

12. Building a Case/Gathering Information

- a. General Questions for a School Observation
- b. CLC Tip Sheet: Questions to Ask on a School Observation
- c. Sample School Observation Memo by CLC Investigator
- d. Addendum to the Classroom Observer Confidentiality Agreement

General Questions for a Classroom Observation

Observation:

Classroom:

1. Where is _____'s classroom located?
2. How many students are in _____'s class?
3. How many boys/girls are in his/her class?
4. How many teachers/teacher's assistants, etc.?
5. For high school, is the teacher certified in the subject area? Special education (if relevant)?
6. What is the classroom like? (big or small? Well decorated? Lots of materials? How are the desks arranged?)
7. Is the counselor/special education teacher in the classroom? How often/for how long?

Particular lesson

1. What is the class working on? What is the lesson?
2. What is _____ working on?
3. Is _____ engaged in the lesson?
4. Does (s)he require a lot of redirection from his/her teacher?
5. How does (s)he respond to the redirection?
6. Is (s)he being given any individual attention by his/her teacher?
7. Is (s)he able to complete the assignments? Is s(he) doing the work correctly?
8. What does (s)he do if (s)he is unable to complete the assignment?
9. How does the teacher/staff respond?
10. Does she raise her hand? If so, is she called on?
11. How does (s)he compare to his/her peers academically? (does child seem to be keeping up with lesson? Is (s)he paying more/less attention than other kids?)
12. Does _____ do the class work independently or with help?

Behavior

1. How is (s)he interacting with his/her peers? In what manner?
2. How does (s)he compare to his/her peers socially?
3. Does (s)he appear to have any friends?
4. Is (s)he staying seated? Wandering around the classroom? Leaving the classroom?
5. How frequently is (s)he out of her seat?
6. Is this disruptive to the class or is it ok?
7. Any behavioral problems (refusing to do work, using profanity, destroying school property, sexually inappropriate behavior, fighting with peers, running outside of the classroom, etc.)
 1. If so, how does the teacher/staff handle it when it happens?
 2. How does the student respond?

3. How long does it take the student to calm down/deescalate/regain focus?
4. How often does the behavior happen?
8. How does _____ handle transitions when leaving the classroom (to go to specials, lunch, etc)? Does (s)he require a lot of individual attention to do what she is supposed to do?
9. Does _____ require any de-escalation from her/his counselor? Why? How many times?
10. Did _____ need to be removed from the classroom at any point? Why? How many times? How long was (s)he out of the classroom?
11. Any behavior system in the class (i.e.,: a token economy? Point system? Behavior charts?)
12. Does the child have any suspensions (in-school or out of school)? Why?
13. Does the teacher call home at all? How often? Why?

Teacher Interview

Program/School structure:

1. What is _____ 's schedule?
2. How many teachers does (s)he have?
3. What types of teachers/staff?
4. What types of classes/programs does _____ have access to?

Academic Progress

1. How is _____ doing?
2. What is his/her best subject? What is his/her most challenging subject?
3. How has (s)he been doing academically this year?
4. How does (s)he compare to his/her peers in the class? (ex.: is (s)he in the lowest reading/math group, does (s)he require more individual attention than peers, grade comparison, etc.)
5. Is the child making progress? What subjects?
 1. How do they know?
 2. Have they done any informal assessments (Fontas and Pinell, Dibels etc?)
If so, can you have a copy of it? Do you feel that these informal assessments accurately reflect the child's academic level (ex: was the child distracted during testing?)
 3. DC BAS given? Has the child improved?
 4. Can you have samples of class work?
6. What strategies are you, other teachers, etc using to help _____ ?
7. How often do you have to be with him/her one on one?
8. If in special education, do you have a copy of the IEP?
9. Does the child get pulled out for special education? If so, do you know when the child gets pulled out?
10. If in special education, do you think (s)he would benefit from any additional services? What?
 - a. inclusion services?
 - b. Pull out services?
 - c. Dedicated aide?
 - d. Counseling/behavior support?
 - e. Speech language?

