
The Site Visit: Host School



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1. Purposes of the Site Visit

Clarifies the purposes for hosting the Site Visit

2. Questions to Consider in Planning Site Visits and Suggestions from Spotlight Schools

*Provides planning questions that the Host School should address to make the Site Visit successful
Provides suggestions of practices from past Spotlight Schools that have made visits successful*

3. Possible Strategies to Include in a Site Visit

Offers a list of strategies to use in generating an agenda by the Host and Visiting Schools

4. Sample Site Visit Agenda

Provides a sample of a one-day agenda for a Site Visit

5. Discussion Topics for Host School and Visiting School Coordinators

Lists planning questions that should be discussed between Host and Visiting School Coordinators

6. Getting the Staff Ready for the Site Visit

Spells out some key action steps to prepare the staff for the visit

7. Folder for Spotlight School Visitors

Offers examples of materials to include in a folder for visitors to the school

8. Planning Sheet: Big Picture

Provides Host School with a planning template to use in designing the big picture of the visit

9. Planning Sheet: Agenda

Gives the planning team a template for mocking up the agenda for the visit

10. To Do List

Offers a form to keep a running "To Do" list

11. Feedback about the Visit

Describes the process and the feedback form that will be filled out by Visiting Schools

12. Future Site Visits

Provides a form for Host Schools to use to make improvements based on feedback from Visiting Schools and their own observations

Purposes of the Site Visit

While there are many successful schools throughout the state of Wisconsin, your school has been selected as a Spotlight School because you have demonstrated a positive impact on students through specific practices and programs. Hosting a Site Visit gives you an opportunity to showcase your work and share your successes with others. During the visit, you may find that you learn as much from your visitors as they do from you.

Staff describe the pride they feel in being selected as a Spotlight School and the impact that it has on the whole culture of the school. They also talk about how the experience has motivated them to become even more successful and to continue to build the capacity of their staff.

For the Site Visits at your school to be successful, it is important that everyone understands why the school was selected as a Spotlight School and to be prepared for the visit. This handout is a resource for your school to use to help you effectively organize and coordinate the Site Visits.

Questions to Consider in Planning the Site Visits: Host School

Below are some key questions to address in planning the visits, as well as suggestions and quotes from both Host and Visiting Schools. Comments in italics are direct quotes from the Host School staff (H) and from the Visiting School teams (V).

Planning and Logistics

1. Who will coordinate the Site Visit?
2. How will you involve staff at the Host School in the planning process?
3. What schedule will work best for the Visiting School? Do you need to adapt the schedule for different needs? Will all visitors have the same schedule or will some engage in different activities?
4. With whom will the visitors interact (groups or teams and individuals)? What are the expectations for these interactions?
5. How will you provide class coverage (substitute teachers or others) so that teachers can meet with the school visitors?
6. Do you want to build in any debriefing or processing at the end of the day?
7. What will you offer for lunch and/or snacks?
8. Do the visitors need information about staying at hotels?

Suggestions from Spotlight Schools: *Planning and Logistics*

Spend the time planning up front with the visiting school.

- *Be clear on the goals for the visit. Find out who will be coming to the school. Knowing this helped us match visitors with specific staff members. (H)*
- *We used a pre-visit survey to help us plan each school visit. (H)*
- *Tailor the agenda to meet the needs of the visiting school. (H)*
- *The food was amazing!!! (V)*

Spend time organizing all of the details of the visit.

- *The more information that the host school sends prior to the visit (agenda, resources, etc.), the higher the expectations for accomplishing a high quality visit and using the time well. (H)*
- *This all seemed daunting at the beginning of the year. We had no idea how valuable it would be. (H)*
- *Clarify start and stop times. (H)*
- *This visit was so well organized. Our time was well spent and as a result, we all benefitted so much from the visit. (V)*

Involve the Host School staff in planning the visit.

- *Have the staff help plan the agenda and what materials to provide to the visiting school. (H)*
- *Evaluate the visits with staff to make improvements for the future. (H)*
- *Work with particular staff members to increase their comfort level in having visitors. They are more likely to volunteer their classrooms, and the visitors benefit from seeing the great things that they are doing. (H)*
- *We asked staff to identify their unique talents and then made sure to showcase them in the visits. (H)*

Think about the best schedule for the Host School in planning the visits.

