



Ensuring High-Quality Feedback to Teachers

School Visit Protocol Supporting Standard I

School visits are to principal evaluation what classroom visits are to teacher evaluation: the foundation for fair and comprehensive supervision and evaluation. They are also a critical way for superintendents to see firsthand how district and school improvement efforts are playing out in schools and classrooms.

This is a school visit protocol that a superintendent can use to:

- ✓ **Gather evidence of the principal's work** observing and providing feedback to teachers or the administrators who supervise them;
- ✓ **Guide and support the principal's development** in providing quality, content-specific feedback; and
- ✓ **Monitor implementation of district and school priorities** for instructional improvement.

During this visit, the superintendent and principal observe 2-4 classrooms together and debrief with a focus on the principal's prior and planned feedback.

As with principals and classroom visits, what superintendents do before, during and after a school visit needs to be deliberate and intentional. This protocol describes the preparation, visit activities, and follow-up that promote a meaningful and effective school visit focused on observations and feedback.

The focus of this school visit is on the following element from Standard I of the [Model Principal Rubric](#):

- **I-D-3: Observations and Feedback**

Ten Steps for an Effective School Visit

Before the Visit

1. Establish expectations.
2. Review artifacts and develop visit focus.
3. Establish time, agenda, and preparation required.

During the Visit

4. Observe with a specific focus.
5. Debrief what you observed and read
6. Share feedback.
7. Agree on next steps and plan for accountability.

After the Visit

8. Hold each other accountable for next steps.
9. Review artifacts.
10. Reflect, prepare feedback, and address implications.



Before the Visit

1. Establish Expectations

- Make sure that the principal:
 - Understands that the focus of this visit is on the feedback they have given and will give to the teachers whose classrooms you observe together.
 - Has communicated to staff that you and they will be observing 2-4 classes together for 10-15 minutes each and that the superintendent is not evaluating the teachers' practice.
- Clarify your expectations for observation and face-to-face and written feedback so that the principal is not surprised by the degree of familiarity you expect them to have with a teacher's practice.

2. Review Artifacts and Develop the Focus for this Visit

- Review notes and next steps agreed on at the last conference and/or school visit with the principal, including samples of prior feedback the principal has provided to teachers.
 - How specific, timely, and actionable is the feedback? Is it content-specific?
 - What questions do these artifacts raise for you that you will want to raise with the principal?
- Check the status of the principal's observation reports. Are they on target to meet district deadlines?
- Beyond observations and feedback in general, collaborate with the principal on a secondary focus for the visit, such as observations and feedback focused on Student Engagement, Quality of Effort and Work, or Meeting Diverse Needs. That decision will guide the choice of artifacts to review and classrooms to observe.

3. Establish Time, Preparation Required, and Agenda

- Schedule the visit in advance with the principal so that the principal can know what classes will be possible to observe.
- Allow approximately 15 minutes to observe each classroom and another 5-10 minutes to debrief each. Consider using [the School Visit Template](#) as a resource to capture plans and keep focused.
- Be clear about the artifacts you want to review before or during the visit, e.g. prior written feedback to teachers, formative evaluations or the principal's schedule of classroom observations.



Deep Dive: Planning a School Visit for Classroom Observation & Feedback

Intentionally planning a school visit around a focus area related to a principal's goals or priorities for the school will help ensure that time allocated for the visit is used to effectively gather evidence and provide meaningful feedback.

- **Choose a focus area.** Having a focus is important for ensuring a targeted, purposeful visit. To better understand and support a principal's practice of observing and providing feedback to teachers, you may choose to identify and focus on priority elements from Standard I, such as:
 - **I-B-1 Student Engagement:** Review examples of the principal's feedback regarding student engagement and observe teachers who reflect a range of proficiency in this area.
 - **I-B-2 Quality of Effort and Work:** Observe a series of classrooms with a focus on the activities and assignments being completed by students and debrief together the feedback that the principal would provide teachers to promote and uphold high expectations for all students.
 - **I-B-3 Meeting Diverse Needs:** Review the school's English learner profile and performance, and observe sheltered English instruction with a focus on inclusive practices designed to meet the diverse learning needs of English learners.
- **Develop an agenda.** The chance to co-observe classes and meetings and see students and student work in person must be the primary focus of the school visit. Other business can happen outside of school hours and/or outside of the school.

Sample agenda for a two-hour visit:

Review pressing concerns, review and adjust agenda	15 min
Observe together	60 min
Debrief observation together	20-40 min
Debrief related topics and issues	5-15 min
Share feedback and next steps.	5-10 min

Note: Both Superintendents and principals have found that they can get "waylaid" in the office unless they both remember that co-observing classes has to be the primary focus of this school visit.

