

**DC
SCHOOL
REFORM
NOW**



**HIGH QUALITY SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN
PARENT WORKBOOK
SECOND EDITION**

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Dear Parents,

We are so glad that you have chosen to ensure your child has the best middle school education possible by participating in the High Quality Schools Campaign (HQSC). The HQSC aims to educate parents about the characteristics of a high quality school, principal and teacher through parent-friendly materials, workshops, school tours, out-of-boundary and charter application support, school enrollment support and parent advocacy training. Our hope for you is that by the end of this campaign, your fifth grader will be enrolled in an excellent school and that you and your student will be excited about middle school and beyond.

As the Executive Director of DC School Reform Now (DCSRN), and a parent of two DC Public School students, I realize the importance that education plays in everyone's life. Because I want my children to be fully prepared to excel in college, I know the quality of education they are receiving now matters. Not *all* schools offer each child the same quality of education—even though all children deserve a high quality education. As a parent, you are fundamental to your child's success in the future. By knowing how to identify and pursue high quality schools, principals and teachers, you will be able to demand the best for your child. The HQSC will give you the knowledge and the tools to do just that.

At DCSRN we are educating, organizing and advocating to build support for public education strategies that prepare kids to become college and career ready. We believe that public schools in DC can and should become the best in the nation and every student in DC should have a high quality school, principal and teacher. Though your student is not yet close to graduating from high school and ready to enter college, each year is a step closer to that important crossroads. We want to expose you to and help you navigate the many options that DC provides so that you can make the most informed and best decision for your child. A high quality education means that students leave high school prepared to enter and graduate on time from a college or university without the need for remedial classes. A college education increases a student's options in life and options equal freedom. We believe your child deserves options, freedom and happiness.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Pickens".

David Pickens
Executive Director



HIGH QUALITY SCHOOLS, PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS: THE BASICS

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL HIGH QUALITY?

- ✓ A high quality school is staffed with a high quality principal and high quality teachers.
- ✓ A high quality school tests children multiple times per year to diagnose the academic level of each child.
- ✓ A high quality school uses different lessons, teaching styles and tests to make sure that each child is growing academically by *at least* one year per school year.
- ✓ A high quality school is welcoming of all parents, families and community members, and seeks to partner with parents to improve a student's academic achievement.
- ✓ A high quality school has a fun, energetic and positive environment, in which students are actively participating but are still respectful of all adults and fellow students.
- ✓ A high quality school provides resources for students that need them, whether they be academic supports (like a teacher's aide), remedial classes, or a resource room, or social and emotional supports (like a counselor, social worker or nurse).

WHAT MAKES A PRINCIPAL HIGH QUALITY?

- ✓ A high quality principal is the true leader of the school and models expectations for teachers and students.
- ✓ A high quality principal has big goals for the school in which students will achieve academically and grow socially and emotionally.
- ✓ A high quality principal holds teachers responsible for increasing students' academic level by *at least* one year per school year.
- ✓ A high quality principal is highly available to students, teachers, parents, families and community members, and is a good communicator to all parties.
- ✓ A high quality principal takes personal responsibility for teachers and students, making sure everyone has what they need to succeed at all times.
- ✓ A high quality principal manages the operations of the school smoothly, always maintaining the safety of the school, the quality of the school calendar, daily schedule and cleanliness of the school facilities.

WHAT MAKES A TEACHER HIGH QUALITY?

- ✓ A high quality teacher takes personal responsibility for how much students achieve academically despite the challenges a student might face outside of school.
- ✓ A high quality teacher uses whatever it takes to increase students' academic level by *at least* one year per school year.
- ✓ A high quality teacher manages the classroom confidently and has high expectations for students' behavior and academic progress.
- ✓ A high quality teacher forms strong relationships with students and the students' families, knowing these relationships will increase academic growth.
- ✓ A high quality teacher is organized and spends time planning daily lessons, unit plans or a long-term plan to guide teaching. Daily goals and objectives are posted visibly in the classroom and the class is clearly following these plans.
- ✓ A high quality teacher never stops growing and continuously seeks ways to increase students' academic level.

HIGH QUALITY SCHOOLS

PARENT TOOL 1: Parent Observation Rubric—Schools (p. 4-8)

Description:

This rubric assists parents in rating the quality of schools. It will provide strategies for in depth analysis of schools by guiding parents to ask questions and critically observe school attributes and characteristics.

In this section, parents will evaluate:

- School Culture..... p. 4
- Curriculum and Data.....p. 6
- School Operations.....p. 7

PARENT TOOL 2: School Visit Checklist (p. 9)

Description:

This checklist highlights key school characteristics for parents to use during school visits and tours.

PARENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC—SCHOOLS

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality 3 = High Quality 2 = Average 1 = Low Quality	Examples of Low Quality
EXAMPLE: <i>Do you shop at a good grocery store?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The grocery store is well-lit.</i> • <i>The produce looks fresh.</i> • <i>There are several employees walking around asking customers if they need help.</i> 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The grocery store is out of most items.</i> • <i>Only one of 10 check-out lines are open and serving customers.</i> • <i>Many products on the shelves are expired .</i>
School Culture			
1. Does this school have a warm and welcoming environment that makes all students, families and community members feel welcomed, respected and valued?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone greets you warmly when you enter. • There is student work displayed on the walls. • There are student pictures displayed around the school. • All school staff are friendly and make sure you are being helped. 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one is there to greet you when you enter. • The walls of the school are bare. • The school looks dirty. • School staff is unfriendly. • You find it difficult to get help.
2. Does this school set goals for its students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You see goals posted in classrooms or key areas of the school like the cafeteria or gym. 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You do not see goals posted anywhere in the school.
3. Can the principal, teachers and students describe their goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If asked what their goals are, a staff member or student might say something like, “To grow two years in reading level, 100 percent of students will become proficient or above on the DC CAS or for all students to earn 85 percent proficiency in all math standards.” 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You ask staff or students what their goals are and they don’t know what you’re talking about.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>4. Does this school teach students that determination and hard work are the keys to success not natural intelligence or talents?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are slogans posted around the school about hard work. • When asked, students might say something like, "I never used to think I could go to college, but I know I will if I continue to try hard in school." 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When asked, students might say something like, "It's okay that I get D's in math, because I wasn't born good at it, but I am good at reading."
<p>5. Does this school remove disruptions and distractions from the school environment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can be seen moving in an orderly fashion in their classrooms and throughout the halls. • Students are never seen outside of their classroom without permission. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are misbehaving. • Students are roaming the halls without permission. • Students are loud and out-of-control.
<p>6. Does the principal and teachers in this school appear to love learning, teaching and children?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principals and teachers are seen smiling and happy. • Principals and teachers are seen encouraging and praising students. • If asked about their job, teachers might say, "Some days are more difficult than others, but there is no other place I'd rather be." 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principals and teachers seem stressed and unhappy. • Principals and teachers are ignoring or disrespecting students. • If asked about their job, teachers might say, "Some kids are just never going to behave and learn, no matter how hard you try."
<p>7. Does this school reach out to its parents with letters, phone calls and home visits?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This school has a policy about how and when teachers should reach out to parents and families. • This school has a staff position that is dedicated to family or community outreach. • It is not unusual to see parents in the school. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This school does not make it easy for parents to visit. • The school does not require staff or teachers to reach out to parents and families.
<p>8. Does this school explain its mission and goals for students when they reach out to families?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff from the school make it a priority to talk to parents and families about what they hope to accomplish with the students of their school. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff from the school do not talk about their mission or goals.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>9. Does this school use school-wide routines, such as a way for students to ask questions, give answers, move between classes and turn in their work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are seen doing the same thing from classroom to classroom—raising their hand when they have a question, walking in an orderly fashion in between classes, following the same schedule daily, not shouting, turning their homework in to the same place every day and knowing where to get the day’s materials. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students do not always behave well and do not work in an organized fashion in some classes. Students do not follow consistent routines—they are seen roaming the halls, they shout out without raising their hands, they do not know what to do when they come into a classroom and these behaviors are accepted.
Curriculum and Data			
<p>10. Does this school use a rigorous, curriculum based on standards that will fully prepare a student for college and career?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This school uses a curriculum that puts students on the path to college and students leave each grade fully prepared for the next level all the way from preschool to college. Students are challenged by the material they’re being taught and are often learning material earlier than what is required. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students often leave a grade unprepared for the next grade. The school often teaches material that is below grade level.
<p>11. Does this school gather data from students on their academic progress throughout the year?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This school uses reading, writing and mathematical tests that diagnose which grade levels students are on, such as Terra Nova, Stanford-10 and IOWA. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This school does not give students diagnostic tests and it is unclear what grade level students are on.
<p>12. Does this school gather data from students on their academic progress throughout the year, using benchmark exams that show mastery on grade level content?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students take multiple benchmark exams in every subject to test their overall progress toward content mastery. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are not given benchmark tests throughout the year. Instead, students take one big test at the end of the year to test their content mastery.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>13. Does this school use the data gathered on academic progress to make decisions about what to teach, how much time to spend on certain subjects and when to re-teach certain concepts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When asked about how student data is used to make instructional decisions, a teacher might say something like, "I spent five weeks on fractions instead of two weeks like I planned because test results showed that students were really struggling to master them." 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When asked about how student data is used to make instructional decisions, a teacher might say something like, "Even though most of the class failed the test on how to use commas, we had to move on because there is so much material I have to cover."
<p>14. Does this school communicate with families about data and about how students are progressing academically—whether or not they have mastered content and are on grade level?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This school has a "data wall" posted somewhere in the school that shows student progress. This school has conferences with parents multiple times per year to discuss the child's academic grade level. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This school does not share data with parents. This school only talks to parents about their child's individual progress if a parent schedules a meeting.
School Operations			
<p>15. Is this school organized in such a way that every minute of the school day is used so that students are mastering academic content, participating in enrichment activities and teachers are getting time to work and participate in professional development?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students in this school take at least 90 minutes of both math and English every day. This school provides students with enrichment classes, such as foreign language, band, choir or art. This school provides teachers with a non-interrupted planning period every day. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students in this school often spend as much time in elective classes as core classes. This school does not have enrichment offerings such as foreign language, band, choir or art. Teachers at this school get planning periods on some days, but not all.
<p>16. Does this school organize the school calendar and daily bell schedule in such a way that provides students with an extended day or year for maximum learning time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school has an "extended day" that runs longer than seven hours per day. This school has an "extended year" in which students get extra learning time by having special summer sessions, Saturday school or year-round school. This school creates a calendar and daily bell schedule that is changed only if necessary. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This school is open the minimum hours necessary to comply with the law. This school creates a calendar and daily bell schedule that is changed frequently.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>17. Does this school provide struggling students with the extra help and supports they need?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When necessary, students are paired with a teacher’s aide. • There is a resource room for students who need it. • Students who are behind are given extra instructional time outside of regular school hours. • Students have extra time to complete assignments when necessary. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is never more than one teacher in each classroom. • Students who need help have nowhere to go. • Students who are struggling are expected to perform on the same level as their peers without any extra support.
<p>18. Does this school have proper social and emotional supports to help students reach their full potential?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This school has counselors, social workers and nurses that students can see free of charge. • This school partners with outside organizations, such as churches and the Boys & Girls Club, to provide wrap-around services. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no outside services provided to students. • If a student wants to talk to a counselor, social worker or nurse, a parent must find one outside of school and make an appointment.
<p>19. Does this school prioritize the budget to support academic goals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This school would spend money on new books before new athletic equipment. • This school purchases new technology because they know it will help students learn. • This school has current textbooks for every child. • This school has a nice library with many books for students to read. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This school would spend money on a new teacher’s lounge before fixing the broken air conditioning inside the school. • This school has either outdated technology or outdated textbooks. • This school does not have a library or has a library with few books.

