

Best Walkthrough Practices

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Feedback Following Walkthroughs

Feedback is an integral part of walkthroughs and should be used to improve teaching and learning. Descriptors for sound and meaningful instruction should be clearly identified before walkthroughs occur. Accurate feedback based on the descriptors should be given in a timely manner following a walkthrough observation. Inaccurate feedback results in the failure of teachers to grow professionally and the failure of students to be successful.

Purposes of Feedback

- Highlight instructional strengths and areas of improvement.
 - Share accurate information concerning observed behaviors and practices.
 - Provide positive reinforcement and encouragement.
 - Encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching.
 - Offer suggestions for improvement.
 - Bring attention to resources or professional development that relate to observed behaviors.
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Characteristics of Feedback

- Specific and accurate
- Nonthreatening
- Constructive
- Well-planned
- Ongoing and consistent
- Learner-centered
- Self-reflective

Keys to Effective Feedback

- Build a climate of trust before feedback is given.
 - Be objective when evaluating teachers and provide honest and reliable feedback. Encourage teachers to understand that honest feedback will lead to improved instruction.
 - Use a coaching model that guides teachers to understand that the goal of walkthroughs is to develop/extend their knowledge, skills, and practices.
 - Avoid making general statements such as, “You did a good job of engaging students in learning.” Rather, ask questions that provoke reflection such as, “How did you engage students in learning throughout your lesson?” “Was this successful?”
 - Ask probing questions that encourage teachers to become self-reflective about teaching so they will continually evaluate their own performance.
 - Choose one or two areas to address.
 - Link feedback to resources that might help a teacher improve instruction (e.g., professional articles, teaching videos, books, campus professional development).
 - Provide follow-up and additional feedback when suggestions for improvement are made.
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Using Evidence to Improve Instruction

All campus leaders recognize that informed decisions are those that are based on data. Data is the evidence gathered during classroom walkthroughs. Knowing how to use classroom walkthrough evidence is something that needs to be defined and well thought out by a district or a campus.

Coach Teachers Towards Continuous Improvement

- Walkthroughs are not the same as teacher evaluations, so all stakeholders must have a clear understanding of the difference.
 - Campus leaders should avoid gathering walkthrough evidence to judge teachers but rather use walkthroughs as opportunities to collect evidence and coach teachers to higher levels of performance.
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Connect Goals to Professional Development

- Classroom walkthroughs might be centered on teacher or campus goals that relate to a district or campus professional development initiative.
- The intent of the walkthrough could be to determine if the training appropriately transferred into effective classroom practices. For example, the training might target quality questioning to increase student engagement.
- While visiting multiple classrooms, the observations revealed that teachers were asking questions that required higher cognitive responses; yet, a preponderance of walkthrough data or evidence across the campus indicated there was little interaction between and among teachers, students, and the content.
- If an overwhelming percentage of observational data show a disconnection between goals and professional development, this might indicate that the professional development efforts are not making the impact that was expected.

Conduct Follow-Up Conversations

- After participating in instructional conversations and analyzing the walkthrough evidence more closely, real-time adjustments can be made with professional development.
- When principals share this type data with the staff and engage them in instructional conversations that explore quality questioning, student engagement can deepen.

Build a Complete Walkthrough Picture

- To fully determine the impact of a professional development initiative on the quality of instruction across the entire campus, campus leaders must understand a complete picture is needed.
- Evidence gathered from a single classroom walkthrough with one teacher tells you little about the impact of the professional development.
- A complete data picture only emerges when numerous walkthroughs are conducted over a period of time, not only with one teacher but with all teachers who are affected by the professional development.
- Multiple walkthroughs followed by shared feedback can guide teachers to reflect on the shared evidence and to make wise decisions about teaching and learning.



Time for Walkthroughs

Most of us have heard the lesson of the big rocks. If you have two large jars and you put in a certain amount of sand, gravel, medium-sized rocks and finally large rocks into one jar, the items don't stand a chance of fitting. But wait! If you reverse the order and put in the big rocks first, followed by the medium-sized rocks and so on, all the items fit neatly into the second jar. This lesson helps us to see the importance of prioritizing the things that will truly make a difference in student achievement. So why do so many administrators not find the time to conduct walkthroughs? I believe other tasks are put into the jar first, crowding out the vital practice of instructionally focused classroom visits. Here are several tips to help place walkthroughs higher on our list of priorities.

- Put walkthroughs on your calendar. Any principal knows that good intentions aren't enough if walkthroughs are going to withstand all of the things that come our way during a regular school day. We have to schedule time for walkthroughs just as we would schedule an ARD or a meeting with our superintendent. If we don't put walkthroughs on our calendar, chances are walkthroughs will get bumped.
- Set weekly walkthrough goals that are realistic. Avoid setting your weekly number too high. Instead, set it moderately low and then raise the number by two or three the following week. The idea is to develop doing walkthroughs as a regular habit. It's kind of like exercise. The more you get into a rhythm, the more likely it will become a regular part of your week.
- Have someone hold you accountable for meeting your weekly walkthrough goal. This person can be someone on your campus, such as your administrative assistant, or a fellow principal on another campus. Let the person know exactly what you want him or her to do as your walkthrough accountability partner. Tell your partner that making walkthroughs a priority is important to you, but that you need help. Give him or her specific instructions to call you at the end of each week to find out whether or not you accomplished your goal. He or she also needs to ask you about your goal for the upcoming week and if you anticipate obstacles that might get in your way.

Taking time out of our already busy schedules for walkthroughs isn't always easy, but it's worth it. After all, no principal ever complained about being in classrooms too much!

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