

New Flexibility Options In Teacher Evaluation

Understand the Change.
Guide the Discussion.



On January 29, 2014, the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council approved new flexibility options for teacher evaluation. This presentation will explain what the flexibility options are, and some of the questions a district Professional Development and Evaluation Committee should discuss so as to use the flexibility options appropriately for their needs. The timelines for submitting changes in the district plan to the State Department of Education will also be reviewed.

Overreliance on Testing

Current Requirement : Use of CMT / CAPT for 22.5% of evaluation

Flexibility Option : No use of CMT / CAPT / SBAC in 2013-14 year
 No use of CMT / CAPT / SBAC in 2014-15 year,
pending federal approval



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The first area of flexibility is in the use of the state tests in evaluation. The teacher evaluation guidelines currently state that the state test - CMT and CAPT - must be used in determining 22.5% of the 45% of evaluation comprised of student growth. Since Connecticut will participate in the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium field test this spring, the state applied for, and was granted, a waiver from using state tests in evaluation for this year.

Connecticut will apply for an extension of that waiver, which would give districts the flexibility to **not** use the state test in evaluation for the 2014-2015 school year. PEAC has agreed to this flexibility being recognized as part of the teacher evaluation guidelines. This flexibility allows teachers and evaluators to mutually agree on greater use of appropriate, student-centered, non-standardized indicators of student growth.

Testing Flexibility Option : What Should Guide Our Discussion?

(sample questions)

1. Are there other standardized indicators we'll use in place of the CMT/CAPT/SBAC?
2. In what years will our plan use those other standardized indicators?
3. Do we know that other standardized indicators align closely enough with our curriculum that they're reliable and valid for measuring student growth over time?
4. Will using other standardized indicators bring an additional expense to the district?
5. What else do we need to have in place if we adopt another standardized indicator for use, and will we be able to do this in time to use those indicators effectively?
6. What non-standardized indicators do teachers currently use to show student growth over time?
7. What additional non-standardized indicators, if any, can teachers use?
8. Will our committee require a specific minimum number of non-standardized indicators for each SLO? If so, what will that number be?
9. Will the committee require more than one *type* of non-standardized indicator, such as district benchmark assessments, teacher created tests, student work, etc?
10. If we use different forms of student work as non-standardized indicators, do we have a common understanding in our district of what constitutes 'high quality' student work? If not, how can we / should we develop a rubric that describes this on a continuum of performance?



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These are a sample of questions your district committee should discuss when talking about a flexibility option. One of the biggest decisions is whether or not a different standardized indicator will replace the use of CMT/CAPT/SBAC. Districts aren't required to purchase another standardized indicator for use, and before doing so, should really be assured that any such indicator aligns tightly with the curriculum being taught.

Having this flexibility to use only non-standardized indicators to show student growth over time brings several advantages:

1. Teachers can collect samples of student work that align with the SLO more frequently, showing incremental growth.
2. Using student work as non-standardized indicators allows the teacher to include different types of work, such as written and oral work, constructed projects, performances, etc. This,

in turn, allows students to use different modalities to show what they've learned.

3. Teachers are more accustomed to assessing student growth using non-standardized indicators, which allows them to create a closer alignment to the curriculum.

Many districts have already developed common rubrics for different types of student work that they can adapt for this purpose, and there are many resources available to help teachers develop rubrics if that's needed. The ultimate goal in deciding how to use non-standardized or standardized indicators should be to give the teacher options for showing student growth over time by examining student performance at several points in the year.

Number of Required Formal Observations Teachers Rated Proficient or Exemplary

- Current Requirement :
- At least 1 formal, in-class observation **each year**
 - 1-2 reviews of practice / year

- Flexibility Option :
- At least 1 formal, in-class observation **every 3 years**
 - 3 informal in-class observations all other years
 - 1 review of practice / year
 - Observations for non-classroom teachers take place in appropriate settings
 - Districts may use the equivalent ratings of 'proficient' and 'exemplary' from prior evaluation system to determine which teachers are eligible for this option



The current teacher evaluation guidelines require that every teacher – no matter what his or her rating – has a combination of 3 observations and reviews of practice each year. At least one of those **must** be a formal, in-class observation.

