

# BRIEF 1: THE STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES (SLO) DELIVERY MODEL AT THE DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEVELS

## **Key highlights from brief:**

- The district depends on a train-the-trainer model to build local capacity to implement Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) in schools. Although this model can be beneficial to ensure that information and training is disseminated broadly, the pitfalls from implementing this delivery model appear to be outweighing the benefits in Denver Public Schools (DPS).
- A key pitfall from implementing the train-the-trainer model is the number of training layers separating teachers from the core group (the SLO team located at the Accountability, Research and Evaluation Department) with the deepest level of knowledge and understanding of SLOs.
- Schools use different configurations to provide SLO training to teachers in data teams. The current configurations used at two case study sites (and most likely used at other schools throughout the district) are not optimal for helping to sustain this process in the long-run.
- Considering the amount of resources that have been dedicated to implementing SLOs both district-wide and in schools, the district should put in place a sustainable training structure. This would have the potential for long-term cost-savings for the district.

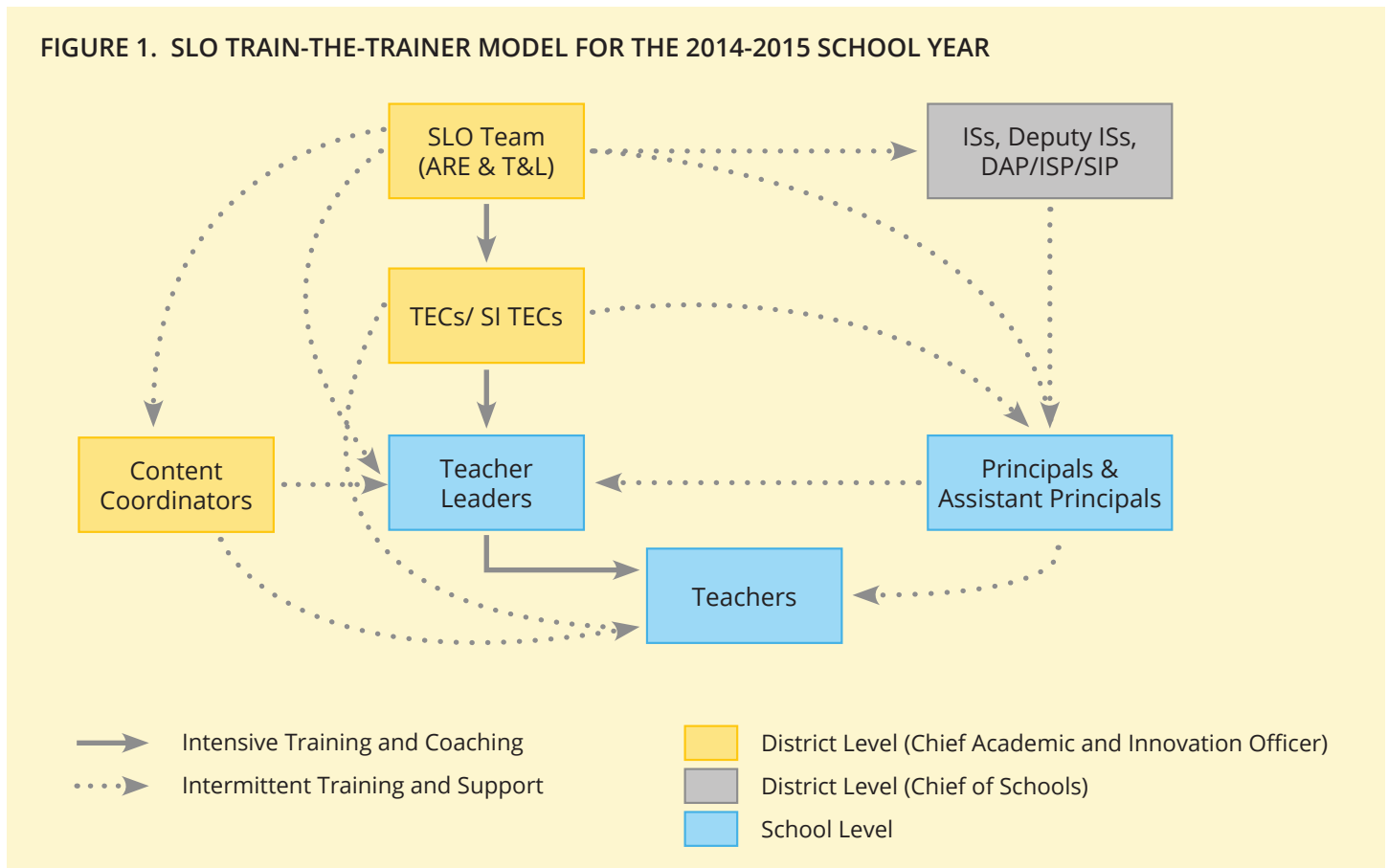
## **SLO DELIVERY MODEL AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL**

