Classroom Observation Tools Guidance

DESE Instructional Planning and Observation Tools Collection | Pilot Version School Year 2024-2025

The Classroom Observation Tools were developed to support continuous teaching and learning improvements of evidence-based practices that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically sustaining, to advance the student goals of the DESE Educational Vision.

As a result of their public education in Massachusetts, students will:	What it looks like in a classroom:
• Attain academic knowledge and skills. • Understand and value themselves and others. • Engage with the world	• All students are known and valued. • Learning experiences are relevant, real world, and interactive. • Individualized supports enable students to excel at grade level and beyond.

Tool Purposes

Observation tools are intended to support effective teacher and administrator practices and routines that promote educational equity through deeper learning for all students. Some of these effective educator practices include regular observation, reflection, and feedback; targeted, aligned, and on-going professional development (PD) and learning (PL); and coaching.

As such, use of observations tools can serve and support a variety of learning and growth-oriented instructional purposes:

- Building a common understanding, language, and shared vision of effective teaching and deeper learning
- Fostering educator reflection towards a common vision of effective instruction
- Planning and supporting coaching conversations (e.g., effective practice, goal setting, feedback, etc.)
- Setting and defining team (district, school, content, grade-level, etc.) structures, priorities, and goals.

  For example, during professional learning or collaborative planning time:

  - Teacher teams might discuss teacher actions that foster a specific student action, grounded in effective practices.
  - Coaching teams might establish common strategies that center students and equity for coaching foci.
  - Administrator teams might calibrate on effective instruction look-fors and develop shared language to describe growth.
  - District teams might establish shared, measurable goals for school-based administrators, such as participation in a certain number of walkthroughs across all classrooms within a specific time period, with focus on practices/indicators aligned to "Teaching All Students" or other instructional priorities or initiatives within the district.

- Instructional walkthroughs to surface trends across schools and classrooms to inform school/district strategic actions or goals
- Assessing and monitoring progress aligned to school or district improvement instructional goals
- Analyzing data to inform strategic school and district actions to strengthen systems, structures, processes, or practices that promote instructional equity and coherence (*Related Resource*: Coherence Guidebook)

Role Considerations

An individual educator's role when participating in a classroom observation often informs their instructional lens, purpose, goals, and specific before, during, and after classroom observation actions. Below are suggested considerations for primary purposes and goals based on participant roles.

Colleague	Coach	School-Based Administrator	District Administrator
Support your own professional development through collaboration, calibration, and reflection.	Support teacher development and growth in implementing evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically sustaining practices that foster belonging and promote equity for all students. Inform school-based administrator actions towards improving student learning experiences, academic achievement, and outcome goals.	Develop understanding of teaching and learning in your school to support teachers and instructional leaders (e.g., coaches, teacher-leaders, department heads), continuous improvement, and equity for all students.	Gain insight into the instructional systems, structures, processes, and practices that inform the district-wide and school-based culture of teaching and learning. Inform system-wide monitoring and strategic decision-making of student, teacher, and school administrator supports and resources necessary to make progress towards realizing the equity-centered district vision and goals.

Tool Types

The following observation tools have been developed to provide educators options based on their classroom observation focus:

Content-Agnostic Classroom Observation Tool with Content Specific Addendum

Early Literacy (PreK-3) Observation and Feedback Tool

Multilingual Learner Look-For Tool

These tools can be used for observations of individual or multiple classrooms/schools as part of instructional walkthroughs. Look-fors provided are illustrative and do not serve as a checklist; they are also not exhaustive. (*Related Resource*: Instructional Walkthrough Guidance; Instructional Walkthrough Debrief Protocol)

Content-Agnostic Classroom Observation Tool

Get the Tool
Content-Agnostic Classroom Observation Tool

Guiding Question
To what extent are all students experiencing evidence-based, inclusive, and culturally & linguistically sustaining instruction that promotes equity and deeper learning?

- Includes effective instructional practices that support student learning and growth, **observable** in every lesson and **every day** across content areas.
- An addendum is included that provides look-fors that are specific to these content areas/disciplines or educational programs: Arts, Comprehensive Health and Physical Education, Career Connected Learning/Pathways, Digital Literacy and Computer, Health and Social Science, Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering, World Languages.
- Content-specific questions included with the addendum supports observers to contextualize the observed lesson within the larger arc of learning and goals of the unit, project, or performance the lesson is advancing.
- Please reference the What to Look for Observation Guides for the specific content knowledge and skills students should be developing at each grade level.

Early Literacy (PreK-3) Observation and Feedback Tool

Get the Tool
Early Literacy Observation and Feedback Tool – *coming soon*

Guiding Questions
What is the evidence-based systematic scope, sequence, and approach to early literacy development in which the **foundational skills** instruction is rooted? In the observed lesson, how is explicit instruction and active practice of the foundational skill supporting students to develop language and literacy, and promoting fluent word reading and language comprehension?

- Helps observers identify and provide feedback on evidence-based and culturally and linguistically sustaining early literacy instructional practices during the core literacy block. (See Mass Literacy and the Massachusetts English Language Arts and Literacy Curriculum Framework)

Multilingual Learning (ML) Look-For Tool

Get the Tool
Multilingual Learning (ML) Look-For Tool

Guiding Question
To what extent are MLs experiencing rich, content-embedded, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction that supports their engagement with grade-level work and promotes deeper learning and language development, across program models and instructional settings?
To what extent is the MA Vision & Blueprint for English Learner Success evident in classroom practice?

- Best used for observations that aim to understand the extent to which multilingual learners, specifically, are supported in classrooms across English Learner Education (ELE) contexts (e.g., English as a Second Language [ESL], Sheltered English Immersion [SEI], Dual Language [DL], etc.)
- Can also help determine the extent to which MLs are in learning environments that affirm and value their cultural and linguistic assets. (*Related Resources*: Massachusetts Vision & Blueprint for English Learning Success, Next Generation ESL Toolkit)