SCHOOL VISIT CHECKLIST

Directions: As you are touring the school, ask yourself the following questions and circle either YES or NO.

EXAMPLE: Does this school have a mascot?

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| | <input checked="" type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 1. Does this school have a warm, welcoming and safe environment? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 2. Are the school facilities maintained properly and kept clean? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 3. Do you feel welcomed and respected? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 4. Is school staff friendly and helpful? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 5. Do the principal and teachers in the building appear to have good relationships with their students and with each other? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 6. Do the principal and teachers in the building seem enthusiastic about learning? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 7. Do the principal and teachers in the building seem enthusiastic about children? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 8. Is there student work displayed in the building? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 9. Is there data on student achievement displayed in the building? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 10. Are there posters, flyers or banners that promote college displayed in the building? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 11. Are the students in the school building on-task and focused on learning? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 12. Does it appear that time is used well and not wasted? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 13. Do the students appear to be respectful to one another and to the adults in the building? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 14. Do students transition between classes in an orderly way? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 15. Does the school schedule and bell schedule run smoothly? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 16. Do the teachers appear to follow a plan? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |
| 17. Do the students look engaged and excited to be at school? | <input type="radio"/> | YES | NO |

HIGH QUALITY PRINCIPALS

PARENT TOOL 3: Parent Observation Rubric—Principal Interview (p. 10-15)

Description:

This rubric assists parents in rating school principals to assess how principals manage the school environment to increase student achievement.

In this section, parents will evaluate a:

- Principal’s Beliefs..... p. 10
- Principal’s Staff Management.....p. 12
- Principal’s School Leadership.....p. 13

PARENT TOOL 4: Principal Interview Checklist (p. 16)

Description:

This is a checklist of questions for parents to use when they interview school principals.

PARENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC—PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality 3 = High Quality 2 = Average 1 = Low Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>EXAMPLE: <i>Is this person a good community leader?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This person frequently visits my town.</i> • <i>This person is honest and has integrity.</i> • <i>This person does a lot for my community.</i> • <i>I feel like this person fulfills the promises they've made to me as a leader.</i> 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This person is never seen anywhere in our ward.</i> • <i>This person acts differently depending on who he/she is talking to.</i> • <i>This person has forgotten about my community.</i> • <i>This person has never fulfilled the promises they made to me as a leader.</i>
Principal's Beliefs			
<p>1. Does this principal believe he/she is personally responsible for the academic growth of students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When asked about the academic growth of students, a principal might say, "Our students did not perform as well as we had hoped on the DC CAS math test last year, so this year I made sure to add extra time for math instruction and introduced afterschool math tutoring so that students are better prepared this year." 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When asked about the academic growth of students, a principal might say, "I know our reading scores on the DC CAS last year were not great, but there is only so much we can do when many students are coming to us behind grade level."
<p>2. Does this principal believe he/she is personally responsible for the professional development of teachers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When asked about the professional development of teachers, a principal might say, "Many of our teachers received excellent scores on the IMPACT teacher evaluation system last year; however, the scores showed the teachers weren't serving male students as well as they could. I provided my teachers with several expert-led workshops throughout the year on how to improve their instruction in teaching male students." 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When asked about the professional development of teachers, a principal might say, "My teachers always participate in the professional development that the system provides them."

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>3. Does this principal have a vision for the school that includes students achieving academically and leaving their school fully prepared for the next grade?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When asked about a vision, a principal might say something very specific like, “I expect all of my scholars to be fully prepared to meet and exceed all of their grade level expectations” or “I want my scholars to learn why education is so important and to commit to giving their all throughout their academic careers.” 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When asked about a vision, a principal might say something very general like, “I want my students to learn, grow and be safe.”
<p>4. Does this principal believe that achievement happens because of hard work instead of natural intelligence and talent?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When asked about what makes students achieve, a principal might say, “All of my students have the potential to graduate from high school and college because we have taught them that hard work is the key to success— not where you come from or what you’re born with.” 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When asked about what makes students achieve, a principal might say, “My students who come from good homes tend to do better in school. I have some really sweet students who try hard, but they are just never going to go to college—we’ll be happy if they just get a good job.”
<p>5. Does this principal believe that parents who are engaged in the education of their children will be more successful?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal works with school employees to host many events that engage parents, such as conferences, family game nights, family field trips and town hall meetings. This principal has a team of parents that are relied on for help, advice and feedback. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal only participates in family related events as required by the system, such as Parent-Teacher Conference Day.
<p>6. Does this principal believe he/she is personally responsible for the academic growth of students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal does not blame students, parents or teachers when test scores show students are behind. Instead, this principal asks him/herself what could be done to improve student achievement. This principal would be comfortable saying something like, “If my students don’t grow academically this year, then I’m not doing my job well.” 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If this principal’s students did not grow academically over a year, this principal would blame teachers or parents saying something like, “Well you can’t expect Johnny to do well—his father just died so he’s distracted and he had Mrs. Smith, who is about to retire and doesn’t care about teaching anymore.”