The flexibility option would give district committees the opportunity to establish an evaluation process based on a 3-year cycle for those teachers who are rated proficient or exemplary. Since this is the first year many districts are using those specific terms, the district can use the terms they included in their *previous* evaluation system to determine which teachers would be eligible for this flexibility option. Within the 3 year cycle, at least one formal, in-class observation must take place; the committee can mutually agree to include more formal observations on a regular basis if they choose.

During the years when a formal observation **isn't** scheduled to take place, proficient and exemplary teachers would have 3 informal observations conducted by their evaluators. This is a practice many districts currently use. This will free up a significant amount of time for evaluators to concentrate on providing support for new teachers and those who are struggling.

The flexibility option also allows an evaluator to schedule additional formal observations at any time during the 3-year cycle if informal observations lead him or her to feel that one or more formal observations are needed. Clarifying language in the flexibility option reinforces that, for non-classroom teachers, observations would take place in a setting that is appropriate to their roles.

The 3-year cycle also includes a review of practice between the teacher and evaluator every year.

Observation Flexibility Option : What Should Guide Our Discussion?

(sample questions)

1. Will our district use this option for teachers, and if so, when will we begin?
2. If we begin this year, how will we decide which teachers will be in year 1, 2, or 3 of the cycle?
3. Will we randomly select? Ask for volunteers? Begin with those teachers who have already been observed?
4. If teachers are placed in an 'informal observation' year, and have already had formal observations, will those be used in their summative evaluation this year?
5. Will the process for conducting informal observations in the 3-year cycle change at all, and if so, how?
6. Will the focus of one formal, in-class observation encompass all or only some indicators of the observation rubric the district uses?
7. Will the committee draw up a list of recommended 'appropriate settings' for those support specialists who are non-classroom teachers, so there is greater consistency across the district?



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Changing the way formal observations are conducted can have several advantages for both teachers and evaluators. With fewer teachers to formally observe each year, the evaluator can spend more time supporting new or struggling teachers. If an evaluator conducts 3 informal observations each year, those can help shape the focus of the review of practice and other conversations with the teacher.

Perhaps the hardest decision to make is whether or not to begin a 3-year evaluation cycle in the middle of this year. This is one area in which mutual agreement of the committee members is critical. One key to making the right decision is assuring that all aspects of the change are fully discussed and committee members have a common, agreed-upon understanding of how those changes will look in practice.

Development of SLOs (Student Learning Objectives)

- Current Requirement :
- 1 – 4 per year
 - Every educator’s SLOs aligned with student academic growth indicators
- Flexibility Option :
- 1 Student Growth Objective per year
 - Support specialist develops growth objective & indicators based on his/her role



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Under the current guidelines, teachers develop between 1 and 4 student growth goals or objectives each year, as described in their teacher evaluation plan. The State Department’s interpretation of the guidelines language has been that the student goals are required to use multiple indicators to measure student **academic** growth and development, no matter what the teacher’s role is within the school. The SEED model requires teachers to write 2 student *learning* objectives, and most districts have followed that requirement.

Requiring teachers to write 2 SLOs can lead to those SLOs and targets being easier to reach and not focusing on students’ most pressing needs. The flexibility option emphasizes that districts **can** focus on having teachers write 1 student goal or objective that addresses the most critical student needs, and that student goal **can**

be based on other areas of growth in which a support specialist does his or her work.

This is especially important for support specialists who work in non-classroom settings (such as guidance counselors and school psychologists), specialists who don't have primary responsibility for direct instruction of students or who teach students on an as-needed basis (such as some library media specialists), and specialists who don't instruct students at all (such as coaches or curriculum specialists).

