

What to Look for When Visiting a School

Before the Visit:

- Check out the school's website to learn about the key features and design principles of the school.
- Contact the host school to schedule the visit and request materials about the school. Discuss the things you hope to see, teachers and students you hope to talk with, and the classes you hope to observe.
- As a staff, develop a list of specific questions related to the features and design principles of the host school that you want to learn more about. Share your list of questions with the host school in advance of your visit.

Common Focus

- What are the few important goals that all students and staff in the school are focused on?
- How is this focus made evident in and throughout the school?
- What evidence is there that the adults and students in the building understand the school's goals?
- How is the school's focus reflected in the schedule and curriculum?

Teaching and Learning

- If there are classes, how are they structured? Does the teacher lecture? Do students work independently and/or in small groups?
- What evidence do you see of active inquiry and in-depth learning?
- What does the teacher do to ensure that all students are engaged? How are special education students and those who aren't native English speakers integrated into the classroom?
- How are all students held to high standards? Is there tracking?
- What is the role of technology in the classroom?
- In addition to traditional classes, do students have an opportunity to participate in internships or other hands on learning outside the classroom? How are these experiences aligned with what they are learning in class?
- How is student learning assessed? How do students demonstrate what they know and can do? Are there multiple measures?

Personalization

- How does the school personalize instruction for each student?
- Are there advisories? How often do they meet?
- Does each student have a learning plan? How is it developed?

Parents and Community Members

- How are parents and community members present in the school? What roles do they play?
- How does the school communicate with parents and community members?

Respect

- How do students interact with each other? Are there cliques?
- How do students and adults interact with each other?
- How do the adults interact with each other?

Use of Space in the Building

- Are there multiple schools in one building? If so, what space (cafeteria, auditorium, etc.) is shared? Does each school have its own entrance?
- Does the traffic pattern allow students from different schools to see each other?
- Do you notice a unique culture/tone in each school?
- If there are classrooms, how is the space used? How are desks arranged?
- If there aren't classrooms, what workspace is available to students? What is the role of technology?
- Do the faculty have offices? Are they accessible to students?

Condition of the Building

- Is the building clean?
- How is student work displayed?
- Are there security guards or metal detectors?
- How are visitors greeted?

Reflections for the Group Following the Visit:

- What was most striking about what we saw?
- How did what we saw relate to the focus areas (key principles/design features) that we selected?
- What made an impression? Why?
- What are we now thinking about that we weren't thinking about before?
- What are the key points/findings/conclusions that we want to share when we return home?
- How will we share these?
- Who will we share our learning with back at our school?
- What are the forums for doing this?