Similar to Denver Public Schools (DPS), many school districts offer formal support to the process of writing, monitoring and evaluating Student Learning Objectives (SLOs). This support, typically provided in the form of professional development, is staff-, time- and resource-intensive, but it is offered because school districts believe that the SLO process has great potential to be instructionally useful to teachers. As indicated by one state education agency: “pedagogically speaking, the SLO framework serves to bring the primary responsibilities of a teacher into focus and alignment and helps establish a culture of collaboration and support in a school community” (Maine Department of Education, p. 4). To move SLO supports from central office to schools, many places (e.g., Hawaii, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Utah) as well as DPS use a “train-the-trainer model.” This model has some benefits in that this can be used to broadly disseminate information to many individuals at one time, and can help reduce professional development costs by having trainers train groups at various sites instead of moving all participants to a central training location (Lachlan-Haché, Cushing & Bivona, 2012; Yarber, et al., 2015).

For a large urban district like Denver that consists of over a 180 schools divided into 14 different networks each led by a different Instructional Superintendent, the train-the-trainer delivery model was selected because it promised to be an efficient way to train teachers on the SLO process. That is, the district recognized that it would not be feasible to send central staff to train personnel in every network and to meet the needs of all schools. However, this model can also present challenges in that the communication of relevant information and the quality of training can break down or weaken with each layer of trainers involved in the training. For the model to be successful, it also requires that each group of trainers possess deep content knowledge and understanding of the SLO process (Lachlan-Haché, et al., 2012; Lamb & Schmitt, 2012).

In DPS, key challenges with implementing the SLOs each year is that the structure of the train-the-trainer model used in 2014-2015 not only changed substantially from the 2015-2016 year, but that the number of training layers separating teachers from the core central office trainers (i.e., the SLO team situated in the Accountability, Research and Evaluation department) also increased. To highlight implications for implementing the different train-the-trainer models used last year relative to this year, we briefly discuss the models used in 2014-15 and then contrast this with the model used in 2015-16. Figure 1 represents the training delivery model used to push the SLO process out from district-level stakeholders to all schools in 2014-15.

