

City Schools Off Cycle Evaluation Opportunity for Classroom Teachers: Frequently Asked Questions

After an initial pilot in SY 2020-21, City Schools offers an Off Cycle Evaluation Opportunity for tenured classroom teachers with a history of strong performance. This is for one school year, and those teachers who make this decision will not have formal observations or professional expectations conducted during the upcoming school year. Rather, their formal observation and professional expectations scores from the previous school year will be included in their upcoming school year's annual evaluation. In accordance with COMAR requirements, student growth data must be gathered each year and so these teachers must still participate in the SLO process while being Off Cycle.

Below are responses to some frequently asked questions, which we hope will be helpful. These are organized into the following categories:

- [The rationale and benefits of Off Cycle evaluations](#)
- [Eligibility criteria to be Off Cycle](#)
- [How to become Off Cycle](#)
- [Your annual evaluation during an Off Cycle year](#)
- [The impact of being Off Cycle and looking ahead](#)

If you have other questions that remain unanswered, please contact the Office of Human Capital by emailing HumanCapital@bcps.k12.md.us or calling 410-396-8885.

The rationale and benefits of Off Cycle evaluations

1. Why did the district decide to offer this Off Cycle evaluation opportunity for tenured teachers?

Teachers and school leaders have shared both the value of informal opportunities for feedback and the challenges with finding the time for more regular and ongoing informal observations of teacher practice. Following monthly feedback sessions in SY 2019-20 co-facilitated with the Baltimore Teachers Union, we piloted an Off Cycle option for over 1,700 teachers and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants.

2. What are the intended benefits of the Off Cycle evaluation opportunity?

City Schools' interest in pursuing the Off Cycle evaluation opportunity was directly informed by listening to and responding to teacher and school leader feedback. The intended benefits of the Off Cycle evaluation opportunity include:

- increasing capacity for more informal observations and increasing capacity and ability to differentiate support for teachers;
- differentiating and increasing time with and support for early career teachers and teachers with areas of developing practice; and
- identifying and lifting up those teachers whose practice will remain consistent and of high impact for students even while they may not receive as much regular and structured feedback through the formal observation process.

3. How did the district gather feedback following the pilot in SY 2020-21?

At the end of the pilot year, we surveyed all eligible teachers and all teacher supervisors. In the month of August 2021, we hosted virtual input sessions for further discussion with teachers and school leaders about some of the themes in the feedback survey results and specific questions to inform the Off Cycle opportunity we currently have in place.

4. What feedback did teachers and school leaders share following the pilot in SY 2020-21?

In our feedback surveys, we heard back from over 800 teachers and school leaders. In their feedback, teachers and school leaders shared:

- 95% of teachers and 78% of school leaders who provided feedback agreed or strongly agreed that the pilot eligibility criteria were appropriate to identify teachers who should be eligible to be “off cycle.”
- 93% of teachers and 91% of school leaders who provided feedback agreed or strongly agreed that pilot Off Cycle teachers understand their school leader’s instructional expectations going into the next school year.
- 80% of teachers and 83% of school leaders who provided feedback agreed or strongly agreed that the pilot Off Cycle experience increased school leader time and capacity for more frequent informal observations.
- 73% of teachers and 85% of school leaders who provided feedback agreed or strongly agreed that teachers who are confirmed as being Off Cycle should support the growth of other teachers’ practice.

Teachers also shared they felt respected and that the Off Cycle evaluation opportunity validated their history of consistent high performance and ability to be leaders and sources of support within their school community. During their Off Cycle experience, they felt more comfortable taking risks and attempting new strategies in their classrooms, and had more time to support their colleagues.

5. How similar is our current Off Cycle opportunity to the pilot experience?

Given the very positive responses we received, minimal changes were made between the pilot and our current Off Cycle opportunity. Feedback from the pilot helped inform our communications with eligible teachers and their supervisors, how we can further ensure our eligibility criteria appropriately identify those teachers whose strong performance will continue without more certain opportunities for feedback, and how we balance and respond to concerns for those rare instances where a teacher’s performance declines without the support and structured feedback aligned with formal observations of practice and feedback on their professional expectations.

