

Focus On Learning

How to Read a School Self-study Report and Draft a Tentative Narrative VC Report

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One of the most important tasks when preparing to visit a school that has completed its self-study report is to read the school's self-study and draft a tentative narrative for the sections you have been assigned to by your Visiting Committee Chairperson. This guide will help you complete this task efficiently and in an organized manner.

There are three phases in writing a tentative narrative draft for the sections you are assigned to:

1. Read the school's self-study and take careful notes as you read the report.
2. Transfer your notes to the "Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets" in the appropriate sections.
3. Write your tentative narrative draft from the "Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets".

Reading the School Self-Study and Taking Notes

As you read the school's self-study report, you should focus primarily in four areas. First, you should note the potential positive findings in the report or what might be considered as areas of strength. Secondly, you should note those findings that may suggest areas for growth or key issues for follow-up. Thirdly, note any statements in the school's report that are either unclear or need clarification when you arrive at the school. Lastly, note findings that may be potential areas of strength or areas for growth but there is no evidence to support the findings.

Develop a short-hand system that will help you take notes in the margins of the school's self-study as you read the report. The following example will cover the four areas described above:

- “ + ” indicates a potential area of strength or a positive finding that is supported by cited evidence
- “ - “ indicates a potential area for growth or a finding that may be a key issue for follow up. There is evidence cited to support the finding.
- “ ? ” indicates a statement or finding that is unclear and will require clarification when you visit the school by way of a question to be asked of an appropriate individual or group at the school.
- “ √ ” indicates that there is a statement or finding that may be an area of strength or an area for growth or key issue for follow up but there is no evidence cited to support the statement or finding.

There may be statements or findings that clearly indicate an area of strength or area for growth or key issue for follow up but there is a need for clarification (question) or there is a need to verify the statement by checking for evidence when you arrive at the school. In those

instances, you would use a combination of the above symbols in the margin next to the text. These symbols might look as follows:

- “ + √ “ indicates a potential area of strength or a positive finding but there is a need to check for evidence after arriving at the school
- “ + ? “ indicates a potential area of strength or a positive finding but there is a need to seek clarification after arriving at the school.
- “ - √ “ indicates a potential area for growth or a key issue for follow up but there is a need to check for evidence after arriving at the school
- “ - ? ” indicates an area for growth or a key issue for follow up but there is a need to seek clarification after arriving at the school.

As you read the school's self-study and make the above notations in the margins of the report, try to be inclusive as opposed to exclusive. In other words, error on the side of making more notations than less. It is far easier as you refine the draft of the sections to which you are assigned to delete unsupported statements or findings that are not validated than it is to add statements. Of course, you will, in all likelihood, add additional statements and findings as you visit the school and finalize your sections of the Visiting Committee's report.

Remember that all findings are not necessarily significant. The significance of a statement or finding may not be verified until you actually visit the school, interview committees, observe in classrooms and examine other data and evidence.

Transferring your notes to the “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets”

After you complete reading the school's self-study, focus only on the text in the school's self-study where you have made a notation in the margin of their report. Transfer the text to the appropriate sections of the “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets”. [Note: It is helpful if the school can e-mail you a copy of their report, or at least, those sections you are assigned to. You can then “cut and paste” the noted text and not have to re-type. Ask your chairperson to make the request of the school to send an electronic version of the report to you.]

Write the questions to be asked after you arrive at the school for each section of the “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets”, as well as, the evidence to be examined when you arrive at the school.

Writing the tentative narrative drafts from the “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets”.

Once you have transferred the noted text from the school's self-study to the “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets”, you are ready to write your tentative narrative draft. For the sections assigned to you, write the drafts by re-framing or paraphrasing what the school has indicated in its report. If there are questions to be asked during the visit or evidence to be examined, you can note it in brackets as you write the draft.

Example: “The school has implemented a number of intervention programs and strategies designed to close the achievement gap between Hispanic and White students [*Question: ask at focus group meeting, what programs and strategies have been implemented*]”

For sections of the report that you are not assigned to develop a tentative narrative draft, save the “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets” and give the appropriate sections to members of your Visiting Committee who are assigned those sections. They will particularly appreciate the questions and evidence that you have noted need to be followed up on during the actual visit to the school

Summary

When writing your tentative narrative draft, develop a short hand system that will allow you to note what may be significant statements or findings in the school’s self-study report. Transfer the text from the school’s self-study report to the appropriate sections of the “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets”. Write a draft of your assigned section(s) of the Visiting Committee report using the text transferred to your “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets”. Share your other notes from your “Pre-visit Preparation Worksheets” with your colleagues on the Visiting Committee.

By following the suggestions in this paper, writing a tentative narrative draft of the Visiting Committee report will be an easier task. It will prepare you and your fellow Visiting Committee members for a rewarding and positive school visit experience and benefit the school from a Visiting Committee report that will add value to their school improvement efforts.

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