TEAM Best Practices Video Library

Instructional Plans

Descriptor 3

Summer 2025

TN Department of Education

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General Educator Rubric:

Planning Domain

Planning Domain

The Planning Domain is designed to evaluate how effectively teachers prepare and think through the steps for instruction. This domain emphasizes the planning and implementation of the unit or lesson plan rather than the written plan itself. Evaluators should look for evidence of planning in the lesson plan, classroom observation, and planning conference discussions.

Key Considerations:

- **Lesson Planning:** While written plans are important, the primary focus is on how teachers plan for instruction. A detailed, multi-page lesson plan is not necessary; instead, evaluators should consider how well the teacher's planning translates into effective classroom practice. Planning scores should be based on teacher process, evidence collected during observation and conversation, teacher implementation of the plan, student work samples, and assessment samples.

- **Planning Conference:** A pre-conference should occur before an announced observation. This meeting helps the evaluator gather information from the educator about the planning process before observing a lesson. If the observation is unannounced, then the evaluator should have a planning conference after the classroom observation to discuss the educator's planning process.

Planning Domain

Indicators:

Instructional Plans:
- Evaluators should assess the strategies teachers use to align their instruction with state standards. This includes both lesson and unit plans.
- Look for evidence that the teacher has thoughtfully prepared to meet the learning objectives.

Student Work:
- Consider the tasks and activities students are engaged in. Student work should provide insight into how well the teacher's planning supports student learning.
- Evaluators should look for evidence that student work is challenging students to use a variety of thinking and problem-solving skills.

Assessments:
- Assessments are crucial for understanding student learning. Evaluators should examine how teachers use assessments to support and enhance student learning.
- Evidence of effective assessment practices can be found in both the planning and execution phases.

Planning Domain

Evaluation Process:

Planning Conference Discussions: These discussions are essential for understanding the teacher's planning process and should inform the planning scores. Explicit and direct questioning opens opportunities for educators to discuss their planning process and the evidence that may not be visible during classroom observations. Evaluators can request a meeting after the instruction to gather additional evidence about the teacher's planning process. This is particularly important for understanding how the teacher plans for the entire unit, not just the observed lesson.

Classroom Observations: During observations, evaluators should focus on how the teacher's plans are implemented in the classroom. This includes looking at student engagement, student work, and assessment outcomes.

Post-Conference: The post-conference should serve as an opportunity for educators to engage in self-reflection regarding their planning and execution. Evaluators should pose thought-provoking, open-ended questions that encourage educators to critically examine the planning practices that have successfully enhanced student learning, as well as identify areas for improvement to further advance student progress toward mastery.

Instructional Plans
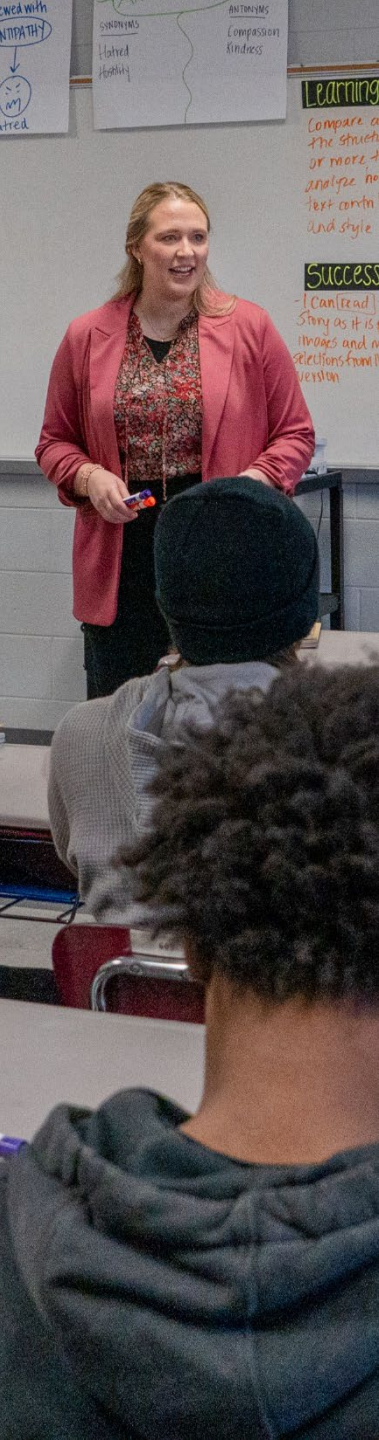
Instructional Plans

Instructional plans are crucial for ensuring effective and efficient learning experiences. They are based on state standards, local curriculum resources, and analysis of formative and summative student assessments. Teachers need to be incorporating these elements into their daily, weekly, and unit planning.

