



Product Research & Documentation

# Best Walkthrough Practices

**Principal Success Series**

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A classroom walkthrough can have a positive effect on teacher morale, self-efficacy, and motivation (Rossi, 2007). Sometimes teachers can become discouraged, develop feelings of isolation, and feel that they have to seek solutions all alone. The walkthrough can become a powerful tool that school leaders use to support and guide teachers to overcome feelings like these. School leaders who frequently visit classrooms become informed and can better assist teachers with instructional practices. Through ongoing collaborative conversations and interactions, isolation barriers can be steadily reduced if not eliminated altogether. Frase (2001, p. 43) found that “increased principal visibility and frequent visits to classrooms are associated with increased self-efficacy levels” of teachers. When teachers believe they can make a difference in student achievement, research has shown their students can perform better than other students whose teachers do not internalize high levels of self-efficacy. Walkthroughs allow principals to provide focused feedback and engage teachers in important dialogue about instruction, influencing student and teacher performance. In turn, walkthroughs help administrators become better informed instructional leaders and more knowledgeable about how instructional practices relate to student achievement.

*Best Walkthrough Practices* from Mentoring Minds is a resource for administrators as they implement walkthroughs on their campuses. The articles and resources provided in this book are written by practicing and former principals. The Teacher Resources Product Development Team at Mentoring Minds developed this product to support school administrators in their ongoing endeavors to become successful leaders. It is the belief of this team that frequent classroom walkthroughs followed by collaborative feedback improve teacher and student performance.

When teachers reflect on their teaching and engage in instructional conversations across the campus about best practices, school-wide efforts can have significant effects on student learning.

School leaders can benefit in many ways by using this book as a resource. Administrators will learn to:

- foster a school culture that supports walkthroughs.
- empower teachers to embrace walkthroughs.
- lead teachers to become active participants in the walkthrough process.
- engage teachers in reflective and collaborative walkthrough conversations.
- implement processes that actively involve teachers, focus on teacher and student behaviors, and incorporate “look-fors” and other walkthrough elements.
- review evidence from walkthroughs to determine if goals are accomplished.
- coach teachers to develop a continuous growth mindset toward teaching and learning in the classroom.
- assess their walkthrough knowledge and take actions to refine skills.

*Best Walkthrough Practices* was created to encourage school leaders to reflect on and evaluate their walkthrough habits in order to maximize the effectiveness of improving instruction and learning. The overall intent of the book is to enhance the instructional leadership of administrators while increasing student achievement.

Research has supported the idea that the quality of teacher instruction is linked to student success. Walkthroughs play a vital role in determin-

ing and improving teacher quality. Key findings include the following:

- The quality of the instruction provided by the classroom teacher can affect school improvement effort (Stronge & Tucker, 2003).
- Effective instruction by teachers can directly impact student learning (Hattie, 2008; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2004).
- Effective instruction can positively impact student learning (Hattie, 2008; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2004).
- A direct correlation exists between effective instruction provided by highly qualified teachers and increased student achievement (Colvin & Johnson, 2007).
- Effective instruction is comprised of common elements if these elements are consistently implemented: clearly stated learning objectives; teaching, modeling and demonstrating; guided practice; checks for understanding; and formative assessments (Hattie, 2008; Marzano et al., 2004; Schmoker, 2011).

When administrators conduct frequent walkthroughs and provide feedback that is focused on instructional improvement, teacher instruction improves and student learning is positively impacted.

Administrators who spend time in classrooms increase their effectiveness as instructional leaders. They collaborate more often with teachers and students and contribute to a more positive school culture. A significant finding that surfaced regarding leadership practices in schools cited the statistic that 88% of principals who were identified as strong instructional leaders visited classrooms daily, and the other 12% visited classrooms 1 to 2 times a week. Instructional leaders who are characterized as effective assess performance by observing and talking to students and gain a

more focused view of how to be a support and resource for teachers. (Brewster & Klump, 2005, p. 34).

Another finding from the analyses of several studies identified two administrative behaviors that appeared to have a large impact on student achievement: monitoring the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on learning, and being visible and having quality contact and interactions with teachers and students (Waters et al., 2003). Frequent walkthroughs allow administrators to exhibit these valued behaviors. Teachers view principals as instructional leaders and as someone who values what they do when classroom visits occur on a regular basis. In addition, students understand that principals value learning. They gain respect and have a better rapport with the adults on campus because they view them as positive role models.

Classroom walkthroughs provide school administrators with evidence to determine the effectiveness of instruction. Oliver (2009) stated, “I have become even more convinced that walkthroughs are a powerful school improvement tool that should be embraced by all school leaders” (p. 12). Other research shows that evidence collected from classroom walkthroughs can drive an instructional improvement cycle (Cervone & Martinez, 2007). The intent of the articles in *Best Walkthrough Practices* is to promote the use of walkthroughs to drive effective instruction.

