the district.
Level 3	Selected by teachers	Code is applied when the assessments are selected by teacher.
Level 3	Selected in collaboration	Code is applied when the assessments are selected in collaboration.
Level 3	Commercially available	Code is applied when the assessments used are commercially available.
Level 2	Assessment Requirements Understanding	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about aspects of the assessment process as relative to creating of SGOs.
Level 3	Scoring process	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about process of scoring of the SGOs assessments.

Level 3	Conflict with standardized assessment	This code is applied when respondents talk about SGOs conflict with standardized assessment.
Level 3	Referral & Classification for Special Ed	This code is applied when respondents talk about the process of referral and classification in connection to the SGOs.
Level 3	Administration of DRAs	This code is applied when respondents talk about administration of DRAs.
Level 3	Administration of Model Curriculum unit assessment	This code is applied when respondents talk about administration of Model Curriculum unit assessment.
Level 3	Administration of WIDA assessment	This code is applied when respondents talk about administration of WIDA.
Level 3	Administration of oral fluency reading assessment	This code is applied when respondents talk about administration of oral fluency reading assessment.
Level 3	Use of writing rubrics	This code is applied when respondents talk about use of writing rubrics.
Level 1	PURPOSE of SGO  POLICY	This code is applied whenever respondents make statements about what they think is the purpose of the policy.

Level 2	Enhanced Learning Opportunities for Students	This code is applied when respondents say SGOs' purpose is to ultimately help students learn.
Level 3	Supports specific learning targets	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to support specific learning targets (in literacy, math, etc.)
Level 3	Supports differentiated needs of all students	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to support differentiated needs of all students.
Level 3	Promotes accountability	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to promote teacher accountability
Level 3	Supports performance on standardized assessments	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to support performance on standardized assessments.
Level 3	Supports formative assessment	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to support formative assessment.
Level 2	Enhanced Learning Opportunities for Teachers	This code is applied when respondents say SGOs' purpose is to ultimately help teachers improve their practice.

Level 3	Promotes understanding of evidence-based learning growth	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to support teacher understanding of evidence-based learning growth.
Level 3	Focus on important skills	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to let teachers focus on important skills.
Level 3	Reveals teaching shortcomings	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to reveal teaching shortcomings.
Level 3	Inform PD	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to inform PD.
Level 3	Focus on providing feedback	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to let teachers focus on providing feedback to students.
Level 3	Support novice teachers	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to support novice teachers.
Level 3	Promotes reflection	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to support professional reflection.
Level 2	Compliance	This code is applied when respondents indicate that the purpose of the policy implementation was compliance.

Level 3	Game of "Gotcha"	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs as a way to police teachers and find fault to use as a measure of teaching effectiveness.
Level 3	Summative purpose	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs as a way to provide a summative measure of evaluation.
Level 3	Punitive purpose	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs as a way to provide a punitive consequence.
Level 3	Measure of teaching effectiveness	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs as a way to simply providing a measure of teaching effectiveness.
Level 3	Control over showing student growth on paper	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to provide teachers with control over showing student growth.
Level 3	Compliance with mandated requirement	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to show compliance with mandated requirements.
Level 3	Red tape & Paperwork	This code is applied when respondents talk about the purpose of the SGOs to superficial evidence of growth.

Level 1	LEARNING STANDARDS	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about a set of learning standards in relation to the SGOs.
Level 2	CCSS	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about CCSS learning standards in relation to the SGOs.
Level 2	NJCCCS	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about NJCCSS standards in relation to the SGOs.
Level 2	NJELP	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about NJELP standards in relation to the SGOs.
Level 1	BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS	This code is applied when respondents provide background and demographic information.
Level 2	Educational Background	This code is applied when respondents provide information about their educational background.
Level 2	Professional Experience	This code is applied when respondents provide information about their professional experience.
Level 2	Grade level currently teaching	This code is applied when respondents provide information about the grade level they currently teach.
Level 2	Instructional practice	This code is applied when respondents provide information about their instructional practice.

Level 1	PEER COLLABORATION	This code is applied when respondents talk about peer collaborations related to the implementation of SGOs, including general information about the process, as well as value judgments about factors contributing to policy outcomes and hindering policy outcomes.
Level 2	Peer Collaboration Contributions	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about opportunities for peer collaborations that in their view contribute to policy outcomes.
Level 3	Communication among teachers	This code is applied when respondents talk about communication among peers as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Allocated time	This code is applied when respondents talk about allocated time to meet as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Productive meetings	This code is applied when respondents talk about productive meetings as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Discussion of assessments	This code is applied when respondents talk about discussions among peer teachers about assessment as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.



Level 3	Discussion of instruction	This code is applied when respondents talk about discussions among peer teachers about instruction as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Sharing of resources	This code is applied when respondents talk about sharing of resources as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Collaboration between ESL and homeroom teachers	This code is applied when respondents talk about ESL/GenEd teachers' collaboration as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Peer to peer training	This code is applied when respondents talk about peer support and peer training as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	Peer Collaboration Hindrances	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about and express value judgments about peer collaboration opportunities that in their view hinder policy outcomes.
Level 3	Contradictory/incomplete information	This code is applied when respondents talk about provision of contradictory information as a hindrance factor in implementation.

