Implementation DASHBOARD

Best Practices for Instructional Walkthroughs

Best Practices for Instructional Walkthroughs

When conducted thoughtfully, walkthroughs provide valuable insight into student learning, instructional practices, and the systems that support teachers. The guidance below outlines a structure and key considerations for before, during, and after walkthroughs to ensure the process is collaborative, supportive, and focused on continuous improvement.

Conducting regular walkthroughs helps ensure they support teachers and leaders with learning and improving the implementation of the HQIM and are not for evaluative purposes.

Before Walkthroughs Begin

Start With the Why

Before launching instructional walkthroughs, it is essential to establish a clear and consistent message about their purpose. When teachers understand that walkthroughs are designed to support learning and improvement rather than evaluation, they are more likely to engage openly in the process.

Key messages to communicate:

- "We're doing walkthroughs to learn how the materials are living in classrooms, not to evaluate individuals."
- "Our goal is to support teachers in getting the most out of the HQIM—because we know it's what helps students access grade-level content."
- "Walkthroughs help us identify what's working well and what support or resources teachers might still need."
- "The walkthroughs help us understand patterns across classrooms, not single moments of performance."
- Emphasize that walkthroughs are an integral part of the leader learning process—to ensure the system supports HQIM implementation effectively.

Set Clear Intentions

A successful walkthrough begins long before entering a classroom. Leaders should be clear about what they hope to learn, how that learning connects to HQIM implementation, and what evidence they will collect to answer their questions.

- **Clarify the purpose:** Decide whether you're looking for fidelity of use (is the HQIM being used as designed?) or quality of instruction (how effectively it's implemented).
- **Anchor in the materials:** Review the lesson/unit in the HQIM ahead of time—understand the learning goals, lesson flow, and key instructional routines. Bring the lesson with you on the walkthrough.
- **Bring your evidence collection tool:** Capturing notes as you go ensures your takeaways remain grounded in specific evidence.

Build Trust

Trust is the foundation of effective walkthroughs. Because implementing new materials and instructional routines can feel vulnerable, leaders must intentionally create conditions that help teachers feel respected, supported, and safe to take instructional risks.

HQIM implementation can feel vulnerable—teachers are learning complex materials and routines. Ensuring safety and trust is critical.

Do this by:

- **Making it non-evaluative:** Be explicit that walkthroughs are not tied to formal observation or appraisal systems.
- **Being transparent about what you're looking for:** Share the "look-fors" or indicators ahead of time so teachers know the focus.
- I**nviting input:** Ask, "What would you like us to pay attention to?" This positions teachers as partners in the improvement process.
- **Following up with gratitude and curiosity:** When debriefing, start with what's strong "I noticed your students were grappling productively with the task. What supports helped make that possible?"

During the Walkthrough

Observe with Intent

The walkthrough itself should focus on gathering objective evidence about student learning and the use of instructional materials. Observers should remain curious, grounded in the lesson goals, and attentive to what students are experiencing throughout the lesson. Aim for 15 - 20 minutes per observation when conducting walkthroughs.

- **Follow the lesson plan:** Use a copy of the lesson plan from the HQIM to help you determine how aligned instruction is to the materials themselves.
- **Focus on student experience:** Ask yourself, "If I were a student in this room, what would I be learning and doing right now?"
- **Capture specifics:** Record direct evidence, not interpretations (e.g., "Students discussed character motivations using text evidence" rather than "Strong engagement").
- **Look at materials in use:** Notice whether anchor texts and lesson components from the HQIM are visible and used as intended.

After the Walkthrough

Calibrate and Reflect

The most valuable insights often emerge after the observation. Taking time to reflect, compare evidence, and identify patterns helps ensure that walkthrough findings lead to meaningful action and support.

Best practices:

- **Debrief with partners:** Compare notes to ensure shared understanding of what "implementation" looks like.
- **Identify bright spots:** Highlight examples of strong HQIM-aligned practices to celebrate and replicate.
- **Look for trends:** Aggregate evidence around themes such as "use of HQIM routines," "student ownership," or "alignment to grade-level expectations."
- **Share Feedback:** Frame feedback as coaching—not compliance. Be explicit and tie it to the HQIM. "One next best step" is progress. Connect observations to upcoming PLCs and vendor meetings.

Share What Happens With the Data

How leaders communicate findings can either strengthen or weaken trust in the walkthrough process. Sharing what was learned—and how those insights will be used—demonstrates transparency and reinforces the purpose of continuous improvement.

Transparency after walkthroughs builds long-term trust.

Best practices:

- **Aggregate results:** Share themes and trends, not individual data ("Across classrooms, we saw strong evidence of lesson structure and opportunities to deepen student talk.")
- **Close the feedback loop:** Let teachers know what's being done with the insights (e.g., "We added planning time for upcoming units because walkthroughs showed teachers needed more prep for small group rotations.")
- **Celebrate progress:** Highlight bright spots in newsletters or staff meetings to show growth over time.

Communicate Continuously

A single explanation of the walkthrough process is rarely enough. Ongoing communication helps build understanding, reinforces the purpose of the work, and keeps staff informed about what leaders are learning and how that learning is shaping support.

Building understanding takes repetition. Embed the walkthrough message in:

- **Staff meetings:** Here's what we're learning from our HQIM implementation data
- **Coaching conversations:** Let's look at this indicator together and see where it shows up in your lesson
- **Professional learning sessions:** Our walkthroughs showed students are strong in discourse but need more support with evidence-based writing—so today's session focuses there