Frequent and focused walkthroughs allow principals to determine campus needs based on collected data. In a research report, *Using Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Instruction*, Protheroe (2009) asserted that, “Frequent five-minute visits focused on specific ‘look-fors’ can give principals valuable information about what’s working—or not working—in their schools” (p. 30). Suppose principals observe and have documented incidences of bullying on campus. Through conversations and sharing of information, principals can create an awareness across the campus of the need to reduce bullying. Following this, a school-



wide plan can be developed. The principal can then visit multiple classrooms in a short period of time to determine if plans are actually being implemented, as well as observe the effectiveness of the plans. This can lead to positive outcomes throughout the campus, evaluating whether school-wide initiatives are being implemented with fidelity and whether or not they are producing the desired results. The practice of gathering data to determine needs and using the data to provide aligned support is promoted in *Best Walkthrough Practices*.

Walkthroughs allow administrators and teachers to establish a common language about instruction, which is valued in this resource for school leaders. For example, if a school-wide initiative involves literacy instruction in all classrooms, language and terms about reading and writing workshop will become known and understood to all impacted personnel across a campus. While an important purpose of walkthroughs is the data that is gathered, this data can also stimulate instructional conversation between teachers and principals (Skretta, 2007). When a common language permeates across a campus, instructional conversations can become more focused on established campus goals.

To reap the highest benefits from professional development, training should be focused on school-wide initiatives and goals. When walkthrough data is used to guide and determine the effectiveness of professional development initiatives, teacher and student success increases. Teachers can collaborate with school leaders to identify goals to help improve their practices, and the school as a whole can establish goals surrounding initiatives to improve performance. According to research, evidence gained from walkthroughs proves valuable in helping district and campus administrators make informed changes

in the professional development offered (Supovitz & Weathers, 2004). Walkthroughs should yield evidence to support continuous improvement and growth.

Research has supported the claim that walkthroughs can be used to improve teacher and student learning when they are effectively administered and their intent and processes are clearly communicated. Walkthroughs should be productive with a focus on ongoing improvement. Administrators are there to support educators, and this premise should prevail across the entire campus. Communicating and sharing procedures and processes prevent stress and increase the success of walkthroughs. Several research findings have supported this idea:

- It is important that principals actively involve teachers in the walkthrough process to help them understand the purpose and how walkthrough feedback is a two-way process (Skretta, 2007).
- Clear communication can help establish a walkthrough culture embraced by all. When the intended purpose is not shared and the results don't occur as originally stated, mistrust occurs and sometimes results in stress and anxiety (David, 2008).
- The results of a four-year study found that walkthroughs caused anxiety for teachers. Reported results indicated that it was difficult to convince teachers or principals that walkthroughs would not be used as evaluative tools (Valli & Buese, 2007).
- The intent of walkthroughs can be communicated in several ways that can produce a positive impact: focus walkthroughs on areas where professional development supports the implementation initiatives;

use the collected data or evidence to effect continuous improvement efforts; and show how the walkthroughs favorably influence learning (Kerr et al., 2006).

*Best Walkthrough Practices* advocates the importance of a continuous cycle of observation and collaborative feedback. The articles within this book create awareness and support school leaders in the development of a climate of trust prior to walkthroughs.

All the aforementioned findings indicated that a relationship exists between frequent walkthroughs and student academic achievement. Although there has not been extensive research on walkthroughs, what is available plus the experiences revealed to researchers or reported by school leaders and teachers show there is an impact on teaching and learning. The information collected from this literature review was carefully studied by the Teacher Resources Product Development Team and used to create *Best Walkthroughs* for school leaders. School leaders who have led or are currently leading effective schools, as measured by the school's accountability results, and leaders who have achieved state or district recognition were invited to contribute to this administrator resource. Based on the articles and resources within *Best Walkthrough Practices*, the content was developed to maximize the effectiveness of walkthroughs.

The Teacher Resources Product Development Team is comprised of educators, all of whom have served as teachers and principals with varied experiences. These educators have been actively involved in conducting walkthroughs and collaborating with teachers, including facilitating training and participating in professional development about walkthroughs. The numerous experiences of the members of the team contributed positively to the creation of *Best Walkthrough Practices*. This resource book will assist school leaders as they support teachers in the pursuit of best educational practices which increase student achievement. The full intent of this resource

is to encourage administrators who conduct walkthroughs to examine and reflect on their practices. Do you maintain a continuous pulse on what is and what is not happening in all classrooms? Is there improvement in the way students are being educated? Are teachers getting deep learning from students? Is the shared feedback authentic rather than compliant? Are the conversations frequent and collaborative? These questions and many more should become routinely demonstrated if walkthrough findings from this book are being infused into your daily practices of leading a school. *Best Walkthrough Practices* should be a resource that enhances the walkthrough process identified and implemented by districts and schools in order to improve the culture and the effectiveness of classroom walkthroughs.

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