

FLEXIBILITY OPTIONS IN TEACHER EVALUATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

MAKING CHANGES TO THE PLAN

1. *Last year, our committee didn't come to mutual agreement on the teacher evaluation plan. Can the district administration make the decision now about whether or not to adopt the flexibility options?*

No. Section 10-151b of CT General Statutes now stipulates that the plan must be developed through mutual agreement between the local board of education and Professional Development and Evaluation (PDE) committee. In addition, the State Department of Education confirmed this in the Jan. 29, 2014 evaluation update memo sent to all superintendents.

2. *If we don't make changes to our plan for this year, can we still include those flexibility options in next year's plan?*

Yes. These options were approved by the State Board of Education on February 6, 2014, and have become a permanent part of the teacher evaluation guidelines, which will be in effect unless and until the entire set of guidelines is revised and changes are made.

3. *If we choose not to make any changes for the remainder of this school year, do we have to notify the SDE of that decision?*

No. The SDE memo to superintendents dated February 10, 2014 states *"To request new flexibility, please complete the "Flexibility Request Submission Form" and submit it to the CSDE for review and approval....Once approved, you will receive notification to the email address provided on the submission form."* It's clear from this statement that notification is needed only if your committee is requesting flexibility for this year.

4. *If we choose a flex option for this year, do we have to submit any other paperwork with the request form?*

If your committee agrees to a flex option exactly as it is stated in the guidelines language, there is no need to submit any other paperwork to the SDE; you simply check the first box on the form under the category for the flex option. If your committee is asking for a variation of a flex option, you would check the second box on the form under the category for the flex option, and explain what the variation is you request. If your committee needs to include a separate sheet of paper with the explanation, that would have to be sent in with the request form.

5. *Who has to sign the Flexibility Request Form? Do we have to state that there was mutual agreement to the request for flexibility?*

The form must be signed by the superintendent and chair of the local board of education. One of 2 boxes on the form must be checked, to indicate whether or not mutual agreement was reached regarding the flexibility request.

6. *Can we make additional changes to our plan for next year?*

Yes. Each year, the district has the opportunity to make changes, have those approved by the local board of education, and submit those to the SDE. All changes must align with the guidelines.

7. *Can changes to our plan apply to some groups of teachers but not others?*

Yes, to some extent, which is part of the flexibility allowed under the guidelines. For example, your district committee can agree to require additional formal observations for non-tenured teachers, or clearly explain how the TEAM program modules intersect with evaluation, or have a different process for how teachers who are proficient or exemplary receive feedback from informal observations than do first or second year teachers. However, your committee can't stipulate, for example, that non-classroom teachers have more or fewer informal observations than other teachers. The key is to align all changes with the guidelines, and come to

mutual agreement on what is best practice for teachers in your district, based on their status and developmental needs.

8. Do we have to accept a flexibility option exactly as it is written, or can we make a change to it?

Your committee can mutually agree to make a change to an option, as long as the change is still in alignment with the guidelines. This would pertain to the number of student goals teachers will select, and the number of formal observations required for teachers rated proficient or exemplary. Please see the further explanations below.

9. What are the advantages of making changes to our plan this year?

The most obvious changes are those that relate to the paperwork, record-keeping, and observations that would be reduced if your committee agrees to make changes this year (see more about those in later sections dealing with each of the options). Additionally, if your committee makes those changes now, that can help form the basis for your district plan for next year, and get your committee started on revising the plan. By using some changes this year, your committee can get feedback about the ‘mechanics’ of the change, and any problems can be resolved before the plan is used next year.

TESTING & NON-STANDARDIZED INDICATORS

1. If our district chose not to use CMT/CAPT in evaluation this year, are we required to use another standardized indicator?

No, that is a district choice. Your district isn’t required to purchase another standardized indicator. The key to making a wise decision is in determining whether or not any standardized indicator used can draw a strong enough connection between the student’s performance and what the teacher did to help bring about that performance. This is why it’s always wise to use multiple sources of data to show growth toward any student goal. If your district chooses to use another standardized indicator, you must still include at least one non-standardized indicator.

2. If we don’t use standardized indicators, how is that portion of the 45% of evaluation based on student growth shown?

In this instance, the entire 45% would be shown using non-standardized indicators. Again, it is always best to use multiple sources of data, and have data collection points at several times over the course of the year, since that will give the best indication of growth over time.

DEVELOPMENT OF SLOs

1. What are the advantages of adopting the flexibility option to require 1 SLO for the remainder of this year, when teachers have been working on 2 SLOs so far?

Using 1 SLO allows teachers to plan instruction with greater focus on student’s greatest needs, and spend their time collecting better data to show growth for that one SLO. This encourages teachers to use different sources and types of data, collected at several points during the year, which is a more true indication of growth. It also cuts down the time the teacher spends on uploading documents to the data management system, and the amount of time the administrator spends reviewing the data.

2. If our committee agrees to require only one SLO for this year, how would the decision be made as to which SLO to drop?

There are different ways to handle this. One would be that the committee would decide that any SLO that uses primarily standardized data as the IAGD would be either kept or eliminated. The decision could be left for the teacher and evaluator to mutually agree on. The decision could also be left to departments (e.g., at the middle or high school level, or at the all-grades level) to mutually agree on with their evaluator. No matter how the ultimate decision for an individual teacher is to be made, the district Professional Development and Evaluation committee *must* agree to that method.

3. If our committee agrees to require only one SLO for this year, do we have to state on the Flexibility Request Form how many IAGDs will be used for that SLO?