Student Growth Goal Flexibility Option : What Should Guide Our Discussion?

(sample questions)

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing 1 student goal?
2. If we're not ready to make a full change to requiring only 1 student goal for next year, should we pilot this with a smaller group of teachers?
3. With the development of 1 student goal, how many indicators would we recommend teachers include?
4. What guidelines do we think are important for teachers and evaluators to follow when developing and agreeing on 1 student goal?
5. Where can we find good samples, or how can we develop good samples, of student goals that focus on the most important role of : (1) a support specialist who provides services directly to students, (2) a support specialist who works primarily with teachers, and (3) a support specialist who doesn't work with either students or teachers?
6. If we want to focus on the use of only 1 student goal starting this year, what guidance can we give to teachers and evaluators about reaching mutual agreement on which student goal to use?



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The student growth goal flexibility option is another that has the potential to significantly decrease the work load for both teachers and evaluators, and enable teachers to focus on one very meaningful growth goal for students. One of the most important parts of the flexibility option is shifting the focus of student goals for support specialists.

Specialists who provide services to students can think in terms of how their services promote student development that contributes to student growth *overall*, not just academically.

Specialists who work primarily with teachers and aren't responsible for primary instruction of students shouldn't be held directly accountable for student performance. They also have no control over whether or not teachers use what they learn from the

specialist, so can't be held accountable for teacher performance. But they can be held accountable for providing supports to teachers in response to teacher needs that are connected to student learning needs, and this can help guide the development of their growth goals.

Specialists who don't work with either teachers or students also can't be held accountable for student growth. The objectives they write may be better linked to how they contribute to a particular school program, depending on their role in the school.

Onerous Data Collection

- Current Issue :
- Excessive data management system requirements
 - Technical & infrastructure problems cause system failures
 - No privacy protections

- New Requirement for All Districts
(not optional) :
- Limit data, information, & artifacts to those specifically used for evaluating teacher
 - By 9-15-14, and then annually, Teacher Evaluation & Development Committee examines efficiency of data management system & makes report to local Board of Education
 - Access to teacher data limited to primary evaluator, superintendent/designee, & others directly involved in evaluation/PD processes
 - SDE access to identifiable student data limited to that needed to comply with statutory audits



At this point in time, data management in teacher evaluation has a stronger emphasis on 'data' than it does on 'management,' and teachers and administrators have reported excessive data uploads required by different systems. This is due in part to the belief that an evaluator has to have evidence for every indicator in every domain, for every observation done of a teacher, no matter what rubric is being used in the evaluation system. Because evaluators may not observe behaviors that align with every indicator while they're in the classroom, teachers are often required to upload additional information. Teachers have reported spending a minimum of 2 hours, and often many more, on these tasks, which takes time from their lesson planning for instruction.

The flexibility option limits the data required to only that which is used specifically in any given observation; in essence, if the

evaluator doesn't see behaviors during an observation that align with an indicator, the teacher **wouldn't** be required to upload additional data and artifacts, and the observation would be based only on what is observed.

District committees would also be required to examine how efficient the data management system selected for use is, and make a report to the local board of education as to what they see the needs for a data management system are, and what would work efficiently. Protections for students and teachers that limit who has access to data stored electronically are also specified, so as to prevent the misuse of such data.

Data Management Flexibility Option : What Should Guide Our Discussion?

(sample questions)

1. What information is really needed in each phase of evaluation?
2. Is there redundancy in the information teachers are asked to provide? If so, where is it, and how can we eliminate it?
3. How can we assure there is consistency across schools in how much information teachers are asked to upload?
4. What does an 'efficient' data management system look like?
5. What privacy protections does any data management system we examine have?
6. What type of training in use of any data management system is needed?
7. What would the cost to our district be?
8. What technical support does any data management system company provide to teachers and administrators?



