Best Practices for Implementing TEAM Processes in a Distance Learning Environment
Pre-Conferences, Observations, and Post-Conferences

In spring 2020, teachers across our nation moved from traditional classroom settings to distance instruction in a matter of days. As teachers made necessary shifts to their instructional practices, leaders were required to make a similar shift in the support provided through feedback and coaching. Because observers must apply the TEAM model with fidelity and provide educators with meaningful feedback in unique situations, the following document is designed to support teachers and leaders through distance learning observation and coaching sessions. It is intended to support observation practices already in use, with a specific focus on supporting teachers as they develop and deliver distance learning. As always, supporting and coaching teacher practice is the foundation of observation and should be the focus of every instructional support conversation.

Guiding Principles for Observers

- Positive relationships with teachers and students continue to be a priority.
- Distance observations should be planned after both the teacher and students have had ample opportunity to develop relationships through the distance learning environment. The same consideration should be applied if, at any point, there is a transition between types of instruction (from in-person to virtual or the reverse).
- The TEAM rubric is applicable in distance learning environments.
- Pre-conferences are fundamental to sharing insight into the implementation of instructional practices.
- The process of observation and evidence collection may take place in multiple platforms and over several days.
- Post-conferences remain key to coaching and subsequent strengthening of teacher practice.

The suggestions below are considered supplementary to the practices already in use for traditional instruction.

I.   Pre-Conference

When conducting an announced distance learning observation, the required pre-conference conversation is essential to gaining insight into lesson implementation. With the change in mode of content delivery, understanding how the educator is navigating the distance learning platform(s) and planning to meet the needs of each student is key. The pre-conference provides the observer the opportunity to understand the challenges the teacher is facing while implementing distance learning.

Observers should consider the following when scheduling and planning for a pre-conference:
- Ask for the lesson plan prior to the pre-conference and spend time reviewing the plan and developing strong coaching questions. Focus some questions on the issues unique to distance learning.
- When reviewing the lesson plan, if it will be delivered to different students in different ways (live, recorded, by video conference, etc.), observe across all models to see the plan's execution in various formats.
- Schedule the conference several days in advance of the observation and at a time when both the observer and teacher can meet free of interruptions. This is particularly important with virtual pre-conferences as the teacher may need to plan for uninterrupted time.
- Develop a working knowledge of the platform(s) being used by the educator to deliver content/assignments.
- Maintain high expectations for rigorous, standards-aligned instruction that meets the expectations of the TEAM rubric and continue using best practices for conducting observations.

Suggested Distance Learning Focused Pre-Conference Questions
- In what ways have you modified and/or supplemented the curriculum? How were your choices guided?
- What types of learning opportunities are you designing for independent practice vs. group practice?
- What resources are you providing/sharing with your students to support independent learning?
- How are you planning to meet the needs of all learners including students with disabilities, English language learners, and students in vulnerable populations?
- What types of synchronous communication do you use? What types of asynchronous communication do you use? How do you decide what is shared via each medium?
- How will you ensure students stay on track?
- What opportunities for additional support do students have beyond live instruction?
- In what ways are you setting expectations for a positive learning environment, including "netiquette"?
- What proactive measures are you taking to identify and combat cyberbullying in the distance learning environment?
- How do you plan for group conversations within live sessions? Do students have the opportunity to work together beyond live sessions?
- What challenges might you anticipate as a result of providing instruction via a distance learning platform?
- Are there any additional accommodations you have made for teaching in a distance learning model?

II.   **Observation and Evidence Collection**

When observing distance learning, evidence collection may take place in multiple platforms and a single learning session may extend beyond a single live session. While traditional practices such as scripting remain useful for live sessions, observers may seek to review message boards, participate in office hours with the educator, review student work from an online platform, or have online discussions with students regarding the learning process.

Observers should consider multiple sources for gathering evidence on the impact of distance learning:
- Ask for links to student work samples.
- Schedule time to engage with any platforms the class is using and seek evidence of impact on student progress.
- Script live lessons, being mindful of transitions and appropriateness of length of instruction.
- Use the time between the synchronous lesson and post-conference to ask clarifying questions. Suggested clarifying questions are shared below.
- Maintain high expectations for rigorous, standards-aligned instruction that meets the expectations of the TEAM rubric and continue using best practices for conducting observations.

Suggested Distance Learning Clarifying Questions
- How do you ensure discussion boards or other media platforms are used to encourage student progress?
- How do you provide feedback through online platforms to encourage higher order thinking and deeper understanding?
- How do you determine if the time provided for completion of tasks is appropriate?
- How do you determine the amount of time allotted for direct instruction?
- What steps are you taking to ensure all student voices are heard in both synchronous and asynchronous learning environments?
- How do you set the expectation of academic integrity?
- What steps are you taking to keep students motivated and engaged in a distance environment?
- How do you engage students in giving academic feedback to each other in a distance environment?
- How are you working to overcome the challenges of creating a positive learning environment in a distance learning situation?
- How are you using student feedback/interactions to monitor and adjust instruction?

III.   Post-Conferencing

When observing distance learning, the post-conference conversation is key to coaching and strengthening teacher practice. With the change in mode of delivery, the focus of coaching teacher practice should include identifying how the teacher knows the selected practices are having the desired impact and identifying ways to increase the efficacy of those practices.

Observers should consider the following when scheduling and planning a post-conference:
- Schedule the post-conference within five working days after all student engagement associated with the lesson has been completed.
- Schedule the post-conference at a time when both the teacher and the observer can meet free of interruptions. This is particularly important with virtual post-conferences as the teacher may need to plan for uninterrupted time.
- Review the available evidence for each mode of instruction and determine the impact on student progress.
- Identify practices that enhance student learning as well as those that, if improved, would most impact student success.
- Maintain high expectations for rigorous, standards-aligned instruction that meet the expectations of the TEAM rubric and continue using best practices for conducting observations.

Suggested Distance Learning Focused Post-Conference Questions
- What parts of providing distance learning are having the greatest impact on student learning? What evidence of that impact can you share?
- What is one of your greatest challenges in providing distance learning?
- How do you collaborate with colleagues to develop and deliver instruction?
- How could you engage with other online instructors to find new technology to enhance instruction?
- When creating expectations for distance learning, how could you involve students?
- What adjustments might you make when designing assessments to ensure all students can achieve mastery regardless of access to technology?
- How can asynchronous[1] assessments inform the way you plan for live instruction?
- How might you encourage your students to more deeply engage in the tasks provided?
- In what ways are you engaging parents/guardians with instruction?
- How could you improve the level of student engagement in synchronous instruction? Asynchronous instruction?
- What do your students need to be more successful with distance learning?
- How might you assess the impact of direct instruction during live sessions?
- What skills did you bring from traditional instruction that continue to benefit your students? What skills might need development as a result of moving to an online environment?
- What supports have you identified that would enhance your online instructional practice?

When observing distance learning, using carefully constructed pre- and post-observation questions, gathering evidence and artifacts throughout the planned engagement with the content, and maintaining high expectations for rigorous, standards-aligned instruction will allow both the observer and teacher to feel more confident with the observation process. In turn, this will allow for stronger feedback and support for teacher practice and improvement for student outcomes.