- **Consider including other administrators.**
 - Consider asking the principal to invite Department Heads or other school administrators for the visit. This provides an opportunity to observe a principal "in action" observing and calibrating observations with other members of their leadership team.
 - Consider asking the district's Curriculum Director to participate in order to add expertise and insight.

During the Visit

4. Observe and Review Artifacts with a Specific Focus

- In collaboration with the principal, identify specific classrooms to observe together.
- Confirm the school's instructional practice priorities and review prior written feedback provided to the teachers whose classrooms will be observed. Carefully reviewed in advance, this artifact can suggest specific elements to focus on and related "look for's." Alternatively, reviewed after the observation, it can confirm or contradict what is observed and prompt further inquiry.

5. Debrief What you Observed and Read

Find a private place for the debrief where you will neither be interrupted or overhead.

Generally, the debrief follows this line of inquiry:

- *How typical is what we saw?*
- *Did we both see (and hear) the same things?*
- *What pleased us? Why?*
 - *What feedback will reinforce the effective practice?*
- *What concerned us? Why?*
- *What is the most important feedback to give this teacher?*
 - *How can it be made specific and actionable enough?*
 - *Is it aligned to content when appropriate?*
 - *How and when will it be offered to the teacher verbally? In writing?*
- *What are the implications, if any, beyond this context? This school?*

Confirm that the principal is meeting your expectations for visiting classrooms and providing feedback. If they aren't, explore reasons and ways to overcome obstacles.

Ask questions such as:

- *How often are you getting into classrooms? What's your strategy for getting into classrooms often?*
- *What gets in the way? What do you/can you do to stay on track with your visits?*
- *What's your system for making sure you meet in person with each teacher after you observe to give feedback? How well does it work? Do you ever miss anyone?*
- *How do you keep up with written feedback after your visits?*

6. Share Feedback

- Offer feedback to the principal about their plan for feedback and what it suggests about their observation and feedback proficiency, in general.
- Make sure that your feedback is also specific and actionable, and identifies for the principal both strengths to build on and ways to shore up performance related to observing and providing feedback on instructional practice.

7. Agree on Next Steps and Plan for Accountability

- Conclude with clarity about the specific next step(s) for both the principal and the superintendent. Be specific about the timeline. For example:
 - Establish a deadline for when the principal will deliver written feedback to the teacher(s) and if and when it will be available to you to review.
 - Decide how and when the principal will provide examples of future written feedback incorporating the elements you established.
 - Decide how and when the principal will communicate evidence of their progress in observing instruction with greater insight and/or giving verbal feedback that reflects the elements you established.
 - Decide how and when the superintendent will provide promised support, if any is to be provided.

Deep Dive: Providing High-Quality Feedback to Teachers

Specific, timely, and actionable feedback that reinforces areas of strength *and* provides concrete recommendations for improvement is essential to an educator's growth and development.

- **Develop a shared definition of high-quality feedback that will improve teacher practice and student learning.**
 - Grounding feedback to in expectations of practice from the [Classroom Teacher Rubric](#) and appropriate, grade-level learning expectations based on the [MA Curriculum Frameworks](#) will both build on and help cultivate a shared understanding of proficient teaching practice.
 - Making explicit the impact of the teaching practice on students and their learning helps teachers “hear” it and act upon it.
 - Offering feedback that is specific and concrete is far more useful to a teacher than vague claims or next steps, whether positive or negative.
- **Leverage distributed leadership to ensure the provision of high-quality, content-specific feedback to teachers.**
 - In a [distributed leadership](#) model, responsibilities for providing feedback and support to teachers are shared by the principal and other school and/or district staff. This feedback may be given by a wide variety of educators—from peers to coaches to administrators—and be used formatively for self-reflection, collaborative planning, and/or formally used in evaluation.
- **Consider using these three feedback prompts:**
 - Share at least one positive instructional strategy you observed and cite evidence of its effect on student learning in the content area.
 - Ask a question to (a) prompt teacher reflection and/or (b) support your own understanding of the lesson.
 - Recommend at least one next step and cite evidence to support the recommendation and how it will improve student learning in the content area.
- **Pay attention to the broader implications of what is seen and heard.** For example:
 - For the principal:
 - How are observations and feedback being used to reinforce school goals and priorities for improvement?
 - How widespread are identified areas of growth? How might grade level, department, and/or faculty meetings address them?
 - What role should instructional coaches/teacher leaders/mentors be playing in order to provide content-specific feedback to individual teachers and teams?
 - For the superintendent:
 - What might this mean about the effectiveness of past professional development for administrators?
 - Can future administrator meeting agendas be designed to help address this?
 - How could district and school leaders continue to build a shared understanding of effective instructional practice and feedback through intentional, ongoing [calibration training](#)?

