




Coaching and Feedback Guidance for Leaders

Effective coaching is one of the most powerful levers leaders have to improve teacher practice and student outcomes. The guidance below supports non-evaluative, growth-oriented coaching conversations, ones that build trust, strengthen instruction, and help teachers develop ownership of their professional growth over time.



A note on non-evaluative observations: Non-evaluative observations are not connected to formal teacher evaluation. Their purpose is to understand implementation health, identify instructional priorities, and inform professional learning, not to assess or judge teachers. Communicating this distinction clearly and consistently is essential to building the trust that effective coaching requires.

What to Look for During Observations

Before observing, ground yourself in the curriculum and the current phase of implementation. Use the Progression Indicators to identify what you expect to see at this stage, and focus your observation on one or two priorities rather than trying to capture everything. Collect specific, objective evidence where possible—what you see and hear—not interpretations and scripted teacher and student language.

Focus Area	Look For
Curriculum use	Is the teacher following the intended lesson structure and pacing? Are materials being used as designed?
Instructional practice	Is the teacher using strategies, routines, and language aligned to the curriculum? Is the cognitive demand maintained for students?
Student engagement	Are students participating actively? Are they using curriculum-aligned language, strategies, and models?
Classroom environment	Are norms and routines established? Does the environment support collaboration, discourse, and productive struggle?
Differentiation and support	Is the teacher using embedded lesson supports to meet the needs of all learners?

Align your primary focus to the current implementation phase:

Phase	Primary Observation Focus
Learn	Curriculum is being implemented as intended; lesson components and pacing are followed; students are participating.
Deepen	Teacher is customizing instruction using student evidence; students are engaging in discourse and using strategies flexibly.
Know	Teacher is making in-the-moment adaptations based on student thinking; students demonstrate ownership of learning.

The Coaching Cycle

A coaching cycle provides a repeatable structure for connecting observations to professional growth. Each cycle moves through three stages.



Stage 1: Prepare

Before the observation, identify a shared focus or instructional priority, either collaboratively with the teacher or based on school-wide trends. Review the lesson or module so you can observe with context. Clarify with the teacher that the observation is non-evaluative and growth-focused, and decide in advance whether a directive or facilitative approach is most appropriate for the debrief (see below).



Stage 2: Observe

During the observation, stay focused on the agreed-upon priority and collect specific, objective evidence. Avoid participating in the lesson or signaling evaluative reactions to the teacher or students.



Stage 3: Debrief

Hold the feedback conversation as soon as possible after the observation, ideally the same day. Open by inviting the teacher to reflect before you share. Share specific, evidence-based observations connected to the instructional priority, explore the impact on student learning, and collaboratively set a clear next step. Close by affirming the teacher's effort and clarifying how you will follow up.

Choosing Your Approach: Directive vs. Facilitative

Effective coaches adjust their approach based on the teacher's experience level, the urgency of the need, and the nature of the instructional challenge. Neither approach is inherently better—strong coaching often moves fluidly between the two within a single conversation.

A **directive approach** is most appropriate when a teacher is new to the curriculum and needs clear, specific guidance to get started; when a non-negotiable expectation needs to be addressed directly; or when a teacher is uncertain or overwhelmed and needs concrete next steps to build confidence. In a directive debrief, the leader shares a clear observation, names the instructional impact, provides an explicit recommendation or models an alternative approach, and sets a specific next step.

Example: *"I noticed that the lesson's Launch was skipped today. That routine frames the lesson and engages students in preparation for the lesson. Let's look at the lesson together and talk through how to incorporate it tomorrow."*

A **facilitative approach** is most appropriate when a teacher has foundational implementation in place and is ready to reflect more deeply; when the goal is to build the teacher's own problem-solving capacity; or when you want to strengthen the teacher's sense of ownership and agency. In a facilitative debrief, the leader opens with genuine curiosity, asks questions that help the teacher draw their own conclusions, and guides the teacher to identify their own next steps.

Example: *"How did you feel the discussion went today? What did you notice about which students were participating? What might you try differently to open it up to more voices?"*

Post-Observation Feedback Conversation Structure

Regardless of approach, use this five-step structure to guide a focused, productive debrief:

- 1. Open with reflection.** Invite the teacher to share their perspective first. “How do you feel the lesson went? What stood out to you?”
- 2. Share a specific observation.** Connect your evidence to the instructional priority. “I noticed that... [specific, objective evidence].”
- 3. Explore the impact.** Connect the practice to student learning—through questions (facilitative) or direct observation (directive).
- 4. Identify a next step.** Name one actionable growth area, either collaboratively or directly.
- 5. Affirm and close.** Acknowledge the teacher’s commitment and clarify how you will follow up. “Thank you for having me in today. I’ll check back in with you after you’ve had a chance to try that.”

Guiding Questions for Post-Observation Conversations

Curriculum Use

- How are you using the curriculum materials to plan and prepare for lessons?
- What parts of the lesson structure feel most natural? What parts feel challenging?
- Where are you in the curriculum, and how are you thinking about pacing?

Instructional Practice

- What strategies or routines are you using most consistently? How are students responding?
- Where do you feel students are doing the most thinking and learning?
- Are there lesson components you feel less confident about? What support would help?

Student Engagement and Learning

- Which students are thriving with this curriculum? Which students need more support?

- What evidence are you collecting about student understanding, and how are you using it to adjust instruction?

Professional Growth

- What is one aspect of your teaching you'd like to strengthen?

- What would be most helpful from me? More observation time, co-planning, resources, or something else?

- As you look at the Progression Indicators, where do you see yourself? What would a next step look like?