Level 3	Limited opportunities for peer collaboration	This code is applied when respondents talk about insufficient or lack of opportunities to collaborate as a hindrance factor in implementation.
Level 3	Competition among teachers	This code is applied when respondents talk about competitiveness among teachers as a hindrance factor in implementation.
Level 3	Inauthentic conversations	This code is applied when respondents talk about inauthentic conversations among teachers as a hindrance factor in implementation.
Level 3	Limited communication among teachers	This code is applied when respondents talk about limited or lack of communication among teachers as a hindrance factor in implementation.
Level 3	Differences in SGOs	This code is applied when respondents talk about the differences in SGOs as a hindrance factor in implementation.
Level 3	Lack of collaboration between ESL and homeroom teachers	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of ESL/GenEd teachers' collaboration as a hindrance factor to policy implementation outcomes.

Level 2	Peer Collaboration Requirement Understanding	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about opportunities for peer collaborations related to the process of creating of SGOs.
Level 3	Format of collaboration	This code is applied when respondents talk about the format of the peer collaboration.
Level 3	Products created	This code is applied when respondents talk about the products created through peer collaboration.
Level 3	Topics discussed	This code is applied when respondents talk about the topics discussed among peers.
Level 1	IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	This code is applied when respondents talk about timing of events related to implementation of SGOs, including general information as well as value judgments about factors contributing to policy outcomes and hindering policy outcomes.
Level 2	Implementation Timeline Contributions	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about events and materials that in their view contribute to policy outcomes.

Level 3	Opportunity for discussion of data	This code is applied when respondents talk about opportunities to discuss data as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Opportunity to adjust SGOs	This code is applied when respondents talk about opportunities to adjust SGOs as contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	Implementation Timeline Hindrances	This code is applied whenever respondents express value judgments about events and materials that in their view hinder policy outcomes.
Level 3	Anxiety	This code is applied when respondents talk about perception of anxiety as hindering to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	No closing meeting	This code is applied when respondents talk about missed opportunity for end-of year meeting as hindering to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	Implementation Timeline Understanding	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about the timing of learning about, creating, and refining SGOs, including learning about, selecting, administering, and scoring the pre- and the post-assessments.

Level 3	For completing assessment process	This code is applied when respondents talk about the timeframe for completing SGO assessment process.
Level 3	Modifying SGOs	This code is applied when respondents talk about mid-year SGO modification process.
Level 3	Entire process	This code is applied when respondents talk about SGO timeframe in general terms.
Level 1	EL NEEDS	This code is applied when respondents talk about whether and how EL needs were considered in developing of the SGOs.
Level 2	EL learning target/standard	This code is applied when respondents talk about the standards or the learning targets for ELs, as they pertain to the implementation of the SGOs.
Level 3	Keeping learning targets achievable	This code is applied when respondents talk about the need of keeping learning targets achievable for EL students.
Level 3	Unrealistic learning targets	This code is applied when respondents talk about unrealistic learning targets for EL students.
Level 2	EL assessment	This code is applied when respondents talk about the assessment of ELs as pertaining to the implementation of the SGOs.

Level 3	Limited assessment comprehension	This code is applied when respondents talk about the limited assessment comprehension of EL students.
Level 1	INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about Institutional constraints which play a role in SGO implementation.
Level 2	Curricular/Programmatic Constraints	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about Curricular/Programmatic constraints which play a role in SGO implementation.
Level 3	Student transiency	This code is applied when respondents talk about student transiency as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Teacher transiency	This code is applied when respondents talk about teacher transiency as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Unique teaching role/position	This code is applied when respondents talk about their unique roles in the school as hindering to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Competing SGOs	This code is applied when respondents talk about competing SGOs as a constraint which play a role in SGO implementation.

Level 3	Competing languages	This code is applied when respondents talk about competing languages as a constraint which play a role in SGO implementation.
Level 3	Dual Language Program	This code is applied when respondents talk about the school's One Way Dual program as a constraint which play a role in SGO implementation.
Level 2	Instructional Resources Constraints	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about Instructional Resources constraints which play a role in SGO implementation.
Level 3	Expanded classroom libraries	This code is applied when respondents talk about expanding classroom libraries as an additional factor contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Lack of resources and teaching materials	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of resources and teaching materials as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	Perceptual/Belief Constraints	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about Perceptual/Belief constraints which play a role in SGO implementation.

Level 3	Lack of buy-in	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of buy-in as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Teachers' Anxiety	This code is applied when respondents talk about teachers' anxiety as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Perception of a lack of control	This code is applied when respondents talk about perceived lack of control as a hindering factor in implementation.
Level 2	Time/Scheduling Constraints	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about Time/Scheduling constraints which play a role in SGO implementation.
Level 3	SGO scores QC	This code is applied when respondents talk about SGO's independent assessment (QC) as an additional factor contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Lack of independent assessment	This code is applied when respondents talk about the lack of independent assessment of implementation components, including auditing of students' assessment data as hindering to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Competing demands	This code is applied when respondents talk about the competing demands of their position as hindering to policy implementation outcomes.



Level 3	Time constraints	This code is applied when respondents talk about time constraints as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 2	Vertical Support/ Leadership Constraints	This code is applied whenever respondents talk about Vertical Support/ Leadership constraints which play a role in SGO implementation.
Level 3	Support from the state	This code is applied when respondents talk about support from the state as an additional factor contributing to policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Insufficient support from the district	This code is applied when respondents talk about limited or lack of support from the district as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Insufficient support from the state	This code is applied when respondents talk about limited or lack of support from the state as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Lack of leadership	This code is applied when respondents talk about lack of leadership as hindering policy implementation outcomes.
Level 3	Mistrust with DOE	This code is applied when respondents talk about mistrust with DOE as hindering policy implementation outcomes.