Evaluators should establish a system for providing regular feedback on an educator's planning process. Instructional planning questions and conversations should aim to elicit a comprehensive understanding of the planning process, encouraging educators to articulate their strategies for delivering quality instruction and implementing best practices.

Benefits of Strong Planning Processes:
- Better-managed classrooms
- More effective learning experiences
- Higher student engagement

Educators should adjust scripted lessons and incorporate student knowledge to meet individual and group needs. Effective planning starts with the end in mind, developing lesson objectives that align with standards, planning activities, and materials to ensure student success.

Descriptor 3:

Instructional plans include evidence that the plan is appropriate for the age, knowledge, and interests of learners

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Descriptor 3: Instructional plans include evidence that plan is appropriate for the age, knowledge, and interests of learners

This descriptor ensures that plans are appropriate and engaging for students. Instructional plans should reflect the expectations for the strategies a teacher employs to guarantee student mastery of the standards. Instructional strategies should include activities that are relevant to student age groups and interests, even if their skill level is lower. This requires strong knowledge of students and is essential for students to make meaningful connections.

To determine if an instructional plan is suitable for students' ages and skill levels, one must consider whether the plan aligns with the appropriate grade level standards. This means that the activities, plans, and assessments should be tailored to what students have previously learned and build on that foundation.

Evaluator Expectations

Evaluators are seeking to understand how educators ensure their materials and activities are engaging and suitable for students' age and skill levels. Evaluators examine how teachers accommodate individual student interests and employ engagement strategies to make the lesson effective. They also look for ways that students are given autonomy and ownership of their learning.

Examples questions:
- How do you know the materials and activities are appropriate for your students' age and knowledge/skill level?
- How do you know the lesson will be engaging?
- What engagement strategies will work best with your lesson?
- How will students have autonomy and ownership of their learning?

Educator Expectations

Educators should provide evidence demonstrating their understanding of students' academic levels and personal interests. This includes using data to assess students' readiness for lessons and explaining how they tailor instruction to be age-appropriate, engaging, and curiosity-driven.

Additionally, educators should describe how they ensure that materials and activities are suitable for students' age and skill levels and aligned with student interests. Furthermore, educators should outline techniques to enhance engagement and explain how they foster student autonomy and a sense of ownership over their learning.

Evidence Capture Example

As you watch the video, observe how the educator demonstrates understanding of her students' interests. She explains that while her students can express age-appropriate opinions, she is now challenging them to support their arguments with text evidence. She connects this skill to its importance in future real-life situations.

Ellie Lee
2024-25 Mid-Cumberland Core Region Teacher of the Year

Video featuring 2024-2025 Mid-Cumberland Core Region Teacher of the Year Ellie Lee under the guidance of Dr. Takisha Ferguson, Principal at Smyrna Middle School, Rutherford County Schools

Evidence Capture Example

As you watch the video, observe how the educator explains her planning process and encourages students to select songs that align with both their skill level and personal significance. She highlights how she strategically incorporates these choices to support the objectives of skill development.

Video featuring 2024-2025 East Grand Division Teacher of the Year Natalee Elkins under the guidance of Kathryn Lutton, Principal at Holston Middle School, Knox County Schools

Evidence Capture Practice

- Watch the video and capture evidence of Descriptor 3.

- Video featuring 2023-2024 Shelby County/Municipals Core Region Teacher of the Year Stephanie Thomas under the guidance of Corrie Martin, Principal at Lakeland Preparatory School, Lakeland School System