Eligibility criteria to be Off Cycle

6. What are the eligibility criteria to be Off Cycle for a particular school year?

Tenured teachers who demonstrate strong performance in recent years are eligible to elect to go Off Cycle for their upcoming school year’s annual evaluation. There is a three year performance review period in which your previous performance on your Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation will be reviewed to determine whether you meet the eligibility criteria.

Specifically, this means a teacher must meet all of the criteria below to be eligible:

- ✓ You are part of the Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation for the upcoming school year
- ✓ You have tenure as of September 1 of the upcoming school year
- ✓ You have at least three completed evaluations (with an annual evaluation rating of *Highly Effective, Effective, Developing, or Ineffective*) as a teacher in the Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation since our district transition in SY 2013-14
- ✓ You were “on cycle” in the most recent school year

- ✓ During the three year performance review period, you were evaluated in the Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation system and your evaluation ratings must be *Highly Effective, Effective, Default Effective, or Administrative Effective*.
- ✓ During the three year performance review period, at least two of your annual evaluation ratings must be *Highly Effective*
- ✓ During the three year performance review period, you must not have been on a Performance Improvement Plan for any portion of time
- ✓ Your professional practice data (formal observation score based on at least two formal observations and professional expectations) from the previous school year must be available

7. What does an example of the three year performance review period look like?

There is a three year performance period in which your previous performance on your Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation will be reviewed to determine whether you meet the eligibility criteria. For example:

- Your eligibility to be Off Cycle for SY 2023-24 will be based on a three year performance review period that includes SY 2022-23, SY 2021-22, and SY 2020-21 performance information and Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation data
- Your professional practice data (ie: formal observations and professional expectations) will be pulled forward from SY 2022-23 (ie: the previous school year)

8. Is going Off Cycle available for all BTU employees?

No. The decision to go Off Cycle is only available to BTU employees who are evaluated as classroom teachers and meet the eligibility criteria mentioned above. BTU employees who are evaluated with the Performance Based Evaluation System (PBES) forms are not eligible at this time.

9. Who decides if an eligible teacher goes Off Cycle?

Upon receiving notification from the Office of Human Capital, it is the teacher's decision of whether or not to go Off Cycle and retain their professional practice scores from the previous school year.

10. If I am eligible to be Off Cycle, can my supervisor decide that I should be "on cycle" instead?

No. If a teacher meets the eligibility criteria and is notified by the Office of Human Capital that they are eligible to be Off Cycle, the teacher's supervisor can not decide that the educator should be "on cycle" instead."

11. How do I know what my professional practice scores from the previous school year are?

Teachers have access to their performance information in their annual evaluations, which can be downloaded from Employee Self Service. There is a [help guide on our website](#) with step-by-step instructions to help you.

12. If I changed roles in the previous school year, am I still eligible to be Off Cycle?

Yes. The eligibility criteria does not specify that an eligible teacher must be in the same assignment as the previous school year. Whether you changed schools, content, or grade level, you remain eligible to decide whether or not you want to be Off Cycle for the upcoming school year annual evaluation as long as you meet the eligibility criteria described above.

13. What if my previous annual evaluation is pending a grievance / appeal?

The eligibility status for teachers is determined based on current and available data. If a grievance, appeal, and/or request for an update to their previous annual evaluation has already been initiated and later

results in an employee becoming eligible for Off Cycle status, the Office of Human Capital will notify that employee and their supervisor.

14. What if all of my professional practice data is not complete from the previous school year?

If there isn't performance data for at least two formal observations and professional expectations from the previous year, you are not eligible to be Off Cycle this school year. This is because we do not have complete professional practice performance data to include in this year's annual evaluation calculations.

15. What if I was on sabbatical / on leave last year?

If there isn't performance data for at least two formal observations and professional expectations from the previous year, you are not eligible to be Off Cycle this school year. This is because we do not have complete professional practice performance data to include in this year's annual evaluation calculations.

If, however, you were on leave and there is still complete professional practice performance data from your previous year's annual evaluation, you may be eligible to be Off Cycle if you meet all other eligibility criteria.

16. I did not receive a notification message that I was eligible to be Off Cycle, but I think I should have been included. What can I do if I disagree with my eligibility status?

