

T&L/ETWD/Educator Development

Principles for Principals September 2026

September Topic: Observing Teaching to Improve Learning (Teacher Effectiveness)

Overview

You Cannot Improve What You Do Not See

One of the most important places for a principal to spend time is where the school's core work happens: in classrooms. Effective instructional leadership begins with knowing what students and teachers are experiencing each day. Learning walks and observations provide principals with opportunities to see instruction firsthand, recognize effective practices, identify areas for growth, and understand patterns across the school.

The [Louisiana Leader Rubric](#) (LLR) calls leaders to ensure that teachers receive observations and feedback that lead to improved student outcomes. The greatest value of observations comes from what happens after the classroom visit.

Observation creates awareness. Feedback creates growth. Follow-up creates improvement.

A single classroom visit provides a snapshot. Consistent learning walks and observations create a clearer picture of teaching and learning across the school. Effective principals use that picture to make intentional decisions about where teachers need support, which instructional practices to strengthen, and school-wide trends that need professional development.

The work does not end when feedback is provided. Principals return to classrooms to determine whether instructional practice has changed and, most importantly, whether those changes are improving student learning.

The goal is not simply to visit more classrooms. The goal is to make every classroom visit matter.

September Leadership Question

How do I use learning walks, observations, and feedback to improve teaching and learning across my school?

Leadership in Action

Establish a consistent routine for classroom learning walks that allows you to

- be present in classrooms regularly, not only during formal observations;
- observe student learning and the implementation of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM);
- gather evidence connected to your school's instructional priorities and goals;
- look across classrooms for patterns and trends in teaching and learning; and
- build a clear picture of the instructional strengths and needs across your school.

Use observations to provide teachers with timely, evidence-based feedback that

- reinforces effective instructional practices;
- identifies a focused area for growth;
- connects feedback to specific evidence from the classroom;
- prompts teacher reflection through meaningful questions; and
- includes clear, actionable next steps and opportunities for follow-up.

Use evidence from learning walks and observations to guide schoolwide instructional improvement by

- identifying trends across classrooms rather than focusing only on individual teachers;
- bringing instructional trends to the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) for analysis and discussion;
- using evidence to determine priorities for Teacher Collaborations (TCs), coaching, and professional learning;
- monitoring whether instructional actions and supports are resulting in stronger classroom practice; and
- returning to classrooms to determine whether changes in practice are improving student learning.

Learning walks and observations are most powerful when they are part of a continuous cycle of instructional improvement. Think of every classroom visit as part of a larger cycle. [The School Instructional Leadership Team \(S-ILT\)](#) is the structure through which school leaders enact the expectations of the LLR while directly supporting educator growth aligned to the Louisiana Educator Rubric (LER). The process links observation cycles, ILT planning, and teacher collaboration to create continuous instructional improvement.

Leadership Reflection

Before meeting with your mentor, reflect on

- What patterns and trends am I noticing across classrooms?
- Am I spending enough time in classrooms to have an accurate picture of teaching and learning across my school?
- How am I using classroom evidence to inform ILT and TC?
- What evidence will tell me that feedback and instructional supports are improving teaching and student learning?

Mentor Spotlight



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Lessons learned from my first year as a principal

- One mistake I made was trying to carry too much of the work myself. I learned that being a strong leader does not mean having every answer or doing every task; it means developing people, trusting them with meaningful responsibility, and creating the capacity for the team to succeed together.
- The decision that changed my year was that I made the intentional decision to invest in people and build leadership capacity from within the school, focusing every effort on the relationships with staff. The relationships with staff allowed a space to both be heard and to listen. Empowering teachers and staff to lead initiatives, make decisions, and take ownership created greater buy-in and ultimately allowed us to accomplish more for students than if I tried to do it all or supported only my own initiatives.
- One leadership habit I continue to practice is that I intentionally ask, “Who else can I develop through this?” Whether it is a teacher, student, aspiring leader, or community partner, I try to look for opportunities to give others meaningful responsibility, provide support, and help them grow. Helping others develop their experience makes a generational impact.
- My advice to every first-year principal is that you do not have to do it all alone. Your job is not to be the best person at everything in the building. Your job is to build a team where the skills of the team are best utilized, and where everyone can become better. Invest in your people, protect instructional time, develop systems to listen more than you speak, and remember that the culture and systems you build for students will ultimately matter more than the number of things you personally accomplish.

Mentor’s Coaching Guide

This month’s coaching purpose is to help the novice principal understand that classroom observations are not isolated events or simply evaluation requirements. They are part of a continuous cycle of instructional improvement.

Support the novice principal in developing consistent routines for getting into classrooms, collecting objective evidence of teaching and student learning, providing meaningful feedback, and identifying patterns across classrooms.

Help the principal make the connection between what is observed in classrooms and the work that follows: Observations →LTs →TCs →Observations

Suggestions for questions to guide your monthly meeting discussions:

Establish Consistent Observation Practices

- How frequently are you getting into classrooms, and what is helping or preventing you from doing so consistently?
- What are you intentionally looking for during learning walks and observations?
- How are your classroom visits connected to your school goals and instructional priorities?

Strengthen Feedback

- Is the feedback you provide specific, evidence-based, and actionable?
- Does your feedback help teachers understand both a strength and a meaningful next step?
- What questions are you asking that encourage teachers to reflect on their own practice?
- How are you following up after feedback to determine whether it resulted in growth?

Connect to the Louisiana Leader Rubric

- What does the LLR expect of you as a leader of teacher effectiveness?

- What progress have you made toward your LLR refinement goal since our last conversation?
- How does this month's focus connect to or support your refinement goal?

Suggested Action Step for Mentor/Mentee School Visits:

Conduct collaborative learning walks. After agreeing on an instructional focus related to a school priority, visit 3-5 classrooms together and compare the evidence gathered.

For questions or comments, please contact LouisianaLeaders@la.gov.