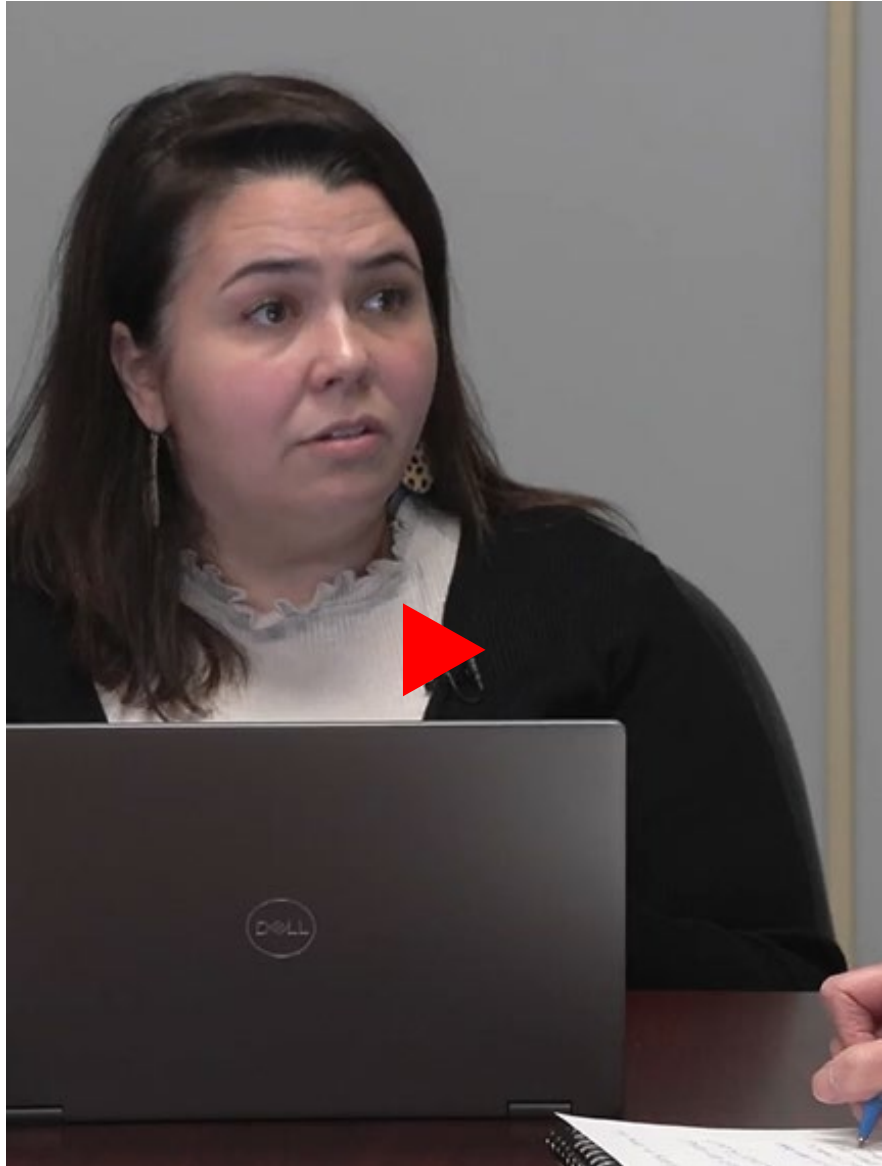**Share evidence you captured of Descriptor 3.**

Possible Evidence

Examples of Descriptor 3 in the video:

- The educator states how she incorporates her students' interests in student government, politics, and debate within her lesson activities.

- She describes how she uses modern political speeches to assist students with writing their own speeches for SGA.

Evidence Capture Practice

- Watch the video and capture evidence of Descriptor 3.

- Video featuring 2023-2024 South Central Core Region Teacher of the Year Emily Fowler under the guidance Penny Love, Principal of Culleoka Unit School, Maury County Schools

Share evidence you captured of Descriptor 3.

Possible Evidence

Examples of Descriptor 3 in the video:

- The educator states how the lesson's vocabulary and grammar concepts are age/grade level appropriate.
- She uses appropriate teaching strategies that support connections between students' vocabulary knowledge and the new target language vocabulary.

Connections to Other Indicators

This descriptor is closely aligned with the following indicators:

- **Motivating Students:**
  - The teacher organizes the content so that it is personally meaningful and relevant to students.
  - The teacher develops learning experiences where inquiry, curiosity, and exploration are valued.
- **Teacher Knowledge of Students:**
  - Teacher practices incorporate student interests and cultural heritage.

Feedback Survey

- Follow the QR code or the use link below to access the form for the feedback survey.
  - https://stateoftennessee.formstack.com/forms/planning_rubric_video_library
- Please use the form to reflect on today's learning and provide feedback about this resource.

Thank You!

Email questions to TEAM.Questions@tn.gov.

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