- *Spread the visits out – no more than one per week. (H)*
- *Start visits earlier in the year. This gives you the opportunity to understand the impact and to follow up with the [visiting] school. (H)*
- *DPI suggested three visits. We did six, which we found to be tight from January to April. (H)*

Plan time for the visitors and the Host School staff to interact and network.





- *Make sure to schedule collaboration time! People want time to informally interact with staff beyond the visits to classrooms. (H)*
- *We scheduled a one hour lunch where Host School staff could rotate through and interact with the visitors. (H)*
- *We made sure that there were four different discussion times between staff and visitors. (H)*

The Visit




1. What kind of environment will you try to create at the visit?
2. Have you aligned what the visitors will experience to the Spotlight Practices that you highlighted in your grant proposal?
3. What are the specific outcomes for the visit? What do you hope the visitors will learn from their visit at your school?
4. What schedule(s) will work best to showcase your work and maximize observation and reflection time?
5. What is the best way to describe your school's improvement journey? When will this fit into your agenda?
6. What role will the principal play during the visit?

Suggestions from Spotlight Schools: *The Visit*



Create a warm and welcoming environment.

-  *I appreciated the opportunity to share with our visiting school. We can learn so much from each other. I look forward to connecting with them in the future. (H)*
-  *Everyone opened their doors to us. We all felt so welcome. (V)*
-  *The willingness of staff to share and make us feel so welcome was so appreciated. I am excited to begin the road to higher achievement. (V)*
-  *Thank you for the opportunity to be welcomed into your classrooms to witness our teaching peers doing such a great job. I am inspired and recharged from my visit. It is never easy to be on stage as a teacher, so thank you! (V)*

Narrow the focus – pick one or two areas.

-  *Need to focus, focus, focus what the visitors will experience and learn. (H)*
-  *Knowing the visitors' interests ahead of time allowed us to plan better to meet their needs. (H)*
-  *Don't try to do too much at the visit. Visitors will learn much more if the visit is focused on a couple of key areas. (H)*

Provide essential background information to help visitors understand the instructional program.

-  *Overview of the journey—where you were and how you got to this place was so valuable. (V)*
-  *Hearing about the process and the changes that occurred along a path to improving student achievement was so helpful. (V)*

Interaction with Host School Staff

- *We only built in one time during the day for visiting teachers to interact with our staff. We should have added at least two more times. (H)*
- *Having the opportunity to interact with staff at lunch was great. (V)*

Design schedules to meet the diverse needs of visiting staff.

- *To accommodate smaller groups of individuals in classrooms, we created three different schedules. The only thing we asked is that the groups stay together and switch at the same time. (H)*
- *Create rotating guest teachers' schedules to allow the maximum number of staff members to engage in discussions with the visiting teachers. (H)*
- *Create several schedules that will address Visiting School's interests, the number of individuals in a room (no more than 3-4), and classroom observations. (H)*

Keep curriculum and instruction at the center of the visit.

- *We were able to see how different classrooms implemented specific schoolwide practices. (V)*
- *It was great to see how the whole school was on board with the comprehensive literacy model. It takes this kind of team work to implement a program effectively. (V)*
- *Seeing the level of instructional collaboration and the positive attitude of the staff was a phenomenal example of what our school can shoot for. (V)*
- *I was so surprised to see that all of the classrooms were so in sync with each other. (V)*

Model Effective Practices

- *I was glad to see a professional learning community in action. It was run so efficiently and so much valuable information was covered. (V)*
- *It was great to see both math and reading blocks implemented well. (V)*
- *I liked observing the discussion about the Data Wall. (V)*
- *After observing the Daily 5, I know what I want to change back in my classroom. (V)*
- *The writing continuum was awesome. Seeing it in process at three different levels was great. (V)*

Visit other Spotlight Schools.



