

Conducting a Walkthrough/Informal Observation

Guidelines for Informal Classroom Observations

- Classroom walkthroughs/informal observations, as part of the teacher evaluation system, may be general in nature or focused on observing a specific aspect of teacher performance. Summary data collected through a series of walkthroughs along with evidence documented through formal observations will come together to inform the teachers' summative performance rating: Ineffective, Developing, Proficient or Accomplished.
- An informal observation/classroom walkthrough is not a(n):
- » Formal observation;
 - » "Gotcha" opportunity for supervisors or evaluators;
 - » Isolated event; or
 - » Shortcut to the observation protocol required as part of the teacher evaluation process.
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Informally Observe All Teachers

All teachers benefit from informal classroom observations. Informal observations should last from 15 to 20 minutes; therefore, conduct only as many observations in a day as you can follow up with on either the same or next day. Teachers need and deserve some type of immediate feedback.

Informally Observe As Often As You Can

The principal's presence in the classroom sends a positive message to teachers: the principal cares. Including informal classroom observation as a school-wide initiative requires consistency and frequency. Find times in the day to observe teachers at varying times of the day: for most teachers, what occurs in the morning is much different than what occurs in the afternoon.

Focusing on One or Two Areas

Although there may be no predetermined focus established (because of no pre-conference), find a focus based on the instruction, events or discussions that are occurring in the classroom. A focus may also occur based upon past conferences and the need for follow up observations.

Make Time to Follow Up

Follow-up communication to informal classroom observations is a critical component. Follow-up will often be in writing but the evaluator should extend to the teacher an invitation to discuss any comments provided face-to-face. The evaluator may also offer resources to help teachers refine their practice.

Teacher Driven Observations

While it is recognized that evaluators have many demands on their time, encouraging teachers to identify instructional periods for the evaluator to observe can be a means for the evaluator to collect evidence related to a specific focus the teacher and evaluator may be working on.

Types of Data

Data collected as evidence of teacher practice may be quantitative, qualitative or a combination of both. Quantitative data includes frequencies, distributions and other counts or tallies. For example the observer could use a checklist to tally how many questions were asked of children in the front row or children who had their hands raised versus not. The evaluator might also chart the types of questions asked (higher versus lower levels). Qualitative data can include scripted notes detailing patterns of activities, vocabulary used and events observed. In both cases, accuracy is essential to ensure the credibility of the process and the evaluator.