

A Brief Overview of Instructional Rounds

The basic premise of Instructional Rounds is that people best learn about the meaning of high quality instruction by observing teachers, students, and the work students are asked to do, followed by meaningful conversation and analysis. Specific protocols focus the conversation on the link between instruction and learning. The process is thoughtfully designed to avoid talk of “good” or “poor” teachers. Considerable time is spent observing the students. The focus is always about “What is going on in a classroom that is causing the students to be highly engaged in challenging work?” and “How is it different from classrooms where learning is not happening?”

Team Members

Instructional Rounds can function with a variety of different groups. Some Rounds teams are formed by only superintendents who visit each other’s districts. Some Rounds teams are made up of principals in a single district who visit each other’s schools. Still other teams are a mix of administrators and teachers who visit schools within a given feeder pattern (this would be all the schools in a single high school district). In Columbus, we have worked with our teachers’ association to implement the later version.

The Process

Groups of 3-5 people observe 4 classrooms for about 30 minutes each. Generally, the staff of the building being visited has identified a specific issue that they want the observers to focus on. After the observations, the observers comb their notes for important observations and write them on sticky-notes. These notes are later shared in their group and patterns are discerned from the observational data. The groups share their findings with the entire visiting team. The team formulates reflective questions for the building staff that recognize what they have accomplished, but also push them to think about how to move to the next level.

The Benefits

Educators rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to observe and reflect on classroom teaching and learning. This process provides teachers with the time to really analyze what works and understand why. It likewise provides administrators with insights into what they need to do to support high quality teaching and learning. It brings the concept of a professional practice to education.