

Observation and Feedback Practices

Within the observation and feedback structure, there are two practices: ongoing feedback cycles, which focus on this structure at a classroom level, and instructional rounds, which focus on this structure at a school level. Below, you'll find key leader actions to support each. Whether you're implementing these practices from scratch or looking to improve what you've already started, this document will help ensure that you and your team—and ultimately students—get the most out of observation and feedback.

*If you've landed here without taking a look at the current state of the conditions for your observation and feedback structure, we **highly recommend** using [these resources](#) to understand your strengths and areas for improvement. It's tempting to focus solely on the practices, but without the right conditions in place, they'll fall flat, and you won't see their full benefit for teacher practice or student outcomes.*

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Ongoing Feedback Cycles

Definition of the practice

An ongoing feedback cycle is the practice of observing classrooms with a specific focus on providing targeted feedback to teachers to inform instructional improvement.

Key leader actions

The key actions below are designed to help strengthen schools' ongoing feedback cycles practice. Completing the [Ongoing Feedback Cycles Rubric](#) before you dig into the key actions can be an effective way to gather baseline data about your strengths and areas for growth and help monitor your progress as you improve the practice.

1. Schedule frequent observations

- Make each visit short (i.e., 10–15 minutes).
- Inventory your time (e.g., [Time Inventory Protocol](#)), and block off chunks of time in your weekly calendar (e.g., [Sample Leader Schedule](#)).
- Stack observations back to back.
- Distribute observations among the leadership team, ideally based on content expertise.

2. Choose high-leverage focus areas

- Consider which changes in the classroom would have the greatest impact on student learning using your observation tool (e.g., [Student Achievement Partners' observation tool](#)).
- Address instructional root causes rather than surface problems.
- Select bite-sized action steps: small changes that teachers can make in a week that are easily observable.
- Track progress over time by using a tracker (e.g., [Sample Observation and Feedback Tracker](#)).

3. Facilitate feedback meetings

- Schedule regular feedback moments with each teacher.
- Meet with teachers face to face when discussing feedback.
- Combine feedback meetings with other meetings (e.g., planning, data analysis meetings).
- Focus feedback on quick, small improvements and bite-sized actions.
- Name what is working well.
- Practice the suggested action step(s).
- Ensure teachers understand how feedback is valuable to their practice and elicit their ideas for improvement.
- Review [this checklist](#) to foster a space for affirmation and trust in the conversation.
- Use a protocol (e.g., [Bambrick's 6 steps to effective feedback; See It, Name It, Do It](#)).

4. Monitor effectiveness

- Review artifacts (e.g., feedback provided to teachers).
- Monitor impact on instruction by observing classrooms.
- Monitor impact on student performance by analyzing student-level data.
- Continue to monitor the conditions for the observation and feedback structure (e.g., **Observation and Feedback: Teacher Survey**; **Observation and Feedback: Observer Survey**); respond to data and feedback by making ongoing necessary adjustments to the process.
- Monitor progress toward intended outcomes for ongoing feedback cycles (e.g., **Ongoing Feedback Cycles Rubric**).

Contextual considerations

The above actions will help schools strengthen their ongoing feedback cycles practice; however, we know that there isn't a one-size-fits-all way to approach improving the practice. When planning how best to take the key actions above, it's useful to consider the particular context of your school. The guiding questions below can help you think through how you might adjust actions to meet your team's specific needs:

- What is the culture of affirming relationships (see the affirmation table in the observation and feedback action plan)? Are there ways you can build that into your protocols and practices more clearly?
- What is the team's familiarity with ongoing feedback cycles as a practice? Has it been successful or challenging in the past? How will that impact your current work?
- What is the team's knowledge of grade-level standards? Is there more you need to support to ensure that ongoing feedback cycles build content knowledge for teachers and leaders?
- What is the team's knowledge of the curriculum? Is there any foundational training you need to add to the plan?
- What are the key moments where you want to gather input and investment? What data do you want to collect to support these processes?

Instructional Rounds

Definition of the practice

Instructional rounds¹ is a practice in which members of a school community observe and debrief classroom instructional practices together in order to:

1. norm and calibrate on a shared vision and criteria for instructional practices;
2. strengthen the knowledge and skills of individual observers to facilitate effective ongoing feedback cycles;
3. communicate overall strengths and areas of growth around schoolwide practices; and
4. determine next steps for improving instructional practices as a school.

Key leader actions

The key actions below are designed to help strengthen schools' instructional rounds practice. Completing the **Instructional Rounds Rubric** before you dig into the key actions can be an effective way to gather baseline data about your strengths and areas for growth and help monitor your progress as you improve the practice.

1. Communicate a shared purpose

- Decide the goal(s) for the instructional rounds (e.g., curriculum implementation review, observer calibration, observer skill development, schoolwide instructional improvement).
- Select which members of the school community need to participate in instructional rounds based on the stated goal(s) (e.g., if the goal is to identify schoolwide opportunities for instructional improvement, all instructional coaches and administration should participate).
- Communicate the purpose to teachers, emphasizing that this is not about evaluating or judging individual teachers.

2. Establish schedules and common process

- Make instructional rounds a clear part of leaders' roles and responsibilities (see the roles table in your observation and feedback action plan).
- Poll co-observers to determine chunks of time that work best for shared observations; encourage leaders to inventory their schedules to ensure that there is sufficient time for instructional rounds (e.g., **Time Inventory Protocol**).
- Select the observation tool you will use (e.g., **Student Achievement Partners' observation tool**).
- Share the instructional rounds schedule and observation tool with teachers.
- Decide how to structure the rounds, considering:
 - Will the team learn the context or goals about a teacher prior to the observation?

¹Our approach to instructional rounds is based on the work of City et al. (2009) see here for more: City, Elizabeth A., Richard F. Elmore, Sarah E. Fiarman, and Lee Teitel. *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2009.

- Will the team discuss notes and ratings after each classroom visit or after all rounds are completed?
- Will there be a focus area for all of the observations?
- Will the team talk with students or review student work?
- Ensure there is sufficient time built into rounds for the group to norm and reflect.

3. Facilitate purposeful processes

- Prior to observational rounds, the leader:
 - restates the purpose of rounds and—if applicable—and explains the focus area.
 - reviews the observation tools and protocol.
- During observations, all observers:
 - have the appropriate curricular materials with them to reference.
 - collect evidence using the observation tool to capture notes and data around the instructional practice or focus area.
 - synthesize notes and takeaways independently before sharing with the larger group.
- While discussing feedback at the classroom level, all observers:
 - share ratings and key data points.
 - consider which changes in the classroom will have the greatest impact on student learning for all relevant content areas.
 - discuss differences until reaching consensus about the rating, instructional root causes, and suggested bite-sized action step(s).
- During the holistic debrief, observers:
 - engage in objective discourse: each observer shares overall strengths, areas of growth, and trends for the school grounded in **low-inference notes**.
 - discuss trends, reaching consensus about next steps for school improvement.
 - make a plan to share high-level trends with teachers.

4. Monitor effectiveness

- Analyze observational data collected, such as growth on your observation tool, to monitor if there is schoolwide instructional improvement.
- Ask teachers if they understand 1) the purpose of instructional rounds, 2) the trends, and 3) next steps.
- Compare observers' individual ratings to determine if the team is calibrated around instructional practices.
- Continue to monitor the conditions for the observation and feedback structure (e.g., **Instructional Rounds: Observer Survey**); respond to data and feedback by making ongoing necessary adjustments to the process.
- Monitor progress toward intended outcomes for instructional rounds (e.g., **Instructional Rounds Rubric**).

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