Protocol for Superintendent’s School Visits

p. B-1 of Implementation Guide for Principal Evaluation

Periodic purposeful school visits offer critical opportunities for superintendents to understand the work of the school leader as it relates to instructional leadership, school culture, and other leadership practices. Superintendents use these visits as opportunities to observe, collect evidence, and analyze the work of school leaders. To do so, they visit classrooms together, but the visits are not for the superintendent to evaluate teachers; instead the superintendent is evaluating the principal’s skills and knowledge as an instructional leader.

Visits to schools should be ongoing and, at times, unannounced as required by the regulations. At a minimum, though, fall, winter, and spring visits to the school leader’s work site can provide invaluable insight into the school leader’s performance over the course of the year. The value of the insights depends on the superintendent and principal engaging together in three specific activities each time:¹

- Discuss progress and challenges.
- Examine artifacts.
- Observe teaching practice and share analyses.

1. The superintendent and principal discuss progress and challenges in areas such as the following:

   - Goals
     - Professional Practice
     - Student Learning
     - School Improvement
   - Outreach to Parents
   - School Climate and Culture
   - Professional Development
   - Challenging Supervisory Cases

2. The superintendent and principal examine artifacts together such as the following:

   - Classroom observation schedule and a sample of the feedback provided
   - Meeting plans
   - Newsletters
   - Interim assessment results

3. The superintendent and principal observe classroom and other practice and share their analyses.

   - 10–15 minute observations in two to four classrooms²
   - Other activities to observe might include:
     - Leadership team meetings
     - Faculty meetings
     - Grade-level, team and department meetings
     - Lunch and recess
     - Transitions (entry, dismissal, between class)

¹ Superintendents often find that they learn the most when they share their general school visit protocol ahead of time with principals so that principals know the purposes of the superintendent’s visits.

² Some superintendents visit classrooms with the principal and discuss what they see “along the way.” Other superintendents will discuss with the principal what classes they would like to visit and then visit on their own, meeting afterward with the principal to share perceptions and ask questions. Some do both in the same visit.
Strategies and Suggestions for Observations

p. 39 of the School-Level Planning and Implementation Guide (Part II of the Model System)

- **Frequent, unannounced observations.** Frequent observation of classroom practice—with feedback—is essential to improving practice, but only feasible if most observations are short, unannounced and followed by brief, focused feedback. There will be times when an evaluator is in a classroom or other work site and it becomes apparent that the visit needs to be extended, but a visit of approximately 10 minutes can yield a great deal of useful information. With short, unannounced visits, many more samples of practice can be collected, and many more powerful conversations about teaching practice can be had: when the **typical** observation of classroom practice is 10 minutes in duration and does not have to be preceded by a pre-observation conference or followed by a period-long post-observation conference, then evaluators can reasonably be expected to conduct 2 to 5 such observations on a typical day.

  - 3 observations conducted each day on 150 of the 180 days in a school year translate to 450 observations each year, or 10 observations per year for each of 45 teachers. 7-10 brief observations followed by focused feedback should be a sufficient number to secure a representative picture of practice and promote the reflection and discussion needed to support improving practice.

  - Feedback can be provided during a conversation or in writing. Providing feedback through conversation promotes discussion of practice; providing feedback in writing creates an opportunity for the educator to more easily reflect on the feedback on an ongoing basis. Whenever possible, an evaluator should have a conversation with the educator and follow up with brief written feedback summarizing the conversation and/or offering targeted advice for improvement.

  - It should be noted that not all observations can or should be 5 to 15 minutes. There will be circumstances where longer observations are appropriate. Novice or struggling teachers may benefit from longer observations on occasion.

- **Observations outside of the classroom.** Observation of practice need not be limited to classroom observation. Conferences with individual teachers or teacher teams that focus on unit planning or ways the team is responding to interim assessment data can yield useful information and provide opportunities for feedback and growth. They can also be well-aligned with school and team goals. Most schools have goals that depend on effective collaboration among educators, so observation of educators in settings where they are developing their skills in collaboration can support school-wide goals. That said, care needs to be taken to ensure that observation does not interfere with the free exchange of ideas that is important in any healthy collegial environment. Therefore, collecting, reviewing and giving feedback on specific artifacts from department and team meetings can serve a purpose similar to observation of meetings. Similarly observing educators with parents and/or reviewing a team’s analysis of representative samples of home-school communications can support collaborative work, reinforce school goals, and provide opportunities for useful feedback.

Observation of practice in work sites other than the classroom will be essential for some educators, as many staff have primary responsibilities that are carried out elsewhere, such as school nurses, administrators, or department heads.