

What works is work!

Teacher Supervision

Teachers welcome instructional suggestions that result in increased student achievement, but they rarely receive them. According to the U.S. Department of Education, supervision that strengthens instruction and teachers' morale has the following elements:

- agreement between supervisor and teacher on specific skills and practices that characterize effective teaching,
- frequent observation by the supervisor to see if the teacher is using these skills and practices,
- a meeting between the supervisor and teacher to discuss the supervisor's impressions,
- agreement between the supervisor and teacher on areas for improvement, and
- a specific plan for improvement, jointly constructed by the teacher and supervisor.

Many secondary teachers report principal involvement in their classroom does not occur often. Those teachers often indicate when principals do observe classroom instruction, rarely do they receive recommendations that are specific enough to implement in their classrooms.

For schools to improve performance, building level administrators must be willing to inspect what they expect of their teachers.

The recommendations made in this text are very easy to observe and monitor. Using the Professional Development Day Agenda in the Backward Assessment Model, principals can be involved and monitor the self identified strengths and weaknesses within a department and the changes in instructional practices identified to address student deficiencies. Additionally, the Components of an Effective Lesson can be easily observed and monitored by the principal. Stating and writing the day's objective on the board, closing the lesson by restating the objective and providing a brief over view, having students write about what they learned at the close of the lesson. By providing two review periods, one in the beginning of the period to go over recently taught material and the second to review long-term knowledge and prepare for high stakes tests. Principals can easily determine if homework is more than just a problem set out of a textbook and monitor whether students had an opportunity to practice with guidance from their teachers.

If the components were adopted within a department improvement plan, principals could focus their recommendations on their implementation. While a checklist could be developed for the components, teachers would be much better served if the principal sat down with the teacher to discuss their observations in greater detail.

While we said this before, it is worth repeating. With respect to school administrators, elementary administrators have typically taught all of the subjects their teachers teach. They know the subject matter, they are familiar with both the sequencing and benchmarks, and instructional strategies to help students learn. Secondary principals normally come from subject specific areas. They have backgrounds in math, social studies, physical education, or science. All too often, people who don't have a background in the natural sciences feel threatened by their secondary math teachers. Some administrators will acknowledge they didn't understand math, they didn't get the math gene and that's why they were not successful in math. So when they evaluate their math teachers, they tend to look more at classroom environment, instructional strategies, a checklist for the components, and classroom management, and not really paying close attention to the math content being delivered to the students. That has to change. A lesson's worth should be determined by what students learned – not how well the class seemed to go.

Administrators must also change their belief systems. Many administrators will sit in a math class, evaluate the instruction, knowing full well they did not understand the day's lesson. If administrators are not understanding the lesson, they need to address that with their teachers, because it is doubtful that the students are getting it.

Improvement plans rarely work unless the school's administration is an integral part of the plan and is actively participating in the process. On the following pages, I have provided an observation sheet that teachers and administrators might discuss and come to an agreement on items that should be observable on most days during a regular class period.