



## LEARNING WALKTHROUGH SITE VISIT COMMUNICATION OF FINDINGS SAMPLE

**To:** Staff and Faculty of ABC School  
**Cc:** Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Key Central Office Staff  
**From:** Principal, ABC School  
**Date:** Friday, February 12, 2009

On Wednesday, February 11, 2009, twelve colleagues divided into two teams to conduct a *Learning Walkthrough* from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. The teams visited eight classrooms in a variety of content areas, collecting evidence related to the school and district's Focus of Inquiry (below). At the end of the *Walkthrough*, both teams met to aggregate all observational data in order to look for patterns of teaching and learning across the school. The team discussed the trends and generated summary statements in order to convey the learning experiences to all colleagues. In support of each summary statement are samples of the evidence collected during the observations that illustrate what that looked like in the classrooms we visited. The school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) will consider this information in relation to the priorities outlined in our School Improvement Plan, noting areas of strength and areas in need of additional resources and support to improve student learning school-wide.

The *Learning Walkthrough* team hopes this information is useful for staff to personally reflect on individual practice, to launch discussions during Common Planning Time, and to deepen implementation of school-wide improvement initiatives. While the goal for all students to be proficient requires long-term planning, this memo also includes some "quick wins" identified by the team and endorsed by the ILT that are intended to have immediate and positive impact.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to discuss them with me at your convenience.

### **Focus of Inquiry:**

**To what extent do students demonstrate higher-order thinking skills while making their thinking and reasoning evident?**

During the final debrief, the *Learning Walkthrough* team came to **consensus on the following themes** that emerged from the evidence from across the set of classroom observations:

#### **Summary Statement #1**

While teachers posed some questions that required students to think and respond at high cognitive levels, many of the questions posed by teachers and students required lower-level thinking in the form of recall of basic facts, knowledge, or procedures.

#### **Sample Evidence to Support the Statement**

In the eight classrooms, the questions posed by both teachers and students were recorded and tallied based on the level of cognitive demand. Of the 157 questions asked, only 32 (20%) were categorized as higher order thinking questions that focused on conceptual understanding and reasoning. The

categorization was based on the framework from our school-wide professional development that is outlined in the School Improvement Plan.

Of the questions that required high cognitive demand, all were posed by teachers, and only 14 were answered by students. In some classrooms, the same few students answered the rigorous questions, while other students did not respond to questions at any level.

Examples of rigorous questions posed to students included, *Who can explain the difference between an obtuse angle and an acute angle? When would it be important to know what the difference is between the two? When would you use that skill? In what other classes [content areas] could you apply this? Can you design a bridge or structure using only acute or only obtuse angles? Do you think it makes a difference which angles are utilized in the structure? Why?*

Examples of low-level recall, knowledge, and comprehension questions recorded include, *What is the title of the book? Who is the author? What did we read about yesterday? Who would like to read today? How did that character act when she...? Who can give an example of one of the problems in the story? What does that word mean?*

### **Summary Statement #2**

The extent to which students were provided opportunities to share their thinking and reasoning varied across the classrooms observed. Frequently, the opportunities were verbal, with students working with a partner or in small groups to demonstrate their understanding of the content. In some classrooms, students were observed using content vocabulary as they responded to questions posed by the teacher or their peers. When working on individual written tasks, students were required to justify their answers.

#### **Sample Evidence to Support the Statement**

The level of thinking and reasoning was apparent in most group work where the assigned task challenged students to engage with content at the conceptual level. In these instances, students were heard using evidence from the text to defend their opinions and making meaning collaboratively with peers.

One student was heard defining terms, as well as the relationship among them.

Some students steered the discussions using sentence starters such as, *"I disagree with you because..."* or *"What I hear you saying is..."* in order to express their thoughts.

While working in small groups, students discussed problems with one another using the vocabulary related to the content and lesson at hand: *That triangle has an acute angle, and this one has an obtuse angle. The main idea of the story is... The author's voice is....*

A total of eight students in three different classrooms were observed referencing vocabulary on word walls while explaining their understanding of a concept.

In three classes, there was no opportunity for student-to-student discussion.

### **Quick Wins:**

To address some of the challenges that emerged, we ask that all school staff and faculty:

- Increase the number of open-ended questions they ask students, using starters such as *why, how, to what extent, and how do you know?*
- Refrain from automatically answering a student's question. Instead ask the student what he or she thinks is the answer, or where he or she thinks it would be possible to find the answer independently.