



Indicator: All teachers improve their practice by responding to principal's observations and/or observations by peers. (5083)

Explanation: Professional development may focus on many things over the course of a year, but should always include training and coaching to improve instructional practice. Classroom observations based on indicators of effective practice help determine the instructional strengths and areas of improvement for each teacher, and when aggregated they show patterns of practice across grade levels, subject areas, and for the whole faculty. An individual teacher's personal professional plan can reflect classroom observations and document reviews, and whole faculty professional development can cover the results of a patterns-of-practice analysis.

Questions: In planning for professional development, are classroom observations taken into account. Does the Leadership Team participate in reviewing aggregated, patterns-of-practice data and determining priorities for professional development? Do individual teachers' personal professional development plans reflect the results of classroom observations?

According to Goe (2013), teacher evaluation has changed rapidly since the 1990s. "Gone are the unstructured observations and checklists that were used in many schools. Gone, too, is the belief that the principal's chief role in the process is to give teachers scores... Saying, 'I know good teaching when I see it' is no longer an acceptable explanation of a teacher's evaluation because now high-stakes decisions are made on the basis of evaluation results" (p. 25). Changes in what the teacher evaluation system is designed to do, and in the principal's role in that system, result from the dissatisfaction with evaluation systems that have frequently failed to distinguish between effective and ineffective teaching (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009).

Goe says most teacher evaluation systems today include the expectation that the teacher will receive meaningful feedback from the principal, based on the evidence of effective teaching practices (including classroom management) and student learning. "As a result of those new expectations, principals may look back at their leadership preparation and wonder when they were supposed to have learned about the importance of feedback, how to give constructive feedback, and what the content of that feedback should be (Goe, 2013, p. 25)."

Several studies point up the importance of principal feedback. A study of Chicago principals found that teachers saw a connection between principal feedback and instructional improvement, with nearly all the teachers feeling that their classroom practices had improved due to use of the Framework for Teaching, and most of those identifying the conferencing process as a critical aspect of that change—including improvement in planning, classroom management, using assessment during instruction, differentiated instruction, and student-focused learning (Sartain, Stoeltinga, & Brown, 2011). And Little's 2006 longitudinal case study of California schools documented the importance of "focused and timely feedback on individual performance and on aspects of classroom or school practice" (p. 22)—this feedback notable in the most successful schools in the study, including those with at-risk students.

Redding (2007) states that professional development should parallel the school improvement plan and evidence of research-based practices in the classroom as determined by systematic classroom observations by the principal and by peers. When classroom observations indicate a general need for improvement across the faculty, well-planned professional development is a

way to improve, and when classroom observations show an individual teacher's areas that need improvement, that teacher's personal development plan can include training or coaching to assist the teacher in the area of need. Before the observation, the teacher and observer should meet to review the indicators of effective teaching practices, and after the observation they should meet to discuss the observer's impressions. The teacher and observer can then create or update a professional development plan for the teacher, listing observed strengths and ways the teacher might share his/her expertise with other teachers; and areas that need improvement and steps toward improvement. The observer assists the teacher in carrying out these next steps, and continuous improvement is achieved through such means as whole-faculty workshops, consultations with Instructional Teams, the principal's work with individual teachers and with teams, and through teacher-to-teacher learning, including peer observations, study groups, coaching, and mentoring. While teacher evaluation is something apart from professional development, evaluation should include examination of the teacher's proficiency with the same indicators used to plan professional development for each individual teacher and for the faculty as whole.

Goe, Biggers, & Cross (2012) list six components in an aligned teacher evaluation/ professional growth system: (1) high-quality standards for instruction; (2) multiple standards-based measures of teacher effectiveness; (3) high-quality training on standards, tools, and measures; (4) training to interpret results and make professional development recommendations; (5) high-quality professional growth opportunities for individuals and groups of teachers; and (6) high-quality standards for professional learning. They state, "Evaluation for accountability and for improving performance can be part of the same system. With careful thought and planning in the design stages of a comprehensive evaluation system, education leaders can create an aligned system that meets both goals" (p.2).