If you believe there is an error in your eligibility status, [you must indicate this by completing an Eligibility Review Request Form \(linked on the BTU Employee Evaluation webpage\) for review by the Office of Human Capital](#). Your request must be documented using this form. Other forms of communication, including notifying your supervisor, will not be accepted as official initiation of this review request.

This must be completed by the communicated deadline posted on the district website. Responses will not be accepted after this time and teachers who do not respond will be considered "on cycle" for the school year.

How to become Off Cycle

17. How will I let you know I want to be Off Cycle?

Eligible teachers will receive a notification from the Office of Human Capital, which will include a link to an electronic confirmation form and a deadline by which teachers must respond. Eligible teachers deciding to be Off Cycle must indicate this using the electronic confirmation form by the communicated deadline posted on the district website. This is the only way which their decision to be Off Cycle will be received and confirmed by the Office of Human Capital.

18. What if I tell my supervisor that I want to be Off Cycle? Does that mean I am now Off Cycle?

Any means of communication, including emailing or telling their supervisor, will not be accepted as official confirmation of an eligible teacher's decision to be Off Cycle. This decision must be indicated using the electronic confirmation form that will be sent by the Office of Human Capital.

19. How will I know that I am Off Cycle?

After an eligible teacher indicates their decision to be Off Cycle in the electronic confirmation form, the Office of Human Capital will email confirmation of their Off Cycle status.

20. After deciding to be Off Cycle, can I change my mind later in the year?

No. Once an employee confirms their decision to be Off Cycle they may not elect to go “on cycle” later in the school year.

21. After deciding to be Off Cycle, can my supervisor place me “on cycle” later in the year?

No. A teacher’s supervisor can not decide that the educator should be “on cycle” at any point during the evaluation cycle for that school year.

Your annual evaluation during an Off Cycle year

22. Does this mean an Off Cycle teacher’s annual evaluation rating will be the same as their previous school year annual evaluation rating?

Not necessarily. The teacher’s professional practice scores will carry forward from the previous school year and will be included in the annual evaluation total score calculation in their Off Cycle year. Thus, their annual evaluation rating will be based on the combination of these professional practice scores and their new, current year student growth scores.

In addition, current year absence data will also be assessed to confirm whether the teacher meets provision 15.22 of the BTU contract and would receive an *Administrative Effective* rating for the year.

23. Will an eligible teacher be exempt from their Student Learning Objective (SLO) as well?

No, they will not. All teachers evaluated in the Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation must complete the SLO process. If they meet the criteria for SLO Exemption, they must submit an exemption request in Blackboard for their evaluator’s review and approval.

Failure to complete the SLO process – including submitting either an SLO Learning Target or SLO Exemption request – may result in a score of “25” for that component in the teacher’s annual evaluation.

24. Can I choose which of my formal observation(s) will be included in my annual evaluation total score calculation when I am Off Cycle?

No. All available professional practice performance data from the previous school year will be included in your annual evaluation total score calculation during your Off Cycle year. This includes all formal observation ratings and professional expectations ratings.

25. If I am Off Cycle, does this impact my formal observations only?

No. All available professional practice performance data from the previous school year will be included in your annual evaluation total score calculation. This includes all formal observation ratings *and* professional expectations ratings.

26. If I am Off Cycle, what will I see on my electronic observation and professional expectations forms in Employee Self Service (OPMS)?

All forms – including formal observation and professional expectation forms – will still publish and be available in OPMS. The guidance from the Office of Human Capital to supervisors is to leave the indicators blank and use the “Teacher Off Cycle” leave waiver to close your professional practice forms in OPMS.

This means you will still see your forms in OPMS, but your supervisor should not enter any ratings. This is because the ratings from your previous school year's professional practice components will be calculated in this year's annual evaluation total score.

27. I see "0s" on my electronic observation and professional expectations forms in Employee Self Service (OPMS). Are there going to be "0s" in my annual evaluation?

No. The "0s" are the way that OPMS shows an indicator was left blank when a form was completed. We apologize for any concern this causes, but please know that there are no "0s" reflected on your annual evaluation record or in any of our reports.

