

THE SCHOOL WALK-AROUND PROCESS



PREPARED FOR

ABCD Middle School Instructional Leadership Team

July 26, 2021

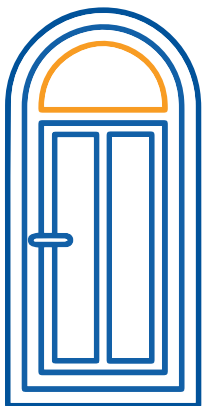
THE SCHOOL WALK-AROUND PROCESS



The School Walk-Around (SWA) process seeks to provide administrators with an authentic and insightful assessment of their instructional leadership skills. It focuses on revealing, through observing and talking, the administrator's personal understanding of the instructional strengths and needs of individual faculty members and the faculty as a whole.

In essence, a SWA is an hour-long walking/talking tour of the school with a 30 minute debriefing-report back meeting at the end. A typical SWA process can be accomplished in approximately 90 minutes. The first 60 minutes are spent in the assessment phase (the actual school walk-around) and the final 30 minutes are spent in the reporting/debriefing session.

Key participants include the SWA facilitator and the school principal. Others can and should join the process depending on the specific characteristics of the setting. Members of the school's administrative team can join the process and/or members of the school's broader leadership community to include key teachers, instructional coaches, or others who share the role/function of instructional leadership at the school. Others who share the responsibility of developing instructional leadership may also join the SWA facilitator as a co-facilitator or as part of a facilitation team. As the SWA process is described, we will continue to refer to the SWA facilitator and principal as the primary participants. Remember that others can and should join in both the walk-around and the debriefing sessions that follows.



The tour begins near the front door of the school. Here the SWA facilitator asks the principal to elaborate on the faculty **as a whole** - talents, strengths, needs, liabilities, experience level, openness to coaching and feedback, past professional learning experiences, attitude, culture, past experiences, college preparation, etc. The SWA facilitator also asks the principal to describe his/her journey, experiences, talents, etc.

The SWA facilitator and the principal then begin to slowly walk up and down each hallway of the school. The SWA facilitator engages the principal in an ongoing conversation about the instructional strengths, needs, and development plans for each individual teacher as they stop outside each classroom. For large faculties, a sampling of teachers (perhaps every third classroom) can be used. Mostly, the discussions happen in the hallway, outside each teacher's classroom. Occasionally (perhaps 7-10 times in a 60 minute SWA), the facilitator and principal step into

a classroom to observe instruction for a brief period (2-5 minutes). After each mini-observation, the facilitator asks the principal what effective practices were noticed in the observation, what the teacher's key talents and strengths are, what areas need improvement, and how the teacher might be best developed. The SWA facilitator might ask the principal to identify a teacher in each grade level, team, or department that they believe to be extraordinarily effective. As these teachers are observed the facilitator will ask the principal to talk about why/how these particular teachers are so effective. The facilitator might also ask the principal to identify weak performers in each grade, team or department and observe/discuss the reasons for these teachers' difficulties. Similarly, the facilitator might ask the principal to observe the most experienced and/or the most novice teachers in each grade, team, or department.

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Specific assessment “look-fors” and “listen-fors” for the SWA facilitator(s):

In the initial talk at the school’s front door:

Listen for how the principal depicts the faculty’s collective talents, strengths, and liabilities. Are his/her comments mostly general or specific?, mostly about instruction or management?, mostly optimistic or negative? Does he/she see patterns and trends or speak mostly of outliers and individuals? How does he/she describe the effects of past professional development efforts? How does he/she describe the faculty’s openness to feedback and coaching? Does the principal seem to “own” these characteristics or just “lament” them? How does he/she describe their personal journey? What do they say are their own strengths and weaknesses? Overall, does the principal see the entire faculty as basically talented and developable- or as basically unskilled and hard to develop? Overall, does the principal describe the faculty’s attitude toward feedback and coaching as basically positive or as generally negative? Finally, does the principal speak as someone who has the knowledge and ability to change/improve/develop the faculty or as someone who is a victim of circumstances?

As the principal walks through the school:

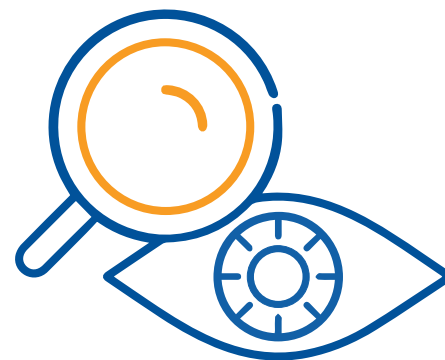
Does the principal talk about the school through the lens of a physical plant (paint, maintenance, landscaping, technology, furniture) or through the lens of a human resource organization (people, talents, strengths, experiences, accomplishments) or through the lens of organizational design (schedules, programs, approaches, initiatives)? Or another lens...?