**FIGURE 1. SLO TRAIN-THE-TRAINER MODEL FOR THE 2014-2015 SCHOOL YEAR**



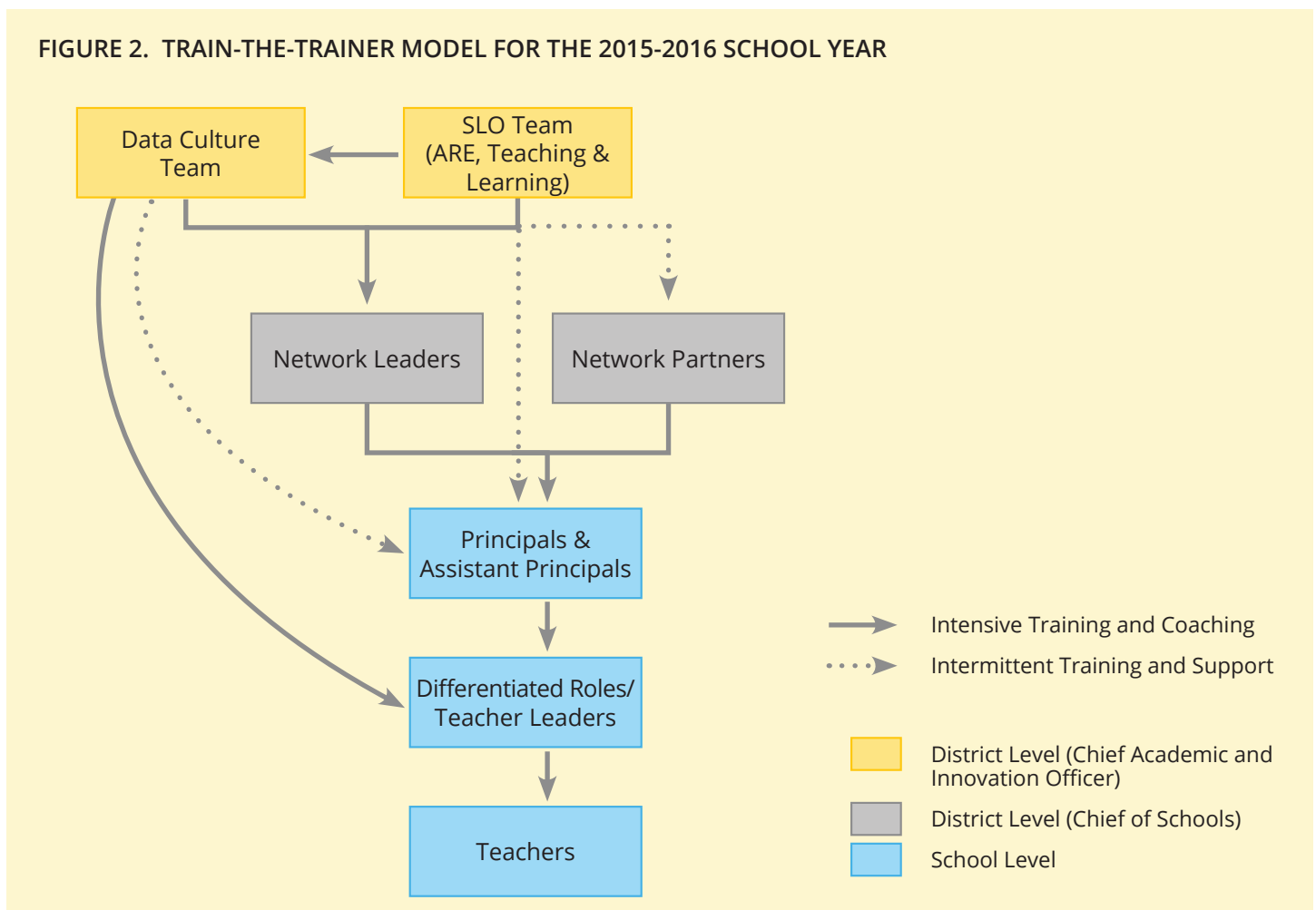
In Figure 1, the primary groups delivering the trainings were personnel situated in departments reporting to the Chief of Academic Innovations. The SLO team located in the Accountability, Research and Evaluation (ARE) department viewed the Teacher Effective Coaches (TECs) as the primary group of trainers who would either directly support all staff on the SLO process at a school or multiple schools. The TECs were charged with supporting the school-based teacher leaders (TLs) who would then guide their teachers through the process in data teams. Under this delivery model, there were two layers of trainers (TECs and TLs) separating the SLO Team that had the deepest understanding of this process from teachers. As noted by Lachlan, et al. (2012), increasing the number of trainers involved could “often resemble a game of telephone in that the information that teachers receive is ultimately inaccurate and substantially different than that communicated to training facilitators” (p. 9). As indicated by focus group data collected last year, training provided to TLs by TECs was deemed by TLs to vary in quality across sites; and training received by teachers from the TLs were deemed by teachers to vary in quality across sites.

