

# Expanding Instructional Leadership through Effective and Thorough Observations

By: Trael Kelly, Pleasant Grove Elementary School

Contact: [kellyt@centergrove.k12.in.us](mailto:kellyt@centergrove.k12.in.us)

## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

As principal at Pleasant Grove Elementary School, I observe teachers between four to ten times a year based on years of experience and/or their evaluation score from the previous year. Currently I share the responsibility of observing and evaluating thirty-six teachers with my assistant principal. This year I will observe and evaluate twenty-one teachers and she will observe and evaluate fifteen.

The Center Grove Community School Corporation adopted its own evaluation system with required (three to six) 5 minute walk-throughs, (one to three) 15 minute observations, and a 45 minute thorough observation. First year teachers are observed up to ten times each year, and experienced teachers are observed based on their rating from the previous year (between four to ten times).

What I have found through my nine years of experience is the communication to the highly effective experienced teachers is limited, as they are only observed in three five minute walk-throughs and one forty-five-minute observation. Several of my highly effective teachers seek more input on their teaching and want more feedback on their instruction and perspective on their classroom performance.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to improve the evaluation process and communication to all teachers during their annual performance review.

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

With this purpose, I wondered, Can I improve my communication to all teachers by regularly scheduling observations each week and routinely give feedback to each individual teacher at least once a month in an observation format? Can I improve teacher effectiveness through more detailed observations? How can I document effectiveness of communication in the process? Do I provide enough information to encourage teacher growth in the process? Am I meeting the needs of all the teachers I evaluate?

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To gain insights into my wonderings, I shared my action research plan to the PGES Leadership Team and then to the faculty as an intro to a Professional Development Meeting. Next, I purposely scheduled my calendar with observation dates to meet the expectations of the Action Plan.

My goal was to complete a minimum of 15 observations per month from January through April. I have regularly met with the PGES Leadership Team to discuss the effectiveness of the observation communication to seek input on improvements.

First, I collected data by tracking the observations I completed each month and charted them in my office.

Next, I compiled a list of observed strengths and areas in need of improvements (challenges I will issue to teachers). Then I shared and discussed the observation data with the Leadership Team and made anecdotal notes on their suggestions.

### **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As a result of analyzing my data three important things I learned include:

1. Scheduling observation dates in my calendar committed me to completion of my goal and improving the process (including the tracking chart).

Prior to scheduling observation times and dates in my calendar, I would wait for open slots/times in my calendar to approach walk-throughs and observations (beyond the 45 minute observations). What I found was open slots in my calendar presented opportunity for others to fill my schedule and limit ideal times for observations (literacy block, RTI, or the math block). The tracking chart in my office served as a visual reminder and kept me motivated to meet my goal. This practice will continue, as my assistant principal and I have found it to be a great motivator.

|          |                 |
|----------|-----------------|
| January  | 16 Observations |
| February | 19 Observations |
| March    | 16 Observations |
| April    | 21 Observations |

2. Communicating with the Leadership Team has helped provide positive dialogue on ideas and approaches to fulfill needs through the teachers' eyes.

The Leadership Team highlighted the fact that five minute walk-throughs shared limited notes and details, thus I have elongated time from five minutes to 10-15 minutes. Most would think this would complicate my observation schedule, however I made an adjustment to my calendar and blocked off one and a half hours two times a week in order to accommodate the time component. I made it a point to document specific details in the observation beyond scripting what was seen to help direct teacher effectiveness.

3. Teacher perception of the Evaluation process has been improved and the communication between both parties is more thorough and detailed.

Although I have only completed a handful of evaluations, the exit meetings have gone exceptionally well. My teachers have welcomed the detailed notes on performance, whether it is positive or constructive in text. The challenges have been logged and will be shared with the Professional Development Team to plan next year's PD plan.

### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

What have I learned about myself as an administrator?

There are several things I have learned about myself as an administrator. The most important lesson I learned was the value my teachers have in a detailed evaluation. Although most of my teachers display type A personalities, I have found that most of them seek affirmation and direction when going through the

evaluation process. The way that our evaluation system works, limits the number of observations for highly effective teachers, thus they may receive limited information on how they can become better professionally. By increasing the time spent in each classroom during 5 minute walk-throughs, I have been able to document more information and provide quality discussion on areas of strengths and challenge areas where they could grow.

As for the future, I plan to continue tracking observations visually, making it a priority to schedule times in my calendar to observe teachers, and to increase the minutes of shorter observations in order to provide more detailed notes. Sharing this information with my Leadership Team and Professional Development Team has instilled a new sense of trust in the evaluation process. To date, teachers have been more self-reflective on their teaching and seem willing to make necessary changes when I issue them a professional challenge. In hindsight, this action research plan has helped me not only reflect on how/why I do things, but encourage me to improve what I do to make it the best experience for everyone.

### **References:**

N/A