

GUIDELINES AND CHARACTERISTICS FOR SCHOOL LITERACY WALKS

School _____

Date _____

tmac'09

1. When you walk into the school for the first time, what do you immediately see?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
Lobby with parent center with books	Entire lobby devoted to announcing point-winners for some program
Bookcases/shelf with current periodicals or recent collection of books	Huge mission statement that says little or nothing about literacy
Bulletin board with recent articles from journals or newspapers on issues relating to literature	Nothing but notices about signing in and reporting to the main office.
Student's recent writing on substantive topics (all levels)	

2. When you walk down the corridors, what do you see?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
Students' work displayed, especially samples that show evidence of engagement in topics	Nothing displayed or work that looks artificial and all the same
Students and faculty who say hello, ask you who are or what you are doing	Yelling coming from behind closed classroom doors
	Students and staff who ignore you

3. When you enter a classroom, what do you see?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
An air of productivity in the room; teachers and students are engaged in language	Initial impression is that the classroom is sterile – few if any books in sight, very little student work displayed, etc..
There are lots of books around, not just textbooks	Seats in rows and never moved for small group discussions
Student work is displayed	
Students are at tables or desks arranged in groups or semi-circles	

4. When you sit down and watch the classroom for a while, what do you see?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
There is a purposeful air about the lesson or discussion; you know immediately what the point is	The teacher dominates all conversations
The teacher engages students in the discussion rather than simply asks questions	Discussions focus on small details only
You hear comments like "What led you to that conclusion?"	Very little genuine writing seems to be going on
You see students initiating a discussion about the big ideas of a book	Excessive time spent on going through answers to homework dittos
Writing folders have daily entries and substantial writing	Many diversions to deal with behavioral issues
Homework assignments on the board are thoughtful and challenging	Material obviously too hard for struggling readers, too easy for better readers
All students in the class seemed to be productively engaged	Teacher working through one book with whole class

5. If you have a conversation with a teacher, or sit down with a faculty at a grade level, what do you glean from the discussion?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
They clearly value literacy for themselves and their students	They don't seem to practice literacy themselves nor really value it
They have a clear vision of what a literate student looks like	They complain about the students, the parents, about what teachers before them haven't taught
They work together within their grade and with colleagues at other grades	They are uncomfortable with both brighter and struggling students
They focus on ways they can be more effective and have a game plan for getting there	They complain there aren't enough support staff
They are aware of issues in the professional literature	They'll use the phrase "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" at least once in the conversation
They have close working relationships with instructional support staff	They don't have time for professional conferences or professional literature
They pay attention to parental concerns	They focus too much on the little details and not enough on the big ideas
They talk about workshops and conferences they have attended and about books they have read	
They don't always agree with colleagues but they respect them and keep the lines of communication open	
They constantly seek out better ways to meet the literacy needs of their students.	

6. If you observe in an instructional support classroom, or watch a specialist working in a regular classroom, what do you see?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
There's a purposeful air about the lesson or discussion	You see how dependent the children are on the teacher
You know immediately what the point is	The teacher supplies the answers rather than getting the child to learn and use strategies on his/her own
You observe how much the specialist focuses on teaching strategies that foster independence in literacy skills	Activities seems cutesy and aimed more at keeping the child engaged and entertained than helping them learn

7. When you sit down with the instructional support staff, what will they talk about?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
They see themselves as part of the school, as part of each grade level and classroom	They talk about how their approach is the only one that works for "their" students
They relate well to each other, despite different training and responsibilities	They complain about other instructional support approaches
They work hard to support classroom literacy instruction, but aren't afraid to supplement it when they feel it's appropriate	They're overworked
They are well trained	
They constantly seek better teaching techniques for struggling readers and writers and especially for the 'newer' disabilities	

8. If you arrive in the school first thing in the morning, before school starts, what do you see?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
There are several teachers and instructional support staff already there	You are the only person in the building, other than the custodian who let you in
You bump into the principal	The children you encounter don't seem pleased to be there, nor do the teachers
You notice several small groups of students, some of whom are coming in early to get extra help, others are in the lobby reading, a small group comes in early for reading study	You don't see much of anything going on until the bell rings for the first class
Everyone you meet seems to be eager to begin the day	
There are some teachers meeting with each other, a parent with a busy daytime schedule has come in for a conference	

9. If you wander around the building during lunch, or after school, what do you see?

Encouraging Clues	Worrying Clues
A "reading club" that meets over lunch or after school, open to everyone	Lunch is just for eating and being admonished by the cafeteria monitors
Instructional support programs that offer services for struggling readers and writers throughout the day	After school, you are again the only person in the building, other than the custodians who are now sweeping up the classrooms.
After-school projects that might involve both faculty and students in literacy-related projects	