
The Site Visit: Visiting School



The Site Visit: Visiting School

1. Purposes of the Site Visit

Clarifies the purposes for visiting a Spotlight School

2. Preparing for the Visit: Key Questions to Address

Provides planning questions that the Visiting School should address to make the Site Visit successful

3. Possible Strategies the Host School Might Include in the 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. Note-Taking Sheets

Provides Visiting School with examples of note-taking sheets for use at the Site Visit

8. To Do List

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

9. Feedback about the Visit

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

10. Follow-Up to Site Visit: Action Plan

Provides Visiting School with an Action Plan form to record specific steps the school will take as a result of the Site Visit

Purposes of the Site Visit

The Spotlight School initiative is a competitive grant and program for Title I schools who have implemented promising practices with a demonstrated impact on student learning and achievement. Schools that received a Schools of Recognition award for three consecutive years were eligible to apply. As part of the application, schools submitted a plan for how they would share what they have implemented at their school with other schools in their region and across the state.

This program allows Spotlight Schools to showcase their work and share their successes by hosting teams from interested schools. Spotlight Schools are careful to describe themselves as not being an exemplar in all areas of school improvement, but to have developed promising and successful practices with demonstrated positive results in specific areas.

During the Site Visit, school teams will have the opportunity to visit classrooms, talk with staff, observe team meetings, and learn in depth about the practices and programs that are helping students achieve. The school will spend a lot of time preparing for your visit. In order for the visit to be a successful experience for your school team, you will need to prepare as well.

This handout will provide you with some resources that can enhance the quality of your experience: the preparation, the Site Visit at the school, and the follow-up.

Preparing for the Visit: Key Questions for the Visiting School

1. Who will be the key contact from our school to work with the coordinator at the Spotlight School?
2. What is the purpose for our visit? Why do we want to visit this school? What do we hope to learn?
3. Which staff, including administrators, should be part of the team that visits the Spotlight School? (Schools are strongly encouraged to have the principal participate in this experience.)
4. What are some times that would work with our school schedule? (Have several possibilities to offer to the Host School.)
5. After we review information about the school, what questions do we have?
6. What steps will we take after the Site Visit to process what we learned?
7. How will we share this information with others in our school?
8. Do we need to reserve substitute teachers for our staff who are going on the visit?
9. Do we need to make reservations at a hotel the night before the visit?
10. How will our contact person communicate with the Host School throughout the process?

Possible Strategies the Host School Might Include in the Site Visit

Meetings

- Meet with principal
- Meet with school leadership and/or the 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 the strategies they use to help 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 with a focus on the ones the school is currently using 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 | To 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 | To 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 | To 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 | To 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 observed 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 |
| 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 interested staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD |
| 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 interested 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.
- Share with the Spotlight School coordinator the Visiting School's specific areas of interest for the visit, as well as questions on which the Visiting School will focus.
- Review the agenda to make sure that it addresses the Visiting School's needs.
- Learn about the Host School: demographics, data, background/research on Spotlight Programs and Practices, school website, etc. to prepare for the visit.

Structure

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

Logistics

- Discuss logistics of the day (time frame, lunch, parking, hotels if needed, phone contacts, etc.).
- Discuss expenses the Host School will cover.
- Discuss best possible visiting dates based on both 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 Visiting School Staff for the Site Visit

Overall Planning

- Make sure that all staff members understand why the Host School was awarded this honor and the purposes of the site visits.
- Involve your staff members in planning the visit: What do you want to learn? Make sure to focus your visit around key areas that will help your school move forward.
- Have staff review and identify possible experiences in which they can participate during the visit. Ask the key contact person from your school to communicate these ideas to the Spotlight Schools Coordinator at the Host School.
- Make sure that staff from your school understand that they are going to the school to observe and learn, not to judge or evaluate the Host School's practices.
- Determine how the visiting team will communicate what they have learned to the rest of the staff when they return from the Spotlight Visit.
- Determine what kind of follow-up, if any, you would like to have with the Host School.
- Once the key contact from your school and the Spotlight Schools coordinator have mapped out the Site Visit, allow the visiting staff review the plan to make sure that it will meet the needs of the school.
- Put together observation/note-taking sheets for visiting staff (some examples are included in this packet.)
- Make hotel reservations if necessary and confirm travel arrangements.

A Couple of Weeks Before the Visit

- Work with the Host School's Spotlight Schools coordinator to assign visiting staff to classrooms and other observation experiences.

A Few Days Before the Visit

- Meet with visiting staff to go over logistics of the Site Visit.

Note-taking Sheets

It is important for the Visiting School to design a note-taking/observation sheet that its staff can use to record observations and insights about the visit. Below are some suggestions, but the staff can also design their own.

Area of Focus

The Visiting School team should come to consensus on what area(s) the Site Visit should address. Narrowing the areas will help team members focus on what is most important to learn as a way of helping their school improve. Use the Host School's information about their Spotlight Practices in designing the visit.

Questions for Reflection (generated by visiting school)

Schedule time for the Visiting School team to reflect on key questions that will guide their interactions and observations before the visit. The visit will be successful if participants are able to gather information about their specific questions.

Observations

Build space into the note-taking sheets for observations.

Questions

Build space into the note-taking sheets for questions that surface based on observations and interactions.

Possible Action Steps/Follow Up Beyond the Site Visit

Create space for staff from the Visiting School to generate some possible next steps for discussion with their school's staff. Be sure to clearly identify possible action steps.



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 about what they learned. 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.
- The Host School will 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.
- The Visiting School should record responses on the *Feedback from Visiting School* form.
- The Host School should fill out the *Feedback from Host Schools* form.
- **The Host School is asked to 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 from the visit? 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 practices, information or 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

FOLLOW-UP ACTION PLAN TO SITE VISIT

I. Key Ideas to Take Back to My School

| Steps that need to be taken | Due By | Person(s) Responsible | Resources/Support Needed |
|-----------------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| A. | | | |
| B. | | | |
| C. | | | |
| D. | | | |
| E. | | | |
| F. | | | |
| G. | | | |
| H. | | | |