

## Providing Teacher Feedback

**School Name: The Bronx School of Science Inquiry and Investigation**

**School Info: Middle School, 388 Students, 96% free and reduced lunch, 20% English Language Learners, and 29% Special Education students**

**Principal: Serapha Cruz**

**Date: December 2010**

Mrs. Serapha Cruz has been principal of The Bronx School of Science Inquiry and Investigation for the last three years and assistant principal for the four years prior. Through her tenure at The Bronx School of Science Inquiry and Investigation, Mrs. Cruz has sought to build a feedback-rich culture, where administrators are instructional leaders that share accountability with teachers for student achievement. Three years ago, Mrs. Cruz adopted the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching to serve as an evaluation rubric for all teachers. The purpose of the adoption was to create a shared understanding of excellent teaching and to make the evaluation process more meaningful for teachers seeking tenure.

Since the adoption of Danielson, Mrs. Cruz has worked with her leadership cabinet to align their classroom feedback to the Danielson rubric. Below you will find an interview with Mrs. Cruz on how she has implemented cycles of teacher feedback and what she has learned from the process along the way.

### Key Success Factors

- As an administrator, learn how to organize your own time so that you can prioritize providing feedback to teachers as an essential element of your weekly schedule.
- Providing effective teacher feedback that teachers can use to improve their pedagogy is a craft. As an administrative team, work on developing your own abilities to provide feedback that is evidenced-based and tied to teachers' professional growth goals.
- Familiarize teachers with the evaluation rubric and its components and encourage open dialogue about quality instruction.
- Be clear with teachers on when the rubric is being used developmentally and when the rubric is being used for evaluative purposes. The goal is to create various opportunities for teachers to develop their instruction before sitting down to an evaluation.

**How do you manage your schedule to find time to observe classroom instruction?**

As a leadership team, it has always been our goal to be in classrooms regularly. However, this year, we made an organizational shift that has helped us prioritize classroom observations. Every administrator now schedules at least two coaching days (sometimes three) and three office days in their weekly calendars. We have found that by using our calendars to schedule coaching days we are more able to ensure non-interrupted time for instructional coaching. On a coaching day, we identify the teachers we plan to visit and spend almost the entire day outside of the office. On those days, we also schedule when we will do any kind of necessary paperwork such as checking in with the secretary or checking email, but the rest of the day is spent observing teachers or providing feedback to teachers, whether it is written feedback or verbal follow-up from a prior visit to their classroom.

On office days, we map out our priorities to ensure we get everything done that would normally sneak into our coaching days. We are trying to be strategic about our “to do” lists - prioritizing what is most important and making sure we get that done. On our office days, we still also schedule teacher meetings to discuss classroom observations. In other words, we are in our offices that day, but we have instructional conversations, as well as, doing the work that may hinder our coaching days.

One tactic I use on my coaching days is I set an “out of office” reply on my email that states “I will be checking email at 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.” so that people know that I will get back to them, but I am not available at that moment.

Each month we also rotate providing feedback to non-certificated staff. For example, this month, one AP is providing feedback to the paraprofessionals, one AP is providing feedback to enrichment teachers, and I am providing feedback to office staff. This way all staff is receiving consistent feedback throughout the year from each person in our leadership cabinet (administrators).

**What does your observation schedule look like?**

In our school, we are organized by department and by grade. Each administrator has a department and grade that he/she is in charge of, some have two. I ask my Assistant Principals to prioritize their classroom visits with their department over their grade so that they can understand the instructional needs of the department. Then, secondarily, the APs will visit classrooms and provide feedback to teachers on their grade level team.

As the principal, my responsibility is to observe and coach teachers up for tenure, at risk teachers that may have had a U rating from the year before, and brand new teachers.

Each of our administrators generally visits a classroom for 10-20 minutes and we try to be very strategic about when we visit the classroom. For example, if the teacher is working on developing their “share out” at the end of a lesson, then I would visit at the end of class. We provide written or verbal feedback to teachers within 24 hours of the observation.

We also have cycles where we do formal observations. This year, we are using a new format to our formal observation template that is based on the Charlotte Danielson rubric which is much quicker to use. I am able to complete a formal observation cycle (pre-observation, observation, and post-observation meeting) and have feedback to the teacher within a week of his/her pre-observation meeting. Using this new format, we expect to complete at least 4 formal observations for each teacher this year.

Although, this is not a classroom observation, we also do unit reviews with teachers. Teachers meet with their administrative contact before starting each unit. We review their unit with them and we coach the teacher to apply key questions about instructional design to their unit plan. This provides an opportunity to “observe” teachers’ planning and preparation.

## **What does your feedback look like?**

### **Verbal vs. Written**

We talk to teachers to find out how they prefer to receive feedback. For example, some teachers have said that they like to have feedback written down because it helps them go back and reflect and use the feedback in their planning. Some are more conversational and prefer verbal feedback.

Then, we also make decisions based on the observation. If it is a small issue, we often follow-up with the teacher with a quick verbal conversation. This works particularly well with teachers we have been working with for a while and know their area of focus. In these cases, we use verbal feedback as a way to give quick feedback on the observed lesson.