- *Visit other Spotlight Schools to learn how they have done or are considering organizing their visits. It was really helpful and a great opportunity to learn from another school. (H)*

Communication




1. How will you communicate with the entire staff about the upcoming visit?
2. What communication strategies will you use with the visiting school prior to the visit?

Suggestions from Spotlight Schools: *Communication*



Assign a coordinator to oversee every site visit.

-  *You need a point person to coordinate all of the needs of the site visits. (H)*
-  *The coordinator is essential to the program to maintain good communication with the Visiting School and with the Host School staff. (H)*

Communicate regularly with the visiting school.

-  *Our grant coordinator was in touch with the school numerous times before the visit to answer any questions they had. (H)*
-  *We set up a communication plan to ensure that we talked several times before the visit. (H)*
-  *As time got closer to the visit, we made personal phone calls to finalize the schedule, check on any dietary restrictions, provide driving directions, and told them where to park. Phone calls also seem to be a quicker way to get responses when decisions need to be made. (H)*

Find out who will be coming to visit the school.


-  *Design a system for confirmations and verifying who will be coming to visit. (H)*
-  *By knowing the roles/positions of the visiting staff, we were able to plan and match the needs of the visitors better. Some staff decided to follow up with each other after the visit. (H)*

Materials

1. Are there materials that the Visiting School should review prior to the visit?
2. What materials will you provide during the Site Visit? How will you do this?
3. How will you get staff input on what materials to provide?
4. How will Host School staff know what visitors are receiving?

Suggestions from Spotlight Schools: *Materials*






Send the Visiting School materials ahead of time that will help them prepare for the visit.

-  *We sent them information about our school ahead of time and an observation option grid to help them plan their day. We also sent them a video ahead of time so that would have an idea of what they would see and begin to formulate questions for us. (H)*

Make sure that all staff at the Host School know what materials are being shared with the visitors.

-  *Our staff knew what was being given to the visitors and could complement the materials with their own when people visited their classrooms. (H)*

Put materials on a flash drive if you are able.

-  *We put all of our materials on a Wiki and gave the schools the QR code. (H)*
-  *Flash drive with materials was such a great idea. (V)*
-  *Provide a list of what is on the flash drive to both the visiting and host school staffs. (V)*
-  *The flash drive offered a wealth of information in our areas of interest (collaboration, literacy, interventions). (V)*
-  *I thought the amount of information was amazing. It was useful and adaptable to our situation. (V)*

Possible Strategies to Include in a Site Visit

Meetings

- Meet with principal
- Meet with school leadership and/or school improvement team
- Meet with students
- Meet with parents
- Meet with central office staff at the school to learn how they support the school in their Spotlight practices or programs

Observations

- Observe in classrooms (different areas of focus related to identified Spotlight practices; different grade levels, or similar areas in different classrooms)
- Observe grade level or content area team meetings
- Observe a staff meeting
- Observe/participate in professional development activities related to Spotlight practices
- Observe teachers talking about student data and student work
- Observe teachers discussing how they monitor student progress
- Participate in walkthroughs with the principal to understand strategies they use to improve instructional practice

Discussions

- Debrief meetings with teachers from observed classrooms
- Meet with specific action teams focusing on school improvement and discuss how the team works on challenges
- Meet with data specialists to better understand student record-keeping and how data is used at the school
- Discuss strategies that the school has implemented with key staff and on which ones the school continues to focus to make significant progress
- Discuss with staff how they have changed the culture of the school and addressed significant barriers