Goe, Biggers, & Cross (2012) point out that "utilizing technology when collecting and analyzing evidence of teacher effectiveness can be helpful in aligning evaluation and professional development" (p. 18)—with several observation systems now including apps or software that can be used with handheld devices and laptops to capture evidence and indicate scores during the observation. They warn that, when using technology, instead of relying on an automatically generated list of recommended professional development, the teacher and evaluator need to work together to develop a professional growth plan, including a discussion of which professional growth options and opportunities are most likely to help the teacher grow professionally. They stress the importance of evaluators being trained on using technological tools for evaluation during the calibration process in order to become reliable raters of teacher effectiveness.

References and resources

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Explanation: Collegial learning (teachers learning together) is a powerful means for solidifying faculty cohesion and elevating professional practice. With a well-planned program of peer-to-peer observations, teachers share their experience and expertise and learn from each other. These observations are most effective when guided by indicators of effective teaching and classroom management so that the observers are looking for common elements.

Questions: Does your school consider peer-to-peer observations and their sharing as part of its professional development? How are the observations organized? Is a common set of effective practices and their indicators used?

Professional development should parallel the school improvement plan and evidence of research-based practices in the classroom as determined by systematic classroom observations by the principal and by other teachers (Redding, 2007).

Teacher-to-teacher coaching can serve to deepen the mutual respect of team members, even as the confidence of professional knowledge is strengthened. But while teachers coach students every day in their classrooms, they are less practiced and comfortable in “coaching” peers (Academic Development Institute, 2012). And being observed in the classroom can rattle any teacher’s nerves. But teacher observations that serve as vehicles for professional growth rather than performance evaluations have multiple benefits—for teachers, administrators, and the school (Israel, 2010).

Collegial learning is a way for teachers to learn from one another, internalize the instructional methods they have developed during instructional team meetings, and contribute to the school’s continuous improvement. The school community improves as each of its members develops greater skill and knowledge (Academic Development Institute, 2012). “School is not a place for important people who do not need to learn and unimportant people who do. Instead, school is a place where students discover, and adults re-discover, the joys, the difficulties, and the satisfactions of learning” (Barth, 1990, p. 43). In the context of collegial learning, adults represent both teacher and learner. The roles shift naturally between colleagues. Teachers “are researchers, students of teaching, who observe others teach, have others observe them teach, talk about teaching, and help other teachers. In short, they are professionals” (Barth, 1990, p. 46).

According to Senge and colleagues (2000), one of the most effective ways for teachers to increase their effectiveness is for them to share what they do and draw on the experience of others. The power of peer observations along with the shared discussion of teaching and learning is dynamic (Academic Development Institute, 2012). This experience of collegial learning and coaching will serve to deepen the mutual respect of team members, even as the confidence of professional knowledge is strengthened.

According to ADI’s Leadership Workbook (2012), working with collegial coaching fundamentals will prepare your team to:

- strengthen an environment of trust by understanding ourselves and others
- increase interdependency
- recognize and learn to practice coaching qualities
- develop communication guidelines, or shared expectations
- periodically review “before” and “after” observation-discussion questions to refine, or supplement
- identify a time (i.e., team meetings) for reflection and discussion of observations (p. 31)

Israel (2010) points out the many stakeholders who benefit from teacher-to-teacher coaching. Administrators benefit from: the opportunity for reflective dialogue with and among

teachers; an increased sense of shared responsibility; an increased focus on student achievement; an increased trust and collegiality among staff; participation in a professional and collaborative learning community; a cadre of self-reliant, confident teachers who love teaching; enriched teacher efficacy; and participation in a professional and collaborative learning community. Teachers benefit from: an opportunity to engage in reflective dialogue about their work; the focused classroom support; improvement of classroom practices; support from an “expert” (peer) who understands the daily demands of the classroom; satisfaction with one’s work; reduced job stress, especially for the new teacher; a welcoming atmosphere for new teachers; and the comfort of knowing that someone is available to help, explain, and assist. And the school benefits from: increased collaboration among teachers; the establishment of a professional learning community; an increased focus on student achievement; and enthusiasm for the teaching profession.

References and resources

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