After the Visit

8. Hold Each Other Accountable for Next Steps

- Make sure that you follow through on any support you committed to provide, e.g., exploring “difficult conversations” at a Leadership Team meeting. Consider incorporating resources such as:
 - [OPTIC: Online Platform for Teaching and Informed Calibration](#) – a professional development tool for developing and refining a shared understanding of high-quality, standards-aligned instruction and feedback
 - [Subject Administrator Protocol](#) – a peer-review model of analyzing and refining samples of written feedback
- Make sure you review the principal’s feedback to see if it meets your expectations.

9. Review Artifacts

- The visit may prompt the need to review more observation or evaluation reports. Make time to review these before finalizing plans for your next one-to-one conference or visit.

10. Reflect, Prepare Feedback, and Address Implications

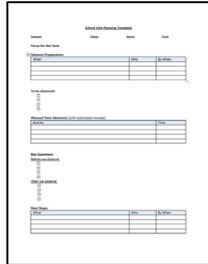
- Take time to reflect on the visit and make notes:
 - Are there patterns emerging about this principal’s performance in observing and providing feedback to teachers?
 - What is an emerging “[Claim-Evidence-Impact-Judgment](#)” statement that captures an essential element of their performance as a supervisor?
 - What supports might help them sharpen their classroom observations skills? Deepen their content knowledge? Improve the clarity of their written feedback? Make more strategic connections to the work of grade level/department teams?
 - Are there other principals who could benefit from those same supports? How might we use Leadership Team time to provide them?
 - How could models of distributed leadership support the principal in ensuring that teachers receive timely, content-specific feedback?
- Share feedback for the principal that is specific and actionable, identifying both strengths to build on and ways to shore up less-than-proficient performance.

The **Model Principal Rubric** defines proficient practice in this focus element as follows:

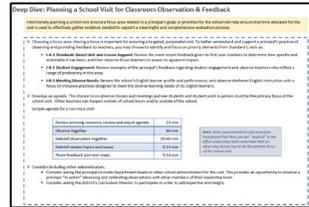
- **I-D-3: Observations and Feedback:**
Typically, makes unannounced visits to classrooms every day and provides quality, content-aligned feedback (specific, timely, actionable) to all educators; feedback reinforces effective practice and provides clear next steps and support for improvement from one performance level to the next.



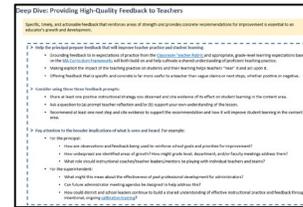
Resources



School Visit Template



Deep Dive: Planning a School Visit on Observations and Feedback



Deep Dive: Providing High Quality Feedback to Teachers



Sample C-E-I-J Statements For Observation & Feedback



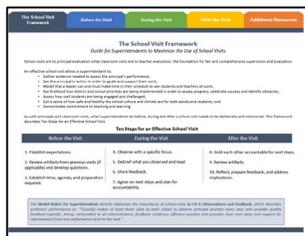
OPTIC: Online Platform for Teaching and Informed Calibration



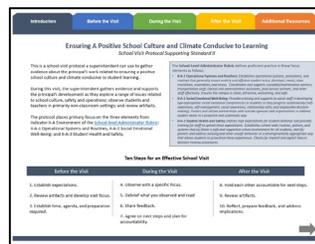
"What to Look For" Observation Guides



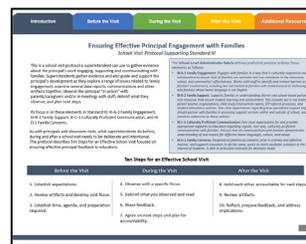
Subject Administrator Protocol



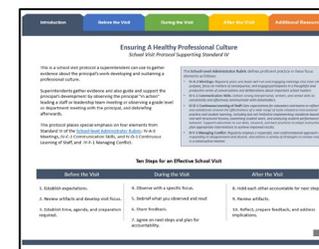
School Visit Framework



School Visit Protocol #2: School Culture



School Visit Protocol #3: Family Engagement



School Visit Protocol #4A: Professional Culture



School Visit Protocol #4B: Cultural Responsiveness