Behavior

11. How is (s)he interacting with his/her peers?
12. How has his/her behavior been?
13. How often is (s)he having the behavioral problems you described previously? (fighting with peers, temper tantrums on the floor requiring the use of physical restraint, sexually inappropriate behavior, profanity, running outside of the classroom, etc.)
14. What seems to cause _____'s behavioral problems?
15. What changes have you seen in _____ since last school year behavior wise? Does his/her behavior change more/less rapidly? Is it harder/easier to get him to do things he does not want to? Is (s)he more/less physically aggressive?
16. Do you see any growth in maturity in _____? In which areas?
17. What interventions are you trying? Any new ones since last year?
18. How does (s)he respond to transitions throughout the school day?
19. What is his/her most difficult time of day?
20. Do you believe there is an environment that would better meet his/her learning and behavioral needs?
21. Any different when special ed teacher is there?
22. Do you think (s)he would benefit from an aide?

CLC Tip Sheet

Questions to Ask on School Visits

You may want to edit this list depending on the type of school and the child's needs

These apply to schools you're considering and will also help you get to know the school the child is currently attending:

- ➔ How many students are in the child's classroom? Number of boys/girls?
- ➔ How many adults are in the classroom? What are their roles (*e.g.*, teacher, aide, or clinician)? What are they certified/trained in? For high school students, is the teacher certified in the subject area he/she is teaching? Special education certification?
- ➔ How are the children at the school grouped (*e.g.*, disability classification, age, ability level)?
- ➔ Are there times of the day (*e.g.*, lunch or recess) where children from different groupings mix?
- ➔ How are related services (*e.g.*, speech/language, physical therapy, occupational therapy, or counseling) offered? Are there full-time employees to provide those services or do the providers float between different schools? How often are they at the school? What are they trained/certified in? How are services provided (*e.g.*, pull-out, integrated in classroom)?
- ➔ How does the school implement behavior interventions (*e.g.*, a point system, token economy, a time-out room)?
- ➔ Does the school provide free breakfast and lunch? (Many private schools don't, which means you'll need to discuss with the child's social worker and caretaker how to make sure he has enough money for meals.)
- ➔ For high schools, does the school provide a diploma-track or a certificate-track? What percentage of the student body is on each track?
- ➔ Ask other questions that are important to the child, for example:
 - Does the school offer the extracurricular activities the child enjoys?
 - Do the students have to wear uniforms?

Additional questions to ask at a school the child is currently attending:

- How many hours of specialized instruction is the child receiving? Who provides it? In what setting are the services provided (e.g., self-contained classroom, pull-out, inclusion)? Does the child have a dedicated aide? If yes, why?
- If the child is in a self-contained classroom, is the child ever integrated with regular education students (e.g., at lunch or recess)?
- What related services does the child receive (e.g., counseling, speech and language, physical therapy, or occupational therapy)? When do those occur during the week? What is the provider's name and qualifications? Where are those services provided (e.g., outside or inside the classroom)? Get service trackers to see what the child has been working on, and to make sure that s/he is actually receiving the required services.
- For high schools, if the child is on the diploma track, how many Carnegie units has s/he earned? How many more does s/he need to graduate? Is the child in the correct classes?
- Update on students' progress: What are the child's strengths and weaknesses, academically and behaviorally? What is s/he working on at school right now? Get work samples. Is the child making progress in each of his/her academic subjects? How does his/her progress compare to other students in the class? Have any recent evaluations or assessments (formal or informal) been done? If yes, get copies. What areas need improvement? What is the school's plan to help the child? If there is a behavior system in the class (e.g., token economy, point system, or behavior charts), how does the child do with that?
- Special education and other school records: Do you have up-to-date records? Be sure that you have a copy of the child's current IEP. Also request comprehensive school records (e.g., attendance, report cards, IEP progress reports, meeting notes, prior IEPs, assessments, and evaluations, and disciplinary records).
- Discipline/suspensions/behavior: Does the child have any suspensions (in-school or out-of-school)? Why? What interventions have been tried with the student? What was the result? Get copies of discipline records.
- Relationships with peers/social interaction: How does the student interact with his/her peers? Any concerns?

