

Learning Walks Overview

Learning Walks: A Reflective Practice Model That Guides Classroom Visits

What is a Learning Walk?

A Learning Walk is a brief classroom visit utilizing a researched-based tool that provides principals and teachers opportunities to reflect on what students are learning, learning strategies, student interaction with the content, and student engagement. Principals and other instructional leaders use handhelds, laptops, or paper forms to collect data based on four minute “snapshots” of classrooms. Data is entered and stored in a central database for analysis at the teacher-, PLC-, grade- or department-, school-, and division-level.

When do Learning Walks occur?

Principals and others conducting Learning Walks make every effort to collect a variety of snapshots over time. Which classes/periods are “walked” as well as the days in which “walks” are conducted should vary. The “walks” should be spread out over the course of the semester as well.

Learning Walks and Teacher Observation Requirements

By the last school day in October (non-tenured teachers only)	1 st round pre-conference, full period observation, and post-conference for all non-tenured teachers done.
By end of 1st semester (By the first school day in December for non-tenured teachers)	At least 5 Learning Walks will be done. Trend data may be discussed.
By winter break (non-tenured teachers only)	Learning walk trend data review.
By the end of the second full week of school in February (non-tenured teachers only)	Full period (unannounced) observation and post conference for all non-tenured teachers done.
By the end of the second full week of school in March	Learning walk trend data shared with teachers.
By the first school day of May (tenured teachers only)	At least 5 Learning Walks will be done.

Teachers may request or principals may conduct formal observations in addition to the required Learning Walks.

Overview of the Learning Walk Model

Using the Learning Walk system (handhelds, laptops, or paper forms), “walkers” collect specific data that provides a series of snapshots of the teaching and learning process. Learning Walks are brief, often lasting no more than four minutes. The focus of a Learning Walk is on student work and teacher responses in the context of teaching and learning.

Over time, the observer collects data on five specific components supported by research related to student learning. This information provides the walker with the opportunity to pose questions based on trend data to engage the teacher, PLC team, or entire faculty in thinking about beliefs, goals, practices, and instructional decision making. Promoting reflective practice will result in several benefits for all educators:

- building trust in the reflective practice process itself;
- inspiring teacher-driven research through the self-reflection focus;
- informing dialogue about teaching and learning between the walker and teacher;
- expanding capacity for analyzing thoughts, actions, beliefs, and emotions;
- enhancing dialogue about teaching and learning within a professional learning community;
- fostering self-monitoring of professional growth; and,
- creating a school-wide climate of inquiry and research.

In the formative performance appraisal process, observers use the Learning Walk model to collect observation data as a basis for posing periodic reflective questions as well as for sharing trend data periodically.

Focus Areas of Learning Walks (see ACPS Learning Walks – 2008-2009 for response options)

The Curriculum

Has the objective been clearly communicated to learners? Are students clear on what they will know, understand, and be able to do as a result of this lesson?

Is the objective aligned to grade-level standards?

What is the predominant thinking level in the classroom?

The Lesson

What strategies are impacting learning?

How are the students involved in assessment?

The Students

Does the environment promote learning?

Is there evidence of differentiation?

Is there evidence of respect and caring?

Is there evidence of social interaction, active engagement, and self-motivation?

Is there evidence of a positive learning environment?

The Work

Does the student work incorporate engaging qualities?

What is the engagement level of the classroom?

Key Elements of the Framework for Quality Learning

Are the key elements of the Framework for Quality Learning clear to the students?

Trend Data Conference

The principal, associate principal, or assistant principal will share data and engage in reflective dialogue with the teacher. The purpose is to engage the teacher in inquiry, analysis, and reflection. The Learning Walks web-based application includes a variety of reports that can support a teacher understanding his or her data in the context of the data collected across multiple classrooms or the entire school.

Open-ended, non-judgmental reflective conversations may occur at the individual teacher level or at the Professional Learning Community level at any time.

Student Engagement and the Learning Walk Model

"The business of schools is providing students with work they find engaging and from which they learn those things considered by parents and other adults to be important. That is, schools provide students with knowledge work." (Schlechty, 2000)

The Learning Walk model includes various elements of Phil Schlechty's work that relate the characteristics of the work that teachers ask of students and the level of student engagement in the work. Schlechty's work is built on the premise that student learning is linked to student engagement and includes the following elements:

- Level of Engagement – Engagement, Strategic Compliance, Ritual Compliance, Retreatism, Rebellion
- Design Qualities of Context - Content and Substance, Organization of Knowledge, Protection from Adverse Consequences for Initial Failures, Clear and Compelling Product Standards
- Design Qualities of Choice - Product Focus, Affiliation, Novelty and Variety, Choice, Authenticity

Schlechty sees the primary work of teachers as developing tasks and experiences that engage students in learning significant content, processes, and skills. Teachers can do this by attending to the Design Qualities of Context and the Design Qualities of Choice. These elements are consistent with the Teacher Performance Appraisal rubrics and the Framework for Quality Learning and directly connect to components of the Professional Learning Community model and the Division's Strategic Plan.

Schlechty's "engaging qualities" are incorporated in to the Learning Walks model. In addition, walkers use the engaging qualities along with other data collected (including one-on-one mini-interviews with students) to indicate whether the classroom is engaged (typically the case if three or more engaging qualities are present), on-task (students are doing what is asked of them but fewer than three engaging qualities are present), or off-task (students are generally not doing what is being asked of them).