Principal's Staff Management

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>7. Does the principal of this school highly value identifying the best teachers possible, bringing them to work at the school and providing the support and development necessary for those teachers to succeed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal describes teachers as the greatest asset. This principal brings the best teachers to work at the school, picking teachers from great universities and excellent teacher preparation programs. This principal provides training for teachers that go beyond what the system provides. This principal begins hiring new teachers in the spring before a new school year. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal takes whatever teachers are available. This principal does not hire in the best interest of the students or the school. This principal does not provide additional professional development for teachers. This principal does not worry about hiring new teachers until the end of the summer.
<p>8. Does this principal have strong and respectful relationships with teachers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal can be seen positively interacting with teachers frequently. This principal can be seen having important conversations with teachers. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal spends most of the time in the office and does not interact with teachers unless necessary.
<p>9. Does this principal have high expectations for teachers and expect teachers to move their children forward by a minimum of one grade level per year?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal looks at the data from benchmark and end-of-year assessments to see which teachers are moving students forward. This principal problem solves with teachers who are not pushing students forward by at least one grade level per year. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal does not look at data throughout the year and only looks at end-of-year data as a school, not examining the data from individual teachers.
<p>10. Does this principal evaluate teachers to make sure teachers are moving their students forward academically?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal personally observes teachers beyond the minimum amount required. This principal always shares strengths, areas for growth and other feedback with teachers. This principal enjoys working with teachers to make sure students are growing and does not see observations or evaluations as a burden. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal observes teachers for the minimum amount required. This principal provides little to no feedback to teachers—neither positive nor negative. This principal considers observing and evaluating teachers a burden and considers it the teacher's job to make sure students are moving forward academically.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>11. Does this principal expect teachers to engage with parents?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal sets goals for the number of times teachers engage with parents whether it be during home visits, while parents are at school events, on the phone, with emails or letters home. This principal encourages teachers to share individual student progress with parents. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal expects teachers to engage with parents only during the mandated Parent-Teacher Conference or to call home when a student is misbehaving.
<p>12. Is the principal at this school surrounded with administrative leadership and staff that are competent and committed to the school's mission and goals?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal selects administrative and school staff with great care. This principal ensures that administrative and school staff believe in the same goals and want more than anything for students to achieve academically. This principal wants to be challenged by administrative and school staff input in the hopes of becoming a better principal. This principal wants administrative and school staff to have the opportunity to shine and grow professionally. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal takes whichever administrative and staff is available to work in the school. This principal does not put much time into the hiring process of administrative and school staff. This principal does not believe the administrative and school staff is talented or competent. This principal does not want to be challenged by administrative or school staff input and feels threatened by the knowledge and skills the staff possess.
<p>Principal's School Leadership</p>			
<p>13. Is this principal honest and realistic about the quality of the school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal knows when there is a problem at the school and does not shy away from tackling the problem. When the school is doing something well, this principal takes a great deal of pride in the school. This principal is honest about what needs to be improved in the school and works to make it happen. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal thinks the school is fine as it is and denies having any major issues. This principal does not have much pride in the school. This principal is resistant to criticism and feedback and does not want to make suggested changes or improvements.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>14. Is this principal aware of whether students are growing academically?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal is always aware of where students are academically and constantly talk with teachers about student progress. This principal looks at student work and student data whenever available to gauge student growth. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal trusts that students are moving forward academically and does not seek proof of that. This principal waits until data about the students comes out from DC CAS or end-of-course exams.
<p>15. Does this principal have high expectations for the behavior of students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No child would dare misbehave in front of this principal because they know this principal has high expectations for behavior. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children can be seen misbehaving in front of the principal because they know they will not get into trouble because the principal won't correct them.
<p>16. Does this principal enforce rules and consequences and maintain order in the school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal can be seen in the hallways or in classrooms of the school reminding students what proper behavior is, praising the students who are behaving well and correcting students who are not. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal is not seen in the hallways or classrooms. When faced with a student misbehaving, this principal does not confront the student.
<p>17. Is this principal accessible to parents, families and community members?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a parent, caregiver or community member calls, writes or comes to the school to talk with the principal, this principal becomes available or immediately follows up with the person they were unable to meet with. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a parent, caregiver or community member calls, writes or comes to the school to talk with the principal, this principal is never available, and despite leaving messages or notes, the principal never follows up.
<p>18. Does this principal initiate honest conversations with staff, students and parents no matter how challenging they might be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a problem arises, this principal will confront the situation and initiate a conversation with those involved. This principal is not afraid to make people uncomfortable or upset if it means that a challenging situation will become better for a child. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal does not confront problems or have conversations about problems unless directly addressed by someone else. This principal does not want to make anyone unhappy and will do whatever it takes to remain popular among adults.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>19. Does this principal understand and appreciate the diversity and individuality of the students and teachers in the building?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal knows that students and adults are different in many ways—gender, ethnicity, age, religion, background, etc., but treats all people with respect and is curious about each person’s differences. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This principal only associates with teachers and students who are similar. This principal seems uncomfortable being around people of dissimilar backgrounds. This principal does not appreciate or value the knowledge and experience different people bring.
<p>20. Is this principal a good listener?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When talking to this principal, you really get the sense that they are listening and fully understanding what you are talking to them about. When listening, this principal frequently nods, makes eye contact, asks questions or provides comments about what you’re talking about. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When talking to this principal, you feel like they are distracted, thinking about something else and not truly listening to you. When listening, this principal is looking elsewhere and doesn’t respond or ask you any questions.
<p>21. Is this principal a good communicator?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When this principal talks to you, you really understand what is being said and leave feeling confident of what the next steps are that you need to take. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When this principal talks to you, you are not sure what point is being made or what steps to take next.

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Directions: As you are talking with the principal, ask the following questions and write down his/her responses. Then as you think about those responses, write down your reactions and reflections.

QUESTIONS TO ASK	PRINCIPAL'S RESPONSE	YOUR REACTIONS
EXAMPLE: <i>What is your school's history?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We were founded in 2003.</i> • <i>We started with 200 sixth and seventh graders.</i> • <i>We expanded by one grade each year.</i> 	<i>Interesting. I thought they had been around longer. They have really grown a lot—that must be a good sign.</i>
1. What is your history with this school?		
2. What vision do you have for your school and students?		
3. Are at least 55 percent of your students proficient in both reading and math? Why or why not?		
4. Do you believe you are personally responsible for the academic growth of your students? Why or why not?		
5. What are your academic expectations of your students?		
6. What do you believe causes student achievement—hard work or natural intelligence?		
7. How do you keep track of how your students are doing academically throughout the year?		
8. What are your behavioral expectations for your students?		
9. How do you enforce rules?		
10. How do you reward good behavior?		
11. Do you believe you are personally responsible for the professional development of your teachers? If so, what sort of professional development do you provide? If not, why not?		
12. If you have a teacher vacancy, how would you recruit and hire the teacher to fill the vacancy?		
13. How do you evaluate your teachers and hold them accountable for student growth?		
14. How do you engage parents in their child's education and in the school?		
15. How often and in what manner are you available to talk to parents?		

HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS

PARENT TOOL 5: Parent Observation Rubric—Teachers and Classrooms (p. 17-23)

Description:

This rubric assists parents in rating school teachers to assess, in depth, how teachers manage the classroom environment to increase student achievement.

In this section, parents will evaluate a:

- Teacher’s Beliefs.....p. 17
- Teacher’s Practices.....p. 19
- Teacher’s Planning.....p. 20
- Teacher’s Classroom Leadership..... p. 22

PARENT TOOL 6: Teacher and Classroom Observation Checklist (p. 24)

Description:

This checklist is for parents to use when they observe teachers in classroom settings.

PARENT OBSERVATION RUBRIC—TEACHERS AND CLASSROOMS

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality 3 = High Quality 2 = Average 1 = Low Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>EXAMPLE: <i>Is this person a good doctor?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This doctor gives me full attention when I visit.</i> • <i>This doctor is thorough and makes me feel that I am listened to.</i> • <i>This doctor is well-educated and has all the necessary credentials.</i> • <i>This doctor came highly recommended from family members and friends.</i> • <i>I trust this doctor and believe she/he will do all that can be done to help me.</i> • <i>Every time I have had an illness, this doctor has pursued a course of action until I was better.</i> • <i>This doctor sets the standard for the office and ensures that it runs smoothly and is clean and welcoming.</i> 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This doctor does not give me full attention and seems distracted when I visit.</i> • <i>This doctor does not make me feel like I am listened to.</i> • <i>This doctor does not keep up with the latest medical knowledge and methods.</i> • <i>This doctor is not recommended.</i> • <i>I do not trust this doctor because I don't feel like he/she will do all that can be done to help me.</i> • <i>I have unresolved medical issues that this doctor has not fixed.</i> • <i>This doctor does not set a good tone in the office and staff seem unhappy.</i>
Teacher's Beliefs			
<p>1. Does this teacher take personal responsibility for the academic growth of students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This teacher believes that how much students are learning and achieving is a direct reflection of great teaching. • This teacher would be comfortable saying something like, "When the majority of my students were failing their test on long division, I knew I wasn't doing something right. I kept re-working my lessons on long division and saw that as I tried some new strategies, my students began to improve." 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This teacher believes that how much students are learning is mostly due to circumstances outside of school and what is taught to students is less important than the neighborhoods and families these students are coming from. • This teacher might say something like, "Some of my students are doing really well because they are easy to teach. The ones who aren't doing well aren't doing well because they don't want to."

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>2. Does this teacher believe that students will grow academically despite what challenging situations they may face outside of school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher believes that the family and/or neighborhood a child might come from does not dictate their intelligence or ability to achieve. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher believes that some children have the ability to achieve academically but because of challenges, like poverty or single-family homes, these children will probably never reach their full potential.
<p>3. Does this teacher believe that a quality education can change a person's life path?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher believes that the quality of education that students are receiving will directly impact how far those students will go in life. Knowing this, this teacher provides the students with the highest quality education, believing it will push the students toward college and excellent careers. This teacher might say something like, "You may not have been born in a neighborhood with a lot of opportunities, but if you keep learning and working hard, you will go to college, have many job options and the life you always dreamed of." 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher believes that no matter what sort of education certain children receive, they will still turn out a certain way. This teacher believes that the type of family and neighborhood that children come from are bigger predictors of their future life path than the quality of education those children receive. This teacher might say something like, "Susie was always going to do well in life, but even if you put Paula in the finest schools in the city, she'll never turn out to be anything."
<p>4. Does this teacher recognize and celebrate the diversity and individuality of students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher realizes that all of the differences in ethnicity, gender and beliefs will strengthen the classroom and help students to learn from one another. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher seems uncomfortable being around students of dissimilar backgrounds.
<p>5. Does this teacher believe that collaborating with the families of students makes a difference in the students' achievement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher knows the value that partnering with families provides students, and you can tell because this teacher is always reaching out to families with phone calls, emails, letters home and home visits. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher believes that certain parents will be involved in their children's education. This teacher also believes that other parents will never be involved no matter what efforts are made, so this teacher doesn't try.