Another key challenge to the delivery model used in 2014-2015 was that based on input received from the former SLO team manager, the majority of Instructional Superintendents and school administrators only received an overview of the SLO process in the spring and in July prior to the start of the 2014-2015 school year. Aside from the few principals across the districts and the one network who directly contacted the SLO team for assistance, the SLO team did not have access to school administrators or other network personnel. Focus groups held with principals and triangulated by data collected from TLs, TECs and teachers all pointed to the detrimental effects of

implementing the SLO process without training school administrators. That is, many school administrators who did not understand the purpose or intent of this reform did not allow their TMs and teachers to engage in this process. Furthermore, as communicated through focus groups and survey data collected from principals last year, since SLOs were not prioritized by several network leaders, this in turn informed many school administrators to not pay attention to this effort. In January 2015, due to significant concerns and confusion articulated by school administrators about the SLO process, the district declared that SLOs would be optional for the remainder of the year.

Recognizing the shortcomings of the train-the-trainer model used in 2014-2015, modifications were made by ARE for 2015-16 to re-structure the training layers between the SLO team and teachers. In 2015-2016, the network staff and school administrators were now directly involved with SLO trainings.

**FIGURE 2. TRAIN-THE-TRAINER MODEL FOR THE 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEAR**



The delivery model in 2015-2016 begins with the boxes located at the top of the diagram. These boxes indicate that the SLO team and the Data Culture team from central office coordinated SLO trainings for network staff. As indicated by the diagram, the SLO team provided training to the Data Culture Team to ensure that members could effectively deliver SLO content to schools. Although the two teams had different sets of responsibilities, both teams worked together to ensure that network-based staff received regular supports and training on the SLO process. The Data Culture team was charged explicitly with strengthening the use of SLOs in data teams at schools in all networks. The SLO Team was focused on developing the content for turn-key presentations to help each set of trainers implement the SLOs and for overseeing logistics associated with implementing the process across all sites (e.g., ensuring deadlines are communicated, organizing the blue/green SLO training days, and that SLO data are entered into the application). Since the Data Culture team worked directly with data teams in schools, a solid arrow leads directly from this group to personnel charged with facilitating the data teams with teachers (i.e., the box

located under school administrators). A dashed arrow also leads from the Data Culture team to Principals and Assistant Principals since they occasionally trained school administrators. Although the SLO team was supposed to provide direct training to the network leaders, they occasionally were asked by network leaders to provide trainings during network meetings to school administrators. For this reason, a dashed arrow also leads from the SLO team to Principals and Assistant Principals.

All personnel located below the SLO team and the Data Culture team consisted of Network Leaders (i.e., Instructional Superintendents and Deputy Instructional Superintendents) and Network Partners (e.g., Data Assessment Partners, Standards Implementation Partners, Literacy Partners, and Implementation Support Partners). Network Leaders and Network Partners, who received minimal training on the SLO process in 2014-2015, were charged with providing direct training to school administrators in 2015-2016.

In the box located the next level down from Network Leaders, school administrators who had also received minimal training about the SLO process in 2014-2015, were expected to provide training to their Differentiated Roles (DRs) Teacher Leaders and TLs charged with implementing SLOs. Unlike the TLs who were charged with providing direct training to teachers through data teams last year, DRs were not only expected to lead data team work with teachers, but they were also given leadership roles by some school administrators in their schools to both mentor teachers through the SLO process and to approve SLOs that teachers submitted. The DRs and/or TLs were then charged with training their teachers in data teams.

In summary then, the SLO implementation model in 2015-2016 added an additional training layer: three layers of trainers in 2015-2016 versus two layers of trainers in 2014-2015. However, the implementation model depicted in Figure 2 posed some potential challenges that ARE's SLO team had already identified earlier in the 2015-2016 year:

- The difficulty of monitoring SLO implementation across 14 different networks and school principals.
- The difficulty of coordinating and messaging the SLO process in a consistent manner (i.e., the “too many cooks in the kitchen problem”).

The next section provides insights into the first challenge noted above regarding how different schools have decided to deliver the SLO process to teachers and implications associated with those choices.