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Choosing a data management system isn't easy for a local board of education. Because there are so many aspects to use of the system that need to be explored and discussed, your committee may want to establish a sub-committee that includes other educators – especially at least one district IT staff member – to take on this work. Monitoring and evaluating the use of the data management system will be a process that occurs over time, and with the other work that the Professional Development & Evaluation committee has to do, it may be better to separate this task. A sub-committee would report back to the full committee with its findings, and the full committee will make a final report to the local board of education about the needs and efficiencies of a system that the committee identifies.

Timelines

January 29, 2014 - Flexibility options approved by PEAC

February 5, 2014 - Flexibility options tentatively set to be reviewed by State Board of Education

March 30, 2014 – District deadline for submitting flexibility plan for remainder of 2013-14 school year to SDE

SDE to determine district deadline for submitting teacher evaluation plan, including any flexibility option, for 2014-15 school year

Note : The district plan, including any flexibility changes made to the plan used for the remainder of this school year, must be approved by the local board of education prior to submission to the State Department of Education.



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Time is always of the essence, but it's critical that district Professional Development & Evaluation committees convene as quickly as possible to review the flexibility options now available and determine their next course of action. As the timeline indicates, a district committee **can** make changes to their plan and put those into effect immediately, and must submit those changes to the State Department of Education no later than March 30 of this year. If a district chooses not to make any changes to the plan they'll use for the remainder of this year, no submission to the SDE is needed.

The SDE will determine the deadline for each district to submit the teacher evaluation plan they'll use **next** year, including any flexibility options that are chosen for that plan. As required by statute, all plans must be approved by the local board of education prior to submission to the SDE.

Timelines :
What Should Guide Our Discussion?

(sample questions)

1. Should we begin by creating and agreeing on a priority list of the changes we feel will have the most positive impact on teaching and learning?
2. What changes can we most easily come to mutual agreement on for use *this* year?
3. Will the changes apply to all staff, or will we pilot those with smaller groups?
4. If we pilot for the remainder of this year, how will we decide whether or not to include the changes in our plan for next year?
5. Should we include a board of education member in our discussions so we have an idea of whether or not the board will approve changes we request?
6. How would we 'message' changes for this year to teachers and administrators so everyone has the same understanding?
7. What flexibility options are we interested in including in our plan for *next* year?
8. Will the changes apply to all staff, or will we pilot those with smaller groups?
9. In what other areas do we want to make changes to our plan for next year?



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The timeline for making changes to your teacher evaluation plan may seem short, but chances are teachers and administrators already have ideas of what changes need to be made. Your committee would be well served to work first on those changes that will have the most positive impact on teaching and learning. Resources are available on the CEA web site's teacher evaluation page to help guide your committee's discussions, and CEA staff are available to work with your committee. It's important to remember that the evaluation plan is a working document and can be changed each year as teachers and administrators in your district find what works best.

Next Steps for Your Committee?

- Convene meeting of the district Professional Development & Evaluation Committee
- Review flexibility options and mutually agree on whether changes will be made for this year, next year, or both
- Establish appropriate working schedule
- Review Flexibility Option Questions as a guide to committee discussions
- Mutually agree on language and practice changes for plan
- Decide on how the changes will be communicated in a clear message to all staff
- Submit changes to plan to local board of education for approval
- Upon approval, submit plan for changes to the SDE; plan for next year will go through established review process for consistency with guidelines

CEA teacher evaluation resources : www.cea.org
Click on 'Teacher Evaluation' on left hand menu

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Time is often in short supply, but it's very important that the district Professional Development & Evaluation committee meets to discuss the flexibility options and makes a well-informed decision. The options have the potential to help make the evaluation process more meaningful and appropriate, while relieving teachers and administrators of some of the burden the current system places on them. With honest discussion about evaluation, we have the opportunity right now to return to a focus on planning and providing engaging instruction for our students.