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Ohio Department of Education issues guidance on teacher evaluations conducted during COVID-19 and beyond

April 10, 2020

To evaluate or not to evaluate? This is the question many school districts are considering in the midst of COVID-19. On April 9, 2020, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) issued guidance addressing frequently asked questions that school districts may have concerning teacher evaluations, the continued use of Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) 1.0 and the implementation of OTES 2.0. In the guidance, ODE answers 21 questions administrators are likely to encounter as they determine how to handle teacher evaluations for the current school year and the 2020-21 school year. Some of the key takeaways from ODE's COVID-19 Education Information: Educator Evaluation Systems FAQs are highlighted here.

ODE's guidance provides that school districts have discretion on a case-by-case basis to complete teacher evaluations, rather than making a district-wide decision. The guidance also confirms that evaluation components may be completed virtually. For an evaluation to be considered complete in OTES, all of the required statutory components must be satisfied. That means a district must complete growth or improvement plans, sufficient numbers of observations and walkthroughs, and conferences as it normally would. The reduced requirements for teachers rated as "Accomplished" and "Skilled" also continue to apply. Student growth measures are a

final statutory component of the evaluation process. A school district may be able to exempt some of its teachers from student growth measures for the 2019-20 school year, if the teacher did not receive value-added data in the fall of 2019 or if the teacher meets any of the [possible reasons for exemption](#) in eTPES. However, if a school district chooses to complete a teacher's evaluation without student growth measures, excluding those who had value-added scores, the teacher will be placed on a full evaluation cycle in the 2020-21 school year. If the statutory evaluation requirements are not satisfied, the teacher's evaluation will be considered incomplete.

School districts that elect not to complete teacher evaluations for the 2019-20 school year due to coronavirus will find COVID-19 listed as an exemption option in eTPES and OhioES. Teachers who are not evaluated will maintain the rating and the evaluation cycle that were in place at the start of the 2019-20 school year when school begins in the fall of 2020. For example, a teacher rated "Skilled" in the fall of 2019 would still be rated "Skilled" in the fall of 2020. ODE further indicated that teachers who do not receive completed evaluations this school year are afforded the rights established under Ohio Revised Code Section 3319.11. Thus, if a school district does not evaluate a teacher this school year, it cannot nonrenew the teacher's limited contract this school year.

The issued guidance suggests that school districts will need to carefully weigh the pros and cons when deciding whether or not to complete their teacher evaluations by ODE's newly-extended May 22, 2020, deadline. School districts should review the provisions of their collective bargaining agreements to determine whether the evaluation provisions and deadlines they contain are different than what the guidance provides. Districts choosing to complete their teacher evaluations this school year will want to address any substantive inconsistencies through an MOU. Any district considering the nonrenewal of a teacher will want to be certain to complete a third observation of the teacher, as required by law.

ODE's guidance is available for review [here](#).