## SLO DELIVERY MODEL AT CASE STUDY SITES

Moving from the district to schools, as indicated earlier, the SLO team intended for all schools to implement the SLO process in data teams through either a teacher leader or a DR. Although data teams served as the primary locus for training teachers on this process, the training structure varied across sites. Figure 3 presents the four different models used to provide training for teachers at each of the case study sites participating in the 2015-16 evaluation<sup>1</sup>. These models provide a window for understanding the different ways that schools in the district may have structured their SLO delivery model to teachers.

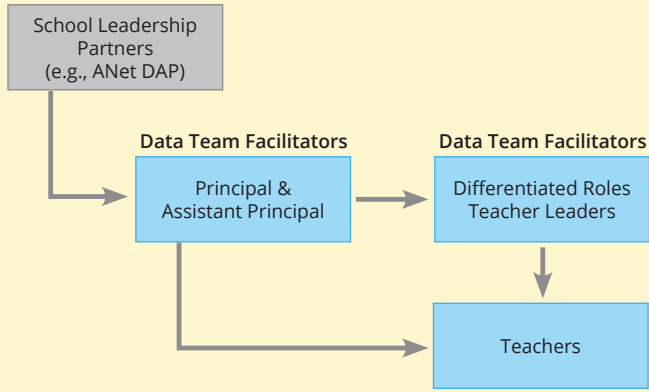
In each diagram presented, the solid arrows indicate a direct pathway for training established between the different actors. For example, at Cottonwood Elementary, the direct lines from the district central office (green box) to the principal and assistant principal and to the differentiated roles teacher leaders (tan boxes) indicate that both groups of data team facilitators are direct recipients of network based trainings. The solid lines from both groups of data facilitators to teachers indicate that teachers are receiving guidance directly not just from the DRs, but are also being guided directly by the principal and the assistant principal. In contrast to Cottonwood Elementary, Aspen Elementary follows the standard implementation model noted in Figure 2. That is, the principal trains the DRs and the DRs train the teachers. At Spruce, the implementation model used reflects the model that was discontinued where school administrators are not directly involved with implementing SLOs. The TEC assigned to Spruce who led the process in 2014-2015, continued to lead the process in 2015-2016. At Tamarisk, there are no teacher leaders leading data teams in the middle schools. A school administrator, the assistant principal, leads the process at the school. Pseudonyms have been assigned to school names to protect the identity of participating schools.

<sup>1</sup> The selection of the case study sites is described in detail in Brief 2.

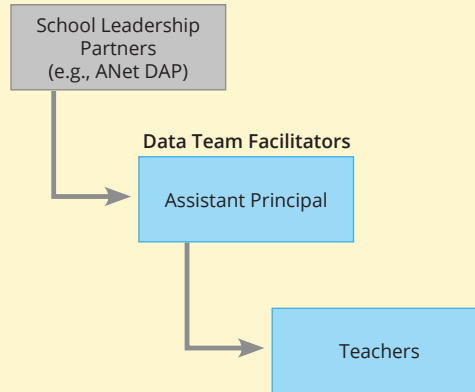
**FIGURE 3: FOUR DIFFERENT SCHOOL SLO TRAINING MODELS**