Spotlight School Sample Site Visit Agenda

Time	Goal	Activities/Strategies	Who is Involved	Materials/Resources
8:30	Welcome visitors to the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of the school Overview of Spotlight Programs and Practices Overview of the day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handout with school demographics, student and school data, descriptions of programs, and other pertinent information
9:00 - 9:25	Observe primary students engaged in reading comprehension strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe in classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom teacher Students Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observation sheets
9:30 - 9:55	Observe intermediate level students engaged in reading comprehension strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe in classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom teacher Students Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observation sheets
10:00 - 10:25	Observe primary students engaged in writing workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe in classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom teacher Students Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observation sheets
10:30 - 11:00	Observe intermediate students engaged in writing workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe in classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classroom teacher Students Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observation sheets
11:00 - 11:45	Debrief with classroom teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss observations Discuss questions that visiting teachers generated prior to visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observed classroom teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples of record-keeping strategies that classroom teachers use Descriptions of programs and practices developed by teachers
11:00 - 11:45	Lunch with teachers at host school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informally talk about common challenges and strategies schools are using to address them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host School staff Visiting School staff 	
12:15 - 1:15	Learn how school leadership/school improvement planning team has moved the school forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host School tells story of school improvement Visiting School discusses questions, challenges, and strategies with host school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leadership SIP team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data from past documents that reflect the history and progress of the school Structures the school has implemented that focus on improvement
1:15 - 1:45	Observe grade level team meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use questions generated by visiting school to focus on structure, activities, and outcomes of meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade level staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forms that reflect notes from meetings, progress over time, roles and responsibilities, etc.
1:45 - 2:15	Debrief grade level team meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use observations to discuss structure, activities and outcomes of meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representatives from grade level teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forms, if available, that demonstrate next steps in moving forward, accountability, etc.
2:15 - 3:00	Observe staff meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe roles of principal, teacher leaders, and other staff, as well as focus areas of the agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agenda and accompanying materials
3:00 - 3:45	Debrief with principal and Spotlight Schools coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process questions from the day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Coordinator Other staff 	
3:45 - 4:00	Wrap-Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on follow-up opportunities and continued networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Coordinator Other staff 	

Planning the Visit: Discussion Topics for Host School and Visiting School Coordinators

Purpose

- Discuss the importance of preparing the Visiting School staff for the visit and topics to consider in the preparation process. Reinforce the visiting team's intention of *learning*, not judging, while at the school.
- Ask the Visiting School Coordinator to share the specific areas of interest for the visit, as well as questions on which the Visiting School will focus.
- Clarify the different needs and interests of the visitors and use the information to design appropriate schedules.
- Review the agenda to make sure that it addresses the Visiting School's needs.
- Provide information about the Host School: demographics, data, background/research on Spotlight Programs and Practices, school website, etc. to review in preparation for the visit.

Structure

- Design an agenda that allows Visiting School team members to go to different classrooms, observe different teams, or experience different learning opportunities during the visit.
- Focus the experience on a few, well-defined and successful practices—those that the Host School is prepared to Spotlight.

Logistics

- Discuss logistics of the day (time frame, lunch, parking, hotels if needed, phone contacts, etc.).
- Discuss expenses that the Host School will reimburse to the Visiting School.
- Discuss best possible visiting dates based on the schools' calendars (avoid special scheduled events and significant testing dates). Consider district, community, and/or parent partners who might be present.

Communication

- Design a plan for on-going communication between the Host and Visiting Schools in preparing for the visit.

Planning the Visit: Preparing Host School Staff for the Site Visit

Planning

- Make sure that all staff understand why the school was awarded this honor and the purposes of the site visits. Communicate the specific practices that visitors will be observing so that staff can demonstrate how these practices are implemented in their classrooms and throughout the school.
- Involve the staff in helping to plan the site visit and determine the materials that could be shared with the Visiting School.
- Determine what kind of follow-up, if any, you would like to have with the visiting school.

A Couple of Weeks Before the Visit

- Determine which classrooms and areas will be available on the days of the site visits and at what times, so that all staff are prepared for people stopping in their rooms.
- Have a plan and assign staff to move visitors through the schedule(s).
- Encourage staff to have lunch with the visitors so that they can informally ask questions and follow up with classroom observations.
- Encourage staff to network with visitors and learn what they are doing at their school to address challenges.

A Few Days Before the Visit

- Meet with staff to go over logistics of the site visit.

Folder for Spotlight Schools Visitors

The Host School should put together materials that help the visitors understand the whole school, as well as the specific Spotlight Practices they are prepared to showcase. Some schools loaded materials on to a flash drive or put them on a website in addition to, or as an alternative to, a folder. Some schools have included professional development or sample instructional materials that made a difference in their school.