Memorandum

To: Kathy Zeisel
From: CLC Investigator
Date: July 23, 2009
Re: School Observation of Sean Smith Jr.: Discussion with Mr. Hughes and Dr. Mosely

On Wednesday, July 22, 2009, I visited the Hamilton Center to do a classroom observation of Sean Smith Jr. As previously discussed with Dr. Mosely, I faxed a letter to the school stating my purpose and intentions of doing a classroom visit, what day, and what time I would be going to the school. When I had arrived at the school I learned Sean had not attended school that day, Wednesday, as well as on the previous Monday. I later learned through Mr. Hughes, Sean's teacher, that Sean told him and the class that he was not coming back to school because his summer camp starts this week. Dr. Mosely told me that Ms. Smith had not called the school to say Sean was not coming back to school; in fact Ms. Smith has not called Hamilton Center once since Sean has been enrolled and attending. According to Dr. Mosely though, Ms. Smith is being kept abreast, as there is a daily behavior sheet that is sent home to the parents alerting them to their child's behavior at school. If Sean was not bringing this back signed, Dr. Mosely would have called home to see the parent was receiving the behavior chart.

According to both Dr. Mosely and Mr. Hughes, Sean's behavior has been very good since attending summer session at the Hamilton Center, and there are no significant negative behaviors that stand out. There was only one week where Sean did not receive a 49-50 (the point system is out of 50/week; 10/day), and on that day he had a minor "meltdown". Mr. Hughes said Sean just shut down when asked to do his work, and became verbally aggressive. Mr. Hughes said it was not severe and he handled the crisis by having Sean stand in the corner to cool down. He said Sean appears to respond well to authority and when Mr. Hughes asks Sean to sit down, he normally will sit down. Also, Dr. Mosely says because it is the summer, she often brings in many rewards for the students and Sean seems to respond well to the reward system and positive reinforcement.

Dr. Mosely said she has not seen any of Sean's behaviors that were previously discussed at the meeting prior to his summer school enrollment. She understands this may be a transition period and Sean still testing his boundaries, but he has not tried to run and has not been violent in any way. According to Mr. Hughes, Sean makes idle threats, but never acts on them. He does swear and is verbal, as well as gets in people's faces, but never acts out the violence and is typically easy to control and calm down. Mr. Hughes' one concern is that Sean often comes to class with a stomach ache. When he asks Sean if he ate breakfast Sean typically says no and also will not eat the breakfast they find at school for him. The first week of school Sean was having bus issues, but seems to be attending school regularly and on time since then.

There are five students in Sean's class and for the most part, all of the kids have similar behaviors and appear to be getting along well with one another (Dr. Mosely said she may keep these students as a class for the fall). There is one student who has a dedicated aid because of his behavior, but Dr.

Mosely thinks the other four students have been “calming” him down. There is one teacher, Mr. Hughes, and 2 instructional aids (Ms. Seans). Ms. Roberson is the behavior technician (and Dr. Mosely said is also the social worker) and is in the classroom “all the time”; it appears she is in the class on Friday for group therapy and maybe one other day. Sean typically receives pull out therapy on Wednesdays, but he missed his session today because he was not at school. If Ms. Roberson has time she will make up the session. The class is classified by grade, and by age, but most of the students are about 12-13years old. They are grouped with similar IEP goals and academic level. Over the summer the class is mostly working on their specific IEP goals rather than DCPS standards.

Academically Sean seems to be doing well. He receives mostly 80-90’s on his class work. In math they are working on graphing coordinates and simplifying fractions which is on the 4th grade level. Math seems to be more difficult for Sean than reading. Mr. Hughes reports Sean is doing excellent in reading. While he is not near grade level yet, if he keeps working on it with the support he is receiving, he can be close to grade level by next year. Overall, Sean was reported to be a good student with minimum emotional outbursts and limited negative behaviors.

ADDENDUM TO THE CLASSROOM OBSERVER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I am conducting an independent educational evaluation of [CHILD'S FULL NAME] to assist with the provision of special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). I understand that the attached Confidentiality Agreement is not intended to interfere with the rights afforded by the IDEIA to children with disabilities or their parents.

To the extent required under the IDEA, as soon as possible upon completion of my observation and report, I agree to provide said report of any recommendations or observations I made regarding the above-referenced student and the student's classroom/school environment to the District of Columbia Public Schools.

Jennifer Engle-Fisher
Weinfeld Education Group

Date