

## Instructional Rounds: Questions and Answers

**Q: Why are superintendents doing Instructional Rounds?**

A: A shared understanding of highly effective, rigorous instruction is essential if *all* students, regardless of subgroup, are to make gains in achievement. Decades of educational research have clearly identified the quality of classroom instruction as the single most important factor in student achievement. More recent research has identified the quality of leadership as a critical factor in improving student learning. We need a deep, shared understanding of what constitutes high-quality instruction that is consistent across all classrooms. By participating in Rounds, superintendents continually refine this understanding. The Network comes to understand rigor, higher-order thinking, student engagement, and relevancy and distinguishes genuine high-quality instruction from “busy work.” Consequently, Network members can be instrumental in making high quality instruction the standard in their districts.

**Q: How many people are involved in the Rounds visit?**

A: This will vary among Networks, whose membership ranges from about eight to twenty superintendents. Regardless of the overall size of the Network, no more than six people will visit any single classroom at one time (usually it is three to five people).

**Q: Will every classroom be visited?**

A: This will depend on school and Network size. A typical Rounds process will involve multiple visits to most of the regular classrooms in the building. Teams of three to five people visit at the same time for about 20 minutes. Classrooms are visited two to four times each by such teams.

**Q: What will I need to do in preparation for an Instructional Rounds visit to my classroom?**

A: No special preparation is necessary. It would be thoughtful to provide four or five chairs or desks for the visitors, as well as copies of any handouts or assignments the class is doing during the visit. You do not need to explain what has happened before or what you have planned after the visit. Prior to the visit you may wish to explain to students what will be happening; this is up to you and your classroom norms.

**Q: Can I opt out?**

A: No. The days of isolated instruction, in which the teachers can close the door to outsiders and work independently, are gone. Transparency of teaching and collaboration are crucial to dramatic improvements in student achievement.

**Q: How does the Network create an environment that respects the safety of teachers and principals?**

A: The primary purpose of Rounds is the professional development of the visiting Network members. Its business is not to judge the effectiveness of teachers, but to differentiate the *practices* that engage, challenge, and result in student learning from those that are less effective. The visiting team members are essentially learners themselves. This is not an evaluative group out to get anyone. The Network’s focus is developing a deep understanding of *what is working for students*. Who is doing what is not part of the discussion. As an observational exercise, Rounds discussions omit judgmental information about individual teachers. Network members hold each other accountable for: focusing on the evidence; not making judgmental statements; and, shining the observational light on *teaching practice*, not individual teachers.



Q: What are the norms the Network uses?

A: While many of the norms pertain to the internal functioning of the Network such as “attend all sessions” and “allow everyone in the group to share their data,” the group also has a strict confidentiality norm that no one discusses any specific observations with anyone outside the Network meeting. In addition, no classroom is ever referenced by teacher name or room number during the internal discussions. General results, feedback, and recommendations for the building are shared with the building’s leadership, but no individual classrooms or teachers are ever discussed in these consultations.

Q: Will any member of the Network share individual feedback with my principal?

A: No. This is a violation of the norms of the group. The group understands that this would be a violation of the trust of the schools being visited and would seriously damage the group’s credibility

Q: I understand that visitors take notes; this sounds like evaluation. How can I be assured that I am not being personally evaluated by this group?

A: Network members take notes to collect evidence on the state of teaching practice in the building. This is necessary to ensure that conclusions and recommendations are based on specific evidence and not just feelings or opinions. Before any evidence is shared with the entire Rounds group, individual pieces of evidence from the observed lessons are transferred to dozens of sticky notes, which are attached to chart paper as supporting evidence for a given general observation or pattern. There is no reference to the grade level, room number, or teacher on the notes. The evidence from many classes is gathered together on the chart paper, which makes it impossible to assign a specific observation to an individual teacher.

Q: Why do superintendents participate in Networks?

A: Superintendents benefit from collaborative learning, just as all educators do. It can be difficult for superintendents to dedicate time to instruction; Networks give them concentrated time and a team with which to focus on this critical element of school leadership. If your superintendent is participating in a Network, you can be confident that s/he values the work you are doing every day in the classroom.

### An Instructional Rounds Network ...

Is	Is Not
A learning community	Learning in isolation
A method to examine the system	A method to evaluate teachers and principals
A method to analyze student learning and student tasks	An instructional audit to determine if teachers are engaging in a specific practice
An in-depth analysis of the instructional core observed in classrooms	A “walkthrough”
A process	A program
A way for network members to objectively describe teaching and learning	A way for network members to learn supervision skills
Developing, through shared experiences in real classrooms, a common understanding of effective teaching practice and how to support it	Reading about or listening to someone describe effective teaching practice and how to support it
Collaboration to create coherence around instructional improvement at scale	Working alone to “figure it out” for one’s own system

Adapted, in part, from: *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* by Elizabeth City, Richard Elmore, Sarah Fiarman, and Lee Teitel, 2009.