Suggested Content

- ✓ Agenda for the visit
- ✓ Map of the school
- ✓ List of staff members with roles or titles
- ✓ Demographics of the school
- ✓ School Mission
- ✓ School achievement and behavioral data
- ✓ Example of school newsletter or information about the school
- ✓ Descriptions of school programs and practices that reflect why the school was selected as a Spotlight School*
- ✓ Descriptions of any districtwide programs connected to Spotlight Practices if appropriate
- ✓ Questions to help visitors reflect on the visit
- ✓ Expense reimbursement forms

*These descriptions will not only help the visiting school understand why the school was selected, but will also assist the staff at the Host School in being well prepared.

Visiting Our School Planning Sheet

Purposes of the visit:

What are the key outcomes? What will visitors learn?

Key Stakeholders Involved:

Identify key individuals and groups with whom the visitors should interact.

Spotlight Practices for Focus:

What are the Spotlight Practices that will focus of the visit?

Artifacts and Evidence:

Identify examples of artifacts and evidence that best tell the story of the work of the school.

Strategies and Activities:

Identify key strategies and activities that best reflect how visitors can learn about the Spotlighthed Practices.

Getting the Word Out:

Generate strategies for marketing the school to share the Spotlighthed Practices with other schools, including use of the school or district website.

Agenda

School Visit: _____
Name of School

Date: _____

Time	Activity	Participants



TO DO LIST

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Feedback about the Visit

Both the Visiting School and the Host School will have insights to share about the Site Visit that can assist the Host School in improving how it showcases its Spotlight programs and practices. Visiting Schools should respectfully share perspectives with their hosts through an informal debriefing at the end of the Site Visit and through their written, specific comments. The staff at the Host School should reflect on the comments of the visitors, as well as their own impressions, in order to provide an even better Site Visit experience. The feedback is also used by the Wisconsin DPI to measure the impact of the Spotlight Schools program.

Feedback Process:

- It is the responsibility of the Host School to collect feedback from the Visiting School and from the staff at the Host School.
- Provide time in the agenda (around 30 minutes) for the Visiting School to respond to key questions (following this page), and to share their impressions with staff from the Host School. The two schools can meet together to respond to the questions, **or** the Visiting School can meet separately, record their feedback, and then meet with staff from the Host School.
- Visiting School Team should fill out the *Feedback from Visiting School* form.
- Host School should fill out the *Feedback from Host Schools* form.
- **The Host School should return both forms (Visiting School and Host School) electronically to Michael Dennison at michael.dennison@dpi.wi.gov within ten days of the visit.**

Feedback from Visiting School

This form should be filled out by each visitor and returned within ten days of the visit to michael.dennison@dpi.wi.gov . The Host School should set aside time at the end of the day for the Visiting Team to complete this form.

Name of Host District _____

Name of Host School _____

Name of Visiting District _____

Name of Visiting School _____

Date of Visit _____ Number of Visitors _____

1. What were the questions you were hoping to learn about from this visit?

2. What did you learn about your questions? Be specific.

3. What about the visit worked well? What were some of the highlights?

4. Were there any surprises?

5. As a result of this visit, what information/processes might you take back to your school?

6. What would have made your visit more successful? What advice might you offer the Host School for future visits?

7. Other Comments

Feedback from Host School

This form should be filled out by each visitor and returned within ten days of the visit to michael.dennison@dpi.wi.gov. Based on the feedback from the Visiting School and our own observations, what can we do differently in the future to improve the Site Visit?

Name of Host District _____
Name of Host School _____
Name of Visiting District _____
Name of Visiting School _____
Date of Visit _____ Number of Visitors _____

1. What did we do well in the area of *Preparation and Planning* with our staff? What might we change?

2. What did we do well in the area of *Preparation and Planning with Visiting School*? What might we change?

3. What were the strengths of the *Schedule for the Day*? What might we change?

4. What were the advantages of the *Strategies/Activities* that we included? What might we change?

5. What were the strengths of the *Materials* we prepared? What might we change?

6. What other ideas do we have to improve the experience of visiting our school?