Teacher's Practices

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>6. Does this teacher have a vision for the classroom?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If asked about a vision, this teacher could go on for hours about what to do for students and how what is done in the classroom will push students to achieve that vision. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher doesn't believe that the experience a child has in the classroom could be life-changing. Instead, this teacher believes that school is just another part of life.
<p>7. Can this teacher describe the goals set for the students and why such goals were chosen?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If asked about goals, this teacher would be able to tell you one to five specific goals for the students to achieve by the end of the year. This teacher could explain why the goals chosen for students are important for the students. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If asked about goals, this teacher would say something general like, "I want my kids to learn a lot this year and do well on the end-of-year test." This teacher could not explain why the goals chosen are important.
<p>8. Does this teacher's classroom look fun, positive, interesting and like a place where students want to be?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher's classroom has student work covering the walls. This teacher's classroom is full of objects and pictures students would find interesting. This teacher's classroom is lively. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher's classroom is bare. This teacher's classroom is empty and does not feel welcoming. This teacher's classroom is boring.
<p>9. Does this teacher believe that quality professional development makes for a better teacher?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher is constantly seeking ways to improve. This teacher attends many in-person and online professional development opportunities to learn from experts in the field. This teacher is not afraid to ask other teachers or administrators for help and advice. This teacher immediately applies what is learned in professional development to teaching. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher believes that professional development is a waste of time. This teacher believes that there are not many "new" things to be learned about the teaching profession. This teacher is defensive when receiving feedback of any kind. This teacher does not use what is learned in professional development.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>10. Does this teacher keep accurate records about the progress students are making?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher has a system for keeping records of students that might include an online database or physical file folders kept in the classroom. Since this teacher keeps accurate records about the progress students are making, it is clear to administrators, parents and students how students are doing in the class at any time. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher does not have a system for keeping records on students. Instead, some student work is graded and put in different areas and some student work is never graded or is lost. This teacher cannot answer questions about how students are doing if asked by an administrator, parent or student.
<p>11. Does this teacher share information with students and students' families about the progress toward the academic goals for the year?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher has a routine to keep students and families aware of their progress, such as weekly one-on-one conferences with students and weekly written reports that are sent home to parents. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher does not have a routine to keep students and their families aware of their progress. Students and families are often confused about how students are doing because the teacher doesn't regularly communicate with them.
<p>12. Is this teacher organized?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher's classroom is neat. Everything has a specific place and is labeled and color-coded. This teacher rarely loses anything. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher's classroom is messy and things are scattered and disorganized. This teacher often loses important information like student work or information from administrators or parents.
Teacher's Planning			
<p>13. Does this teacher create daily lesson plans, unit plans or a long-term plan?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If asked how this teacher knows what and when to teach students, this teacher would say that lessons are organized with a long-term plan that covers the whole school year, unit plans that cover major topics and daily lesson plans to guide each day's activities. If asked, this teacher would be able to show you daily lesson plans, unit plans and/or long-term plan. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If asked how this teacher knows what and when to teach students, this teacher would say something like, "I follow the textbook." If asked, this teacher would be able to show you a lesson plan or two—but they might not be for that day.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>14. Does this teacher have daily objectives planned for students and are they displayed somewhere in the classroom?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you walk into this teacher’s classroom, there is a numbered list of objectives (the day’s goals) posted somewhere in the room, such as a white board, chalk board or on a projector. The teacher is clearly following these objectives. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you walk into this teacher’s classroom, there are never objectives posted, or if there are, they might be outdated and not frequently updated or followed.
<p>15. Does this teacher begin each lesson with something that will grab students’ attention?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you were to watch the beginning of this teacher’s lesson, it might start by showing a photo, film, playing music, telling a story or asking a provocative question related to the lesson’s content to grab students’ attention and focus them on the lesson. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you were to watch the beginning of this teacher’s lesson, it would simply start by going directly into the lecture, note-taking or having students copy down vocabulary words.
<p>16. Does this teacher create a daily agenda for students and is it displayed somewhere in the classroom?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you walk into this teacher’s classroom, there is a numbered list of what the class will be doing that day somewhere in the room, such as a white board, chalk board or on a projector. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you walk into this teacher’s classroom, there is never an agenda posted, or if there is, it is outdated and rarely updated or followed.
<p>17. Does this teacher ask students tough questions that cause them to think critically?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you watch this teacher give a lesson, you will observe that students do the hard work of coming up with answers to tough questions instead of giving them the answers. This teacher will push a student who says “I don’t know” by asking the question in a different way. This teacher asks students follow-up questions after a student has given an answer. 	<p style="text-align: center;">3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher does not ask difficult questions and usually provides the answer if no students can answer the question. This teacher usually only calls on students who raise their hands. This teacher moves to the next student when someone says “I don’t know.” This teacher does not ask follow-up questions.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
<p>18. Does this teacher use content in lessons that students would find interesting and relatable to real life?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher uses examples that refer to pop culture—such as music, movies and TV shows that students are exposed to. This teacher uses examples that relate to the people and communities the students are a part of. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher uses the same examples year after year. This teacher is not interested in being in touch with what students enjoy and experience.
<p>19. Does this teacher allow time in the lessons to check if students understand the material?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whenever giving a lesson, this teacher frequently stops to ask students if they have any questions. Whenever giving a lesson, this teacher frequently stops and asks students questions that will show whether or not they understand the material. This teacher often gives homework and/or ends each class with some sort of quiz or activity that will demonstrate whether the students understood what they learned. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whenever giving a lesson, this teacher does not stop to ask students if they have any questions. If a student asks a question, the teacher might say something like “we have to move on.” This teacher rarely gives homework and does not provide an activity when class is over to see if students understood what they learned that day.
<p>20. Does this teacher use multiple teaching methods to help students with different learning styles?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher uses multiple methods and activities such as, individual work, group work, competitive activities, visual activities, hands-on activities, etc. Whenever you visit this teacher’s classroom, there is something new and different happening every day. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher only allows students to work one way—either individually or in groups. This teacher prefers one teaching method, and does not add creativity or variety to the classroom.
Teacher’s Classroom Leadership			
<p>21. Does this teacher have committed, personal, caring and respectful relationships with the students?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher can be seen interacting with students in a positive way and can be heard praising students and encouraging them and their talents. This teacher values the time had with students and puts students’ needs above everything else while in the classroom. 	<p>3 2 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher does not recognize nor appreciate the individual personalities within the classroom. This teacher does not seek to spend any more time with students than is necessary. This teacher can be seen and heard disrespecting the students.