As the principal interacts with people during the SWA:

In a 60 minute walk-around, it is common for the principal to run into several people/situations. Watch how the principal interacts with different audiences- teachers, classified staff, students, parents, others. To which group does the the principal pay the most attention? With which group is the principal most at ease?

As the principal enters each classroom:

Does he/she look comfortable- like this is a common activity for them? How does the teacher react or respond to the principal’s (and the facilitator’s) presence in the classroom? Is there a greeting?, eye contact? Does the principal move easily and freely around the space? Does the principal interact with students while in the classroom? Does the principal interact with the teacher in any way? Watch the exit... is there a “thank you” or any communication with the teacher?



As the principal observes in each classroom:

Follow the principal’s eyes and movement. What do they notice? Where do they stand? Do they sit? Do they check their phone? Do they turn off their walkie-talkie or other communication devices? Are they comfortable talking quietly about what is happening in the classroom? Is the principal most concerned with the physical aspects of the classroom, the instructional practices, the classroom environment, or classroom management issues?

As the principal describes each teacher’s key talents and strengths:

Listen carefully for depth... does the principal speak of the teacher’s talents as mostly affective (tone, likeability, respect from students, positive relationships) or as mostly organizational (well planned, prepared, routines, procedures, management) or as mostly instructional (instructional techniques, practices, and approaches)? Does the principal differentiate between natural, innate talents and learned skills?

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As the principal describes each teacher's key weaknesses:

Listen again for depth... does the principal describe the teacher's key weaknesses as mostly in the affective, organizational, or instructional domain? Are they in the areas of content knowledge, teaching technique, or relationship building? Does the principal speak of the weaknesses as permanent or developable? Does the principal describe what he/she has done or is doing to address the issue?

As the principal describes how each teacher might be best developed:

Does the principal speak first of building on the teacher's talent areas or of correcting an issue or problem? Does the principal speak of feedback and coaching as a way to develop the teacher? Does the principal speak of what he/she has done or is doing to develop the teacher?

As the principal describes his/her most effective teachers:

Listen for the principal's attribution theory. To what does he/she attribute the teacher's effectiveness (relationships, content knowledge, teaching technique, good attitude, dependability, infrequent problems sent to the office)? Ask "how might you help this teacher get even better?" Listen for the principal's first reaction to this question. Is he/she surprised by it (as if to say "this teacher is already good- no need to spend time/effort here")? Does the principal have a ready answer (able to speak to it in just a few seconds as if recalling it, not creating it on the spot).

As the principal describes his/her least effective teachers:

Listen again for the attribution of effectiveness (or lack of effectiveness). Does the principal speak of the weaknesses as mostly innate and unchangeable (attitude, intelligence, ability to get along) or as mostly addressable through coaching, practicing, or adjusting the setting?

The debriefing/reporting meeting:



After the SWA, the facilitator and principal retreat to the principal's office or conference area for discussion, debriefing, and reporting. If others were present for the SWA, they can/should be invited to the debriefing also.

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Agenda for SWA debriefing meeting:

1. The SWA facilitator should restate the purpose/rationale of the SWA. The School Walk-Around (SWA) process seeks to provide administrators with an authentic and insightful assessment of their instructional leadership skills. It focuses on revealing, through observing and talking, the administrator's personal understanding of the instructional strengths and needs of individual faculty members and the faculty as a whole.
2. The SWA facilitator should then report back to the principal (or group) an essence/summary of what was heard in response to the SWA questions. It is not necessary to report back on each and every question from the SWA, but only on the ones that the facilitator thinks were particularly revealing or indicative of the principal's instructional leadership skills and approach. For example, the SWA facilitator might say "After we observed some very effective 4th grade teachers, I asked you to describe the reasons for their effectiveness. You replied that they were great at building positive relationships with students and kept the classroom interesting with fun activities." This was a common theme as we talked about your best 3rd and 2nd grade teachers as well. You added that they were also very knowledgeable about the students' home lives and difficult situations."
3. The SWA facilitator should share their interpretations of the principal's responses. For example, the SWA facilitator might say "From these responses, it seems that you readily see teachers' abilities to build positive relationships with students." Or "As I listened to you talk about the faculty's attitude toward receiving feedback and coaching, it is evident to me that you see that as an important growth area for the school and that you have some good ideas about how to improve in that area."
4. The SWA facilitator should share suggestions (2 or 3) for improvement/development of the principal's instructional leadership skills and practices. The SWA facilitator might say "Based on our conversations, I'd like to suggest that as you visit your most talented teachers' classrooms, you practice identifying (in addition to the teacher's relationship skills) specific instructional skills and patterns that contribute to the teacher's success. The ability to build positive relationships is important and a key to success. You're already adept at seeing this. Practice noticing other elements of success such as the teacher's specific instructional techniques."
5. The SWA facilitator should follow with a written report that repeats and elaborates on the key findings from the SWA.

