MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The School Visit Framework
A Guide for Superintendents to Maximize the Use of School Visits

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.

An effective school visit allows a superintendent to:

✓ **Monitor implementation of district and school priorities** to assess progress, celebrate successes, and identify obstacles;

✓ **Observe the principal in action** to guide and support their work and gather evidence to assess their performance; and

✓ **Demonstrate commitment to teaching and learning** by modeling that a leader can and must make time in their schedule to see students and teachers at work.

As with classroom visits, what superintendents do before, during and after a school visit should be deliberate and intentional. This framework describes the preparation, visit activities, and follow-up that promote meaningful and effective school visits.

Ten Steps for an Effective School Visit

Before the Visit	During the Visit	After the Visit
1. Establish expectations.	**4.** Observe with a specific focus.	**8.** Hold each other accountable for next steps.
2. Review artifacts and develop visit focus.	**5.** Debrief what you observed and read	**9.** Review artifacts.
3. Establish time, agenda, and preparation required.	**6.** Share feedback.	**10.** Reflect, prepare feedback, and address implications.
	7. Agree on next steps and plan for accountability.	

The **Model Rubric for Superintendents** directly addresses the importance of school visits **in I-D-3 Observations and Feedback**, which describes proficient practice as: *"Makes multiple visits to each school to observe administrator practice, and provides quality feedback (specific, timely, actionable) that reinforces effective practice and provides clear next steps and support for improvement."*

Before the Visit

1. Establish Expectations

Establish norms and expectations for school visits with the principal so that they know what to expect and can prepare.

For example:
- *Visits will be scheduled in advance and will only be canceled if there's an emergency that cannot be handled by anyone else*
- *Visits are not intended to be "dog and pony shows" but rather opportunities to see authentic practice;*
- *The focus of each visit will be jointly developed in advance.*

Agreed upon norms and expectations set the stage for visits that are focused and productive, and result in little if any disruption to the day-to-day operations of the building.

2. Review Artifacts and Develop the Focus for this Visit

Decide what is most timely and important to work on together. Consider: the principal's professional practice, student learning and school improvement goals; notes from the last conference and/or school visit; observations and evaluations the principal has prepared; notes from recent Leadership Team meetings; district reports on benchmark testing, staff and student attendance, and staff or student survey results. Any and all of these can suggest areas of focus for the visit and prompt questions to pose.

3. Establish Time, Preparation Required, and Agenda

Schedule the visit in advance with the principal unless an unannounced visit is essential to achieving your intended outcome. Scheduling in advance demonstrates respect for the principal and their work by not assuming they can drop everything they had scheduled when you arrive.

- With the principal, when feasible and appropriate, decide what artifacts to review in advance or have available for review during the visit, as well as the classrooms and/or activities to observe with the principal (e.g. classroom observation reports, formative or summative evaluations, faculty meeting agendas, etc.)

- Develop an agenda for the visit that estimates the time planned for each activity. An agenda helps ensure that there will be enough time for the observation, debrief and development of next steps. Capture plans for the visit on a template or form that can be shared before and after the visit to help ensure effective preparation, focus, and follow-up. See the *School Visit Template* as one resource for this planning.

Deep Dive: Planning a School Visit

Intentionally planning a school visit around a focus area related to a principal's goals or priorities 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. For example:

- How well does the principal observe and provide feedback to teachers? *(Standard I)*

- How well does the principal foster a safe and supportive school environment for all students? *(Standard II)*

- How well does the principal engage with families in a culturally responsive and collaborative way? *(Standard III)*

- How well does the principal plan and lead well-run and engaging meetings that have clear purpose, focus on matters of consequence, and engage participants in thoughtful and productive conversations and deliberations? *(Standard IV)*

- How well does the principal ensure that policies and practices enable staff and students to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment in which students' backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges are respected? *(Standard IV)*

➢ **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 a school visit. Other business can happen outside of school hours and/or outside of the school. Here's a sample agenda:

Review pressing concerns, review and adjust agenda	30 min.
Observe Together	45 min.
Debrief Observation Together	20 min.
Debrief Related Topics and Issues	15 min.
Share Feedback and Next Steps	10 min.
TOTAL	2 hours

Have less time? Shorten the initial conversation in order to leave as much time as possible for observing and debriefing classrooms.