Questions to Ask or Observe	Examples of High Quality	Rate the Quality	Examples of Low Quality
22. Does this teacher manage the classroom with confidence and not allow disruptions, distractions or misbehavior?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher has firm control over the classroom and students do not misbehave. All students in this classroom are on task. 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The students, not the teacher, have control over the classroom, and this teacher is reacting to students not leading them. Students are frequently seen misbehaving in this teacher's classroom.
23. Does this teacher have high expectations for students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher demands excellence from all of the students despite where they come from or what struggles they might have. This teacher does not accept excuses and expects the same from everyone. 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher believes that only some students will behave or do well academically, and that others are not capable.
24. Does this teacher enforce consequences for misbehavior?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher has a system in place for students who misbehave. The system starts with a warning and gradually moves up in severity if a child does not improve in behavior. 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher allows students to misbehave and students do not get into trouble for their behavior. This teacher is inconsistent when enforcing consequences.
25. Does this teacher reward good behavior?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher has a system in place for rewarding good behavior that starts with verbal praise and can include earning prizes such as candy or homework passes. 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher does not think students should earn anything for good behavior. This teacher rarely praises the students.
26. Does this teacher use class time effectively?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher has students working from bell to bell in order to get the most out of class time. 	3 2 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This teacher does not work from bell to bell and allows students to have lots of "free time." This teacher is often seen sitting at the desk or at the computer and not interacting with students. This teacher often shows unrelated movies instead of teaching.

TEACHER AND CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Directions: As you are observing a teacher teaching in a classroom, ask yourself the following questions and circle either YES or NO.

EXAMPLE: *Is this teacher hard to hear?*

YES

NO

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Does this teacher create a welcoming, positive and interesting environment in the classroom? | YES | NO |
| 2. Does this teacher seem to take personal responsibility for students? | YES | NO |
| 3. Does this teacher appear to have high expectations of students? | YES | NO |
| 4. Does this teacher manage the classroom in such a way that there is little to no misbehavior? | YES | NO |
| 5. Does this teacher correct misbehavior from students and enforce consequences if misbehavior happens? | YES | NO |
| 6. Does this teacher praise students when they do well? | YES | NO |
| 7. Does this teacher talk about goals with students? | YES | NO |
| 8. Does this teacher encourage students and lead them to believe in themselves? | YES | NO |
| 9. Does this teacher have an agenda and objectives for the day posted in the classroom? | YES | NO |
| 10. Does this teacher appear to be following a plan? | YES | NO |
| 11. Does this teacher appear to be organized? | YES | NO |
| 12. Does this teacher seem to be taking the time to check whether students understand what is being taught? | YES | NO |
| 13. Does this teacher ask challenging questions and push the students to discover the answers on their own? | YES | NO |
| 14. Does this teacher waste time in class? | YES | NO |
| 15. Does this teacher find a way to relate what is being taught to real life? | YES | NO |
| 16. Does this teacher use examples that are interesting and relevant to students? | YES | NO |
| 17. Does this teacher use multiple creative tactics when teaching? | YES | NO |

PARENT NOTES

NOTES ON HIGH QUALITY SCHOOLS: _____

NOTES ON HIGH QUALITY PRINCIPALS: _____

NOTES ON HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS: _____



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