28. If I am Off Cycle, what will I see on my annual evaluation report for the year?

When you access your Teacher Effectiveness Evaluation Report from Employee Self Service, you will still see the full PDF report. It will include your identifying information, your professional practice scores from the previous school year, and your student growth scores from this school year. There will be a note underneath the tables that list your professional practice scores, indicating these scores come from the previous school year due to your being Off Cycle.

The impact of being Off Cycle and looking ahead

29. If I am Off Cycle, will I still have informal observations and receive feedback?

Yes. It remains City Schools' expectation that all teachers receive regular, formative feedback. This includes feedback stemming from informal observations of practice. We hope that increasing school leader time and capacity for more frequent informal observations is one of the benefits of this Off Cycle opportunity.

30. If I am Off Cycle, do I still need to write an Individual Development Plan (IDP)?

Yes. Eligible teachers who decide to be Off Cycle must engage in and complete all other aspects of their evaluation cycle. This includes writing and working towards their professional development goals in their IDP.

Based on feedback from teachers following our SY 2020-21 pilot, we strongly encourage teachers who are Off Cycle to include a development goal or action items connected to (1) specific instructional skills or TEACH indicators they would like to grow further in while Off Cycle and/or (2) a way they want to increase their leadership capacity. Action steps in support of your IDP may include reference to informal observations or other formative opportunities for feedback from your supervisor.

31. If I am Off Cycle can a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) still be initiated?

Yes. A PIP may be initiated at any time by an employee or their supervisor.

As a reminder, part of the eligibility criteria includes that an eligible teacher must not have been on a Performance Improvement Plan for any portion of time during the three year performance review period. Thus, if a Performance Improvement Plan is initiated during your Off Cycle year, it will impact your eligibility for the next three school years.

32. Will teachers who are Off Cycle be able to use their annual evaluation for salary movement purposes?

Yes, teachers who are Off Cycle will still be eligible for salary movement in accordance with the BTU contract based on the final evaluation rating that is calculated for that Off Cycle year.

In the year a teacher is Off Cycle, their annual evaluation will calculate based on performance data that is available. This includes their previous year's professional practice data and current year's student growth data. Current year absence data will also be assessed to confirm whether the teacher meets provision 15.22 of the BTU contract and would receive an *Administrative Effective* rating for the year.

33. Will teachers who are Off Cycle be able to use their annual evaluation for certification purposes?

Yes, they will.

34. For how long will I be Off Cycle?

Eligible teachers are confirming their decision to be Off Cycle for one school year annual evaluation only. The Off Cycle evaluation opportunity is for one school year, after which those teachers will be "on cycle" and will engage in the full annual evaluation process the following school year.

35. Can I be Off Cycle on an every-other-year basis?

If you meet the eligibility criteria, it is possible to be Off Cycle every other year. As a reminder, each year the eligibility criteria will be reviewed to determine who is eligible for the Off Cycle evaluation opportunity.

36. What if I am interested in another opportunity (ie: Model Pathway, Opportunity Culture, SLO Ambassador) that considers my performance on my annual evaluation? Do I need to make sure I stay "on cycle" this school year?

If another opportunity or process requires you to have current performance data for a specific evaluation component – for example, formal observation ratings – you may need to be "on cycle" if such component performance data would be needed.

If, however, the opportunity or process requires an overall annual evaluation rating, you may be Off Cycle and be able to use the overall annual evaluation rating that is calculated. You should consider this when deciding whether to be Off Cycle for the year or not.

37. Will I need to be formally observed next school year?

Eligible teachers are confirming their decision to Off Cycle for one school year only, and the eligibility criteria include that a teacher must have been "on cycle" in their previous school year. Thus, if you are Off Cycle this year, you will not be eligible to be Off Cycle the next school year. This means you will engage in the full evaluation process in the next school year, including your professional expectations and formal observations.

38. If I am eligible to be Off Cycle in the upcoming school year but decide to stay "on cycle", can I choose instead to be Off Cycle in the following school year?

No. Teachers are not able to save or carry forward their eligibility from one school year into another. Rather, your eligibility to be Off Cycle will be reassessed at the beginning of the next school year.