Have more time? Use the visit to share status reports on "hot" district and school issues and then review progress on the principal's goals, identifying key indicators of success and any emerging obstacles.

➢ **Include other administrators.**

- Depending on the focus for the visit, consider asking another central office administrator to participate to add expertise and insight.

- In schools where it is applicable, consider asking the principal to invite Department Heads or other school administrators for the visit. This provides an opportunity to see a principal "in action" observing and calibrating observations with other members of their leadership team.

During the Visit

4. Observe and Review Artifacts with a Specific Focus

In collaboration with the principal, identify specific classrooms, settings, and meetings to observe. Ask the principal to identify aspects of school practice they want to highlight or receive feedback around. Similarly, identify together artifacts to review.

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? What concerned us? Why?*
- *What are the most important takeaways and next steps?*

6. Share Feedback

Offer specific, actionable verbal feedback, identifying both strengths to build on and ways to shore up less-than-proficient performance.

- Identify at least one positive claim with evidence and impact, using the *"Claim-Evidence-Impact-Judgment" framework.*
- Prioritize feedback and next steps by asking and answering these questions:
  - *What are the one or two practices that – if done better – would have the greatest impact on teaching and learning?*
  - *What specific, actionable feedback can you give this principal related to these areas?*
- Decide how direct to be, on the scale from non-directive to directive.

7. Agree on Next Steps and Plan for Accountability

Conclude the visit with clarity about specific next steps for both the principal and the superintendent. Be sure the next steps address the broader implications of what has been learned. Finally, identify the likely primary focus for the next school visit.

Deep Dive: Collecting Evidence on a School Visit

School visits offer a rich source of evidence about principal practice. Approaching visits with clarity and specificity about questions to ask, situations to observe and artifacts to examine will set the stage for deep, growth-enhancing conversations with principals about their practice.

➤ **Be strategic.** The Massachusetts educator evaluation regulations require the collection of evidence from three categories:

> *Multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement*

> *Products of practice (e.g. observations and artifacts)*

> *Additional evidence relevant to Performance Standard(s) (e.g. staff feedback)*

See **_Sample Sources of Evidence_** for a menu of options and ideas for what to ask, observe, and examine on a school visit.

Examples of places to observe and artifacts to review may include:

- Review recent evaluations and observe 2nd and 3rd year teachers to calibrate standards for earning professional teaching status (I-D: *Evaluation* and II-B: *Human Resources Management & Development*)

- Review office referral rates disaggregated by subgroups and observe lunch at a middle school to assess culture and climate (II-A-2: *Social Emotional Well-Being*, II-A-3: *Health & Safety*)

- Review past newsletters and observe the Leadership Team plan a Family Math Night with special focus on understanding their outreach efforts to families of English Learners (IIIA-1: *Family Engagement* and III-C-1: *Culturally Proficient Communication*)

- Observe a Department Head meeting and review recent agendas to assess the principal's skill at organizing meetings that are purposeful and engaging (IV-A-3: *Meetings)*

➤ **Pay attention to the broader implications of what is seen and heard.** For example:

- A novice teacher's classroom management issues might prompt questions about the district's mentoring program, instructional specialist's focus, and/or student assignment process.

- Inconsistent standards for student work across a grade or course might lead to a new department, school or district professional development.

- Students arriving late to school may lead to a commitment to reexamine the bus schedule.

After the Visit

8. Hold Each Other Accountable for Next Steps

School visits have the greatest impact when they are part of a connected sequence, not discrete "events", so there needs to be a system for ensuring that agreed-upon next steps are taken.

