

Research Brief Walkthroughs

Question: What are some ways to do classroom observations in short visits of 5-15 minutes?

Summary of Findings: The responsibilities of school site administrators are numerous and varied, yet one of the most important, is for them to support an environment that provides a high quality instructional program for every student. In surveys completed by teachers about what they wanted from principals in creating a positive school climate, they felt it was essential to:

1. treat students and teachers fairly and equally
2. communicate with students and teachers
3. support students and teachers
4. model caring behaviors
5. be visible and available
6. lead learning
7. focus on teaching and learning
8. create opportunities for professional learning

One strategy that administrators have used to help meet this challenge is to do classroom walkthroughs. This is a process of visiting classrooms for short time periods of 5-15 minutes, where the instructional program is observed, feedback is provided to teachers, students talk about what they are doing, and data is gathered to inform curricular decisions.

Major Conclusions

Set Up

1. The administrators and teachers should meet together to develop the process and procedures.
2. How would this practice meet the goals and mission of the school, its culture, and its climate?
3. Pre-determine the areas to be observed. A checklist would be helpful.
4. Establish other important information and data to collect.
5. Schedule time (15-30 minutes) in the daily and/or weekly calendar to consistently conduct the walkthroughs.
6. Visit every classroom during the first week of school.
7. Write a succinct and positive note to the teacher within 24 hours of the walkthrough supporting what was observed. It may also include a suggestion and/or question. The administrator may also want to meet with the teachers to discuss the walkthrough.
8. Provide appropriate supportive follow-up through mentors, coaches, etc.
9. Use data gathered to support meaningful staff development and inform curricular decisions.

Suggestions of areas to scan

Walk through the entire classroom. Look for:

1. Levels of student engagement
What does their behavior indicate?
2. Ask questions of at least two students:
What are they are doing?
Why they are doing it?
How do the get help if they need it?
3. Classroom layout and set up
How does the classroom surroundings reflect the curriculum?
How is student work part of the environment?
4. Similarities and differences in pedagogy
How can teachers share what they are doing and learn from each other?
5. Purposes of the lesson
What was observed?
What will subsequent lessons cover that relate to this lesson?

Online Resources:

- Academic Walkthrough Report
A brief description of the walkthrough process used in charter schools in the Mid-West, along with the data gathered.

<http://www.bsu.edu/teachers/article/0,,26433--,00.html>

- Best Practice Framework: Taylor High School, TX
Examples of different walkthrough checklists are provided in this article.
Google PDF:Theme:Level:BEST PRACTICE FRAMEWORK
- Face to Face
This is a description of the walkthrough process developed and used by a school district in PA where volunteers and community members are part of the walkthrough team.
<http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/jsd/barnes224.cfm>
- Leadership by Walking Around
An overview of the tenets of a walkthrough is provided. It includes a succinct description of the 5 steps in the process. A list of resources is provided at the end of the article.
<http://www.principalspartnership.com/feature203.html>
- Seeing Through New Eyes
An explanation of the walkthrough process at a middle school in Texas is provided in this article.
<http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/tools/tools10-01rich.cfm>
- The Walkthrough. A Unique Professional Development Opportunity for Principals
An overview of a walkthrough process used in Baltimore, MD that includes general questions to ask and conditions at which to look is described.
http://www.publiceducation.org/doc/strategic_interventions/walkthrough.doc

Articles

- Ginsberg, M. B. and Murphy, D. (2002, May). How walkthroughs open doors. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 34-39.
This article provides a description of the walkthrough process that includes areas of concentration when visiting classrooms and how to establish the procedure.
- King, D. (2002, May). The changing shape of leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 34-39.
The results of a survey about what teachers want from principals in creating a positive school climate are provided in this piece.



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Submitted By: Dr. Karen Walker, University of Maine, Farmington

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