For teachers that are struggling, written feedback is more helpful so they have a resource to reference in their planning. The written documentation also provides you with a record of your support with this teacher. Generally, we will also follow-up with struggling teachers with a verbal conversation to support them in understanding the feedback.

### **Feedback Focus**

We focus our feedback on specific areas of the Danielson competencies that are pertinent to that teacher. This is our third year using the Danielson framework and, as a school, we use the entire rubric. However, we have created a scaffolded release of the rubric depending on the teacher's experience. For example, a year one teacher is responsible for less components within the rubric than a year two teacher and then by year three, teachers are responsible for the entire framework.

At the beginning of the year, teachers set goals around the competencies that they need to work on for that year. As a result, we try to streamline our process so that our feedback is related to the teachers' goals which, in turn, are based on the Danielson rubric.

### **Essential Elements**

Feedback needs to be evidence-based. When visiting a classroom, we ask ourselves, "If I was a student in this classroom what would I now know how to do?" We write down only what we see students doing not what we infer students are understanding. We use that evidence to generate our feedback within the specified areas of growth.

**What kind of resistance did you encounter when trying to implement more frequent teacher observation and feedback?**

Feedback has been part of our culture for so long that we have not encountered very much resistance from teachers. Our surveys show that teachers want to have feedback. They want to have people coming into their classroom and talking to them about their practice. Feedback makes teachers feel like they are working in a much more professional environment. There is a sense of professionalism when administrators regularly come in to observe the great work they are doing and, together, they are having conversations about the areas the teacher is working on growing.

However, our feedback-rich culture is an adjustment to new teachers that come to our school and are not accustomed to a high-level of feedback. To support new teachers that may find this transition difficult, we have a week-long seminar in the summer for new teachers. We spend one day on familiarizing teachers with the Danielson rubric and helping them understand the various structures that we use around the rubric such as informal and formal observations, unit reviews, and learning plans. We identify which of these structures are developmental and which are evaluative in nature. For example:

- Developmental: goal setting meetings, weekly observations and feedback related to rubric components, improvement plans, and coaching conversations.
- Evaluative: mid-year and end-of-year conversations, formal and informal observations that go into a teacher's file (we clearly communicate the intention of the observation before having it).

The idea is that by the time teachers get to an evaluative cycle, they have already received a great deal of informal, developmental feedback. We encourage teachers to engage in professional conversation within all of these structures - dialogue and asking questions.

Our biggest challenge has been building our own capacity, as a leadership cabinet, to provide effective feedback. We are consistently working on our own abilities to ensure our feedback is evidenced-based and helpful to teachers - something that they can utilize to help them grow their instructional practice.

**How have you built your capacity to provide effective feedback to your teachers?**

Our leadership cabinet uses various structures to ensure there is consistency across the school in our approach to coaching and evaluating teachers:

- We have a weekly leadership cabinet meeting that focuses on feedback to teachers. Similar to teachers using a protocol for looking at student work, we get together to discuss and analyze our feedback to teachers. For example, most recently I filmed myself in a pre-observation conversation with a teacher. My leadership team, watched the video and provided feedback to me on the types of questions I asked.
- We norm our scoring on the evaluation rubric by visiting classrooms together once per month. We use a template to observe one component on the rubric and then discuss if we scored that teacher in a similar place for the observed instruction. We then discuss what kind of feedback would be most effective to share with this teacher based upon their professional goals and where that teacher is on the evaluation rubric.

We have also sought to grow our coaching abilities through outside resources and training. Resources that we have found particularly helpful are:

- Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning by Dr. Elmore: Discusses a process called “instructional rounds” where educators develop a shared practice of observing, discussing, and analyzing learning and teaching.
- Breakthrough Training - Time Management: provides participants with the ability to evaluate and prioritize what is most to least important, and provides a system of time spending techniques that support participants in focusing on their established goals and priorities.
- Implementing the Framework for Teaching in Enhancing Professional Practice by Charlotte Danielson (ASCD): a resource that contains many templates and reflection tools for each component of the Danielson rubric.

**What is your advice for NYC principals working on building a feedback rich culture in their schools?**

**Personal Growth**

It is critical to organize your time. I recommend attending a training on time organization (Breakthrough Training was helpful to us) so that you can ensure that you are able to prioritize your time to have consistent conversations with staff members on how they can improve their practice. Without systems of organization such as managing your schedule and a few filing systems that I have found helpful, prioritizing observations and feedback will feel overwhelming - like you are scrambling in order to be in classrooms.

**Support to Teachers**

Provide time for the staff to internalize the evaluation rubric. For example, in the summer we ask teachers to identify what pieces of evidence would demonstrate proficiency on a few components of the rubric. I know other principals that have had their staff jigsaw the entire rubric, adding evidence for each component. The more the teachers are familiar with the rubric, the more they will feel like it is a guide to good teaching - that it is helpful rather than punitive.

Then, it is important to regularly use the rubric in a developmental way - through frequent informal observations. It builds professional respect between you and the teacher because you share a common language around quality instruction.