Tips:
- *Use a shared Google Doc to keep track of next steps, report on progress, and establish future agendas.*
- *Clarify any potential misunderstandings by asking principals to send an email detailing their understanding of next steps after the visit.*

9. Review Artifacts

The visit may have prompted questions requiring the superintendent and/or principal to examine data, reports, communications or other artifacts. Similarly, the next steps may include one or both following up on something verbally or in writing. Make time to review all of these relevant artifacts and provide feedback as needed.

10. Reflect, Prepare Feedback, and Address Implications

- Draft written feedback for the principal that is specific and actionable, identifying both strengths to build on and ways to shore up less-than-proficient performance.

- Start drafting the conclusions with evidence that will make their way into your formative and summative evaluations. Many Massachusetts leaders use the C-E-I-J (Claims-Evidence-Impact-Judgment) framework for writing the narrative portion of their evaluations. They find that being specific about evidence and explicit about impacts helps ensure that their analysis is both thoughtful and persuasive.

- Make notes for yourself. There are few responsibilities of a superintendent more important than guiding, supporting and evaluating school principals. Take time to reflect on the visit.

  - *How does what you saw and heard during the visit fit into the larger context of your work with this principal?*

  - *What are implications for your on-going work with this leader?*

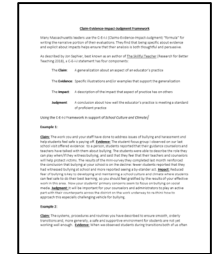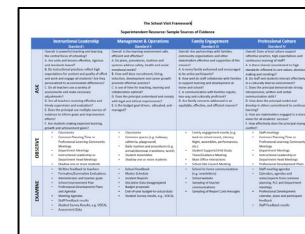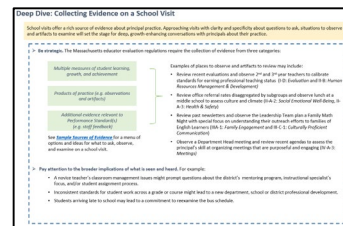 - *What did you learn that has implications for others?*
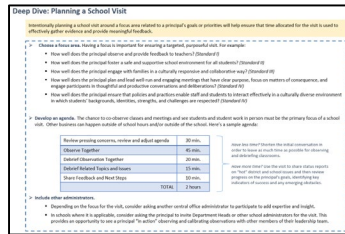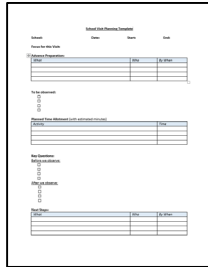
Resources

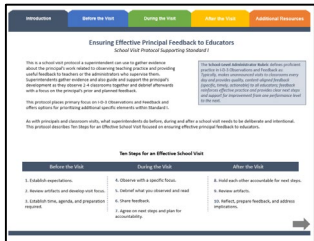Brief: Reinvigorating Principal Evaluation

School Visit Template

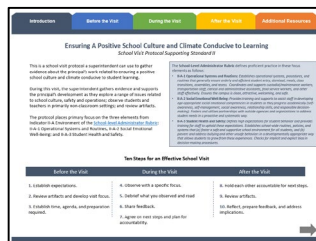Deep Dive: Planning a School Visit

Deep Dive: Collecting Evidence on a School Visit
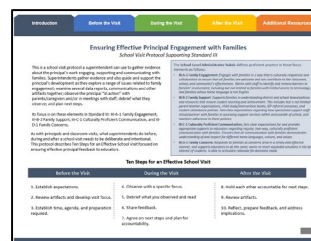

Sample Sources of Evidence

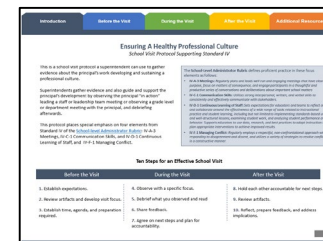C-E-I-J Framework Claim-Evidence-Impact-Judgment

School Visit Protocol #1: Observations and Feedback

School Visit Protocol #2: School Culture

School Visit Protocol #3: Family Engagement

School Visit Protocol #4A: Professional Culture

School Visit Protocol #4B: Cultural Responsiveness