- Direct SLO Implementation Pathway
- Establish SLO Implementation Pathway

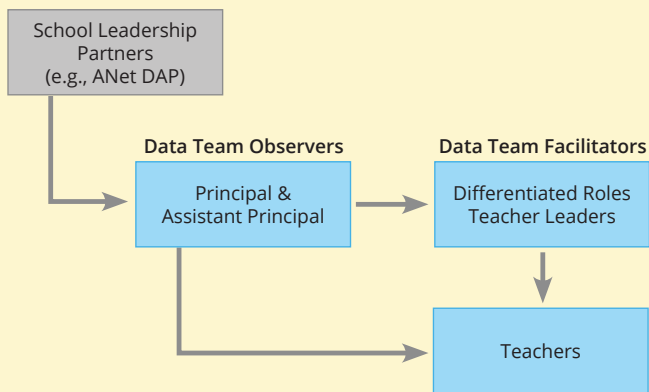
**Model 1: Cottonwood Elementary**



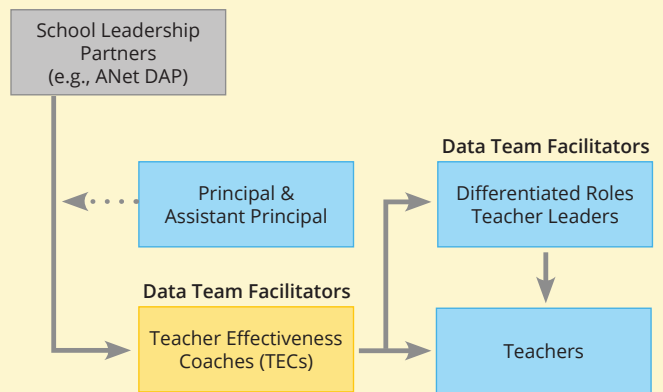
**Model 2: Tamarisk Middle School**



**Model 3: Aspen Elementary**



**Model 4: Spruce Middle School**



The variety of data team configurations that are undoubtedly also in place across other sites in the district have some interesting implications. More specifically:

Models 1 (Cottonwood Elementary), and 3 (Aspen Elementary) have more sustainable features built into maintaining institutional knowledge and understanding of the process for training teachers each year relative to Model 2. For both models, the distributed leadership model is in place and school administrators play an active role supporting data teams. Should there be attrition in the DR group or if a school administrator departs, there would be several staff members in each school that would still maintain institutional knowledge about the SLO process.

Model 4 reflects a model that was supposed to be discontinued but based on input received from ARE staff, appears intact in several places. Model 4 reflects the delivery model from 2014-2015 where TECs trained TLs and the TLs subsequently trained teachers. School administrators are typically not or are indirectly involved with the SLO work since they depend on the TEC to implement the work. This configuration is not necessarily different than having school administrators conduct the trainings to TLs; but schools using their TECs as the central conduit for implementing SLOs will need to establish a new delivery model since all TEC positions will be eliminated in 2016-2017.



Model 2 (Tamarisk Middle School) depends on a school administrator to oversee and provide training to the DRs. In Model 2, the assistant principal (AP) serves as the sole lead for facilitating data teams for the middle school teachers at this school. Since approximately 30 percent of school administrators leave the district in a given year, the departure of the AP for this school or the departure of school administrators at other sites using this model would leave a vacuum at the school. Transition plans would need to be put into place during the summer to ensure that the SLO pipeline to teachers is reinstated.

In addition to the elimination of the TEC position, the data culture team positions that provided support to data teams were also eliminated for the 2016-2017 school year. This leaves the implementation of SLO content to schools in the hands of administrators. The district-wide training structure for next year will have implications for schools that have traditionally depended on TECs and the data culture team to support the SLO implementation work. The SLO team will want to closely monitor the extent to which the delivery model at these schools are effective in training teachers on this process. Considering that the district experiences significant administrator turn-over each year, the district will need to consider whether the train-the-trainer delivery model to be used in 2016-2017 can be sustained in the long-run.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The two recommendations below may assist with building capacity and sustainability of the training delivery model over time:

- Designating PDU leads to support the SLO process at schools.

Since the PDU lead's position is supported by the ProComp system and responsibilities for this position include supporting the SLO process at schools, these individuals can be readily integrated into the SLO delivery model. Though building up the capacity of this group would not immediately resolve all issues involved with providing consistent level of supports and communication about the process to all schools, taking this step would ensure that there is a stable/funded position and clearly designated SLO point person at each school site. This person would be responsible for providing ongoing assistance to teachers on the SLO process.

- Develop on-line training modules that can be accessed by all school staff.

This solution, also raised in Brief 2, can serve two purposes: 1) ensure that all school staff can access information about SLOs without depending upon one or two key individuals to disseminate information about the process to them; and, 2) provide a different mode for school staff to access materials and information without having to learn about the process during specific training days (i.e. scheduled and intermittent blue/green days).

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