No. The form already states that the teacher and evaluator will mutually agree and select multiple indicators. No specific number is required.

4. If our committee agrees to require only one SLO for this year, does that have any effect on our parent or student feedback goal (10% of evaluation), or use of school-wide student data (5% of evaluation)?

No. The flexibility to use only one SLO applies only to the 45% of evaluation based on student growth.

5. The flexibility option states that teachers would select one student goal; our plan requires teachers to select three student goals. Can we change the flexibility option to require two goals, rather than one?

Yes, this is allowed. The original language in the guidelines states that teachers will select between one and four student goals. The SDE has indicated on the Flexibility Request Submission Form that the PDE Committee can vary the number of goals from what the flexibility option requires.

6. Can our committee allow, but not require, the use of more than one SLO next year, if the teacher and evaluator mutually agree?

It would be allowed under the current guidelines, but the committee should discuss this thoroughly before making a decision. The main goal should be for the teacher to show that s/he has planned and implemented instruction that helps lead to student growth over time. The issue is that of *quality* of data collected, not quantity. Focusing on one SLO for this purpose allows a teacher to collect different types of data from different sources, over a period of time, which provides a more clear picture of what the teacher did that led to student growth. This doesn't happen as well if a teacher has two SLOs for which to collect data. The PDE committee should aim for consistent, fair practice across schools, so no one teacher or group of teachers is burdened with more work than others.

7. What does it really mean for a support specialist's growth objective and indicators to be based on his/her 'assigned role'?

What this means is that the student growth objective must reflect what the support specialist actually does with and/or for students. This often doesn't tie directly to student *academic* growth, but rather, ties closely with other ways in which students develop. Statute calls for evaluation to be based on "*multiple indicators of student academic growth and development*," which are two separate but related things. If a support specialist works primarily with teachers, it's much harder to show a connection between what the specialist does to support the teacher and how the teacher uses that to lead to student growth (e.g., literacy coaches). In such cases, the key is for the specialist to write a goal and IAGDs that show what s/he has contributed to the growth of teachers and/or the improvement of a program that helps lead to student growth, whether the growth is academic or in some other way contributes to student development.

OBSERVATIONS FOR TEACHERS RATED PROFICIENT OR EXEMPLARY

1. What are the advantages of adopting this flex option this year, when some of our teachers have already had observations, and some haven't?

The main purpose of this flex option is to ease the burden brought on when evaluators are required to do formal observations for every teacher every year. The amount of time required of the evaluator is extensive, which has detracted from other responsibilities evaluators have. Many evaluators feel there is no need to formally observe every teacher every year, and would prefer that the time spent doing so is spent working with struggling teachers, or fulfilling other leadership responsibilities. Many teachers have stated that the amount of time they have spent uploading information for observations has taken time away from planning instruction and doing other tasks that benefit their students. This, too, would be alleviated with the adoption of this flex option this year.

2. *If our committee mutually agrees to adopt the flexibility option for this year that requires 1 formal, in-class observation, what do we use to guide the decision about which teachers would be in Year 1 of the cycle?*

The first thing your committee would use is the evaluation designations used in previous years to determine what the equivalents are for 'proficient' and 'exemplary.' Those are the teachers who would be eligible for this flexibility option. Once your committee has determined who is eligible for the option, there are several ways to decide who'll be in which 'year' of the cycle. The aim is to make a decision that will balance, as much as possible, the number of teachers who will be in any year of the evaluation cycle. This will reduce the burden of observations so that evaluators can focus on providing support for those teachers who need it the most.

There are several ways that eligible teachers can be placed into Year 1 (the formal observation year), 2, or 3 of the evaluation cycle, including, but not limited to:

- a. Those who have already been observed this year might be placed in year 1, and the remainder divided between Years 2 and 3;
- b. Teachers can volunteer to be placed into a specific year on the cycle;
- c. Teachers can be randomly selected to be placed into a specific year on the cycle;
- d. Placement can be based on a teacher's seniority in the district.

2. *In addition to the formal observations, what else is required in Year 1 of the cycle?*

Every teacher must participate in one review of practice.

3. *What is required in Years 2 and 3 of the cycle?*

Teachers will have 3 informal observations each year, and one review of practice.

4. *If a teacher is in Year 2 or 3, can formal observations be done?*

Yes. The flexibility option allows for this, if the evaluator deems it necessary, based on what was informally observed in the classroom.

5. *Will teachers receive feedback from informal observations during the cycle?*

Yes, it is still expected that feedback will be given in a timely manner; what is 'timely' is up to the committee to mutually agree on. The committee must also mutually agree on *how* the feedback will be given (e.g., written, verbal, both), since that is part of the evaluation process.

6. *How does the flexibility option pertain to teachers who are non-tenured and in years 3 & 4 of their careers?*

The flexibility option is not based on tenure status. If teachers in years 3 and 4 have been rated proficient or exemplary by their evaluators, they're eligible for this flexibility option.

7. *How do we determine the eligibility for a teacher who is new to our district?*

If the teacher is in the first or second year of his/her career, that teacher is required to have 3 formal, in-class observations. If the teacher enters the district beyond his/her second year of teaching, there are two options: (1) the teacher can choose to share evaluation information from the former district, which can be used to determine if the teacher would be considered proficient or exemplary, and, hence, eligible for this option. (2) the district can consider the teacher to be a year one teacher, then, based on the teacher's evaluation in that year, determine where the teacher would be placed the following year. Again, this would be a decision the committee would mutually agree on.