

Defining a Quality School

Activity 3: “A Vision of Quality”

Teacher Edition

What do you see in your mind’s eye?

1. Have room set up with rows of chairs.
2. Have participants sit and get comfortable.
3. Turn down the lights and ask participants to close their eyes.
4. Begin providing a narrative of a visualization that has the participant walk into a school as a teacher new to that school environment.
5. Following first half of visualization, allow 5 minutes to write what was seen on note cards.
6. Have participants turn to partner and share examples of what they saw, heard, felt.
7. Conduct the second half of the visualization and repeat #5 and #6.
8. Have participants leave the note cards in a box on the way out.

NOT TO BE SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS IN ADVANCE OF THE ENVISIONING EXERCISE.

STATE: We will be engaging in a visioning exercise for the next 10-15 minutes. I will ask you to close your eyes then at least twice we will pause so that you can write what your mind’s eye imagines. There will be a lot to think about, so simply let yourself following along and try to recall images, sounds, and feelings. In the end we will share with a partner and then popcorn style, we will share out to the group. Now close your eyes. Have your pen and notecard nearby. Now relax everything and close your eyes.

Imagine that you are a teacher who has worked for a number of years in at least one or two schools in Oakland. You may have worked elsewhere as well. You’ve decided to seek a change and an opportunity has opened up at a school you have long heard good things about, and so you took it. You are now a teacher new to this school. It is the spring before the your starting year and you have a chance to visit the school to spend time with the principal, with other teachers, to observe and to prepare.

Your new school is considered a great school by everyone you know. It has a long waiting list, has long been spoken of among colleagues as a school few teachers ever want to leave and it is a school that some consider to be the crown jewel of the district. A real gem. You’ve come to believe based on what you’ve heard that this must be a high quality school. That said, you’ve never been to the school and today you will visit it for the first time.

You arrive at the school and park a few doors down. It is the start of the school day and you plan to remain until the afternoon. You get out of the car, notebook in hand and head to the school. Imagine how you would be feeling. Nervous? Excited? Worried? Anxious? You arrive at the front of the school. What do you see? What do you hear? What is happening there? You enter the main building and you come to the main office. You look inside. What do you see? How are people interacting with one another? What do you hear people saying?

The principal comes out of his or her office and greets you. How are you greeted. He or she invites you in for a brief conversation to help you become acclimated to the school. How is their office organized? What do you notice? What does the principal share about the school? What seems important to him or her? How do they describe what matters most in their school? What types of support do they commit to providing you?

PAUSE: Participants are given 3-5 minutes to write what they saw, heard and felt thus far in this quality school.

The principal encourages you to spend the day on campus and look to feel free to look around. You leave his or her office and pass on down the hall as students enter classrooms. What do you see on the walls? What does it feel like there? What do you notice? Based on what you see, what seems to matter here? You get to a classroom with the door open and you can observe without being noticed. There is a lesson going on. How are the teacher and students interacting. What is the teacher saying? What are students doing? What type of questions are students asking? One student disrupts the class. How does the teacher respond? How does the student respond to the teacher? Eventually the bell rings for lunch. You continue out to the courtyard. The sun is out, though its chilly. How do the students move to the cafeteria? When you get there what is happening? What are students eating? What are the ways they are interacting with each other and the adults in the room?

PAUSE: Participants are given 3-5 minutes to write what they saw, heard and felt thus far in this quality school.

The school day is an early dismissal and you are invited to observe the professional learning time? How is the time organized? What is expected of teachers during this time? What is expected of the principal and other support staff? As you observe, how are teachers interacting with each other? What is the focus of their energy and attention? As you observe the way in which they use this time, what are you feeling?

Soon you excuse yourself.

As you head out towards the campus entrance you pass a student you know from another school you once worked at that you know recently transferred to this school. They greet you excited to see you and you pause to ask them how things are going and more importantly, how do they like their new school. What do they say? How do they describe what they are learning? What do they say they do and how do they say they do it? How do they describe how they feel? How does it make you feel? Now open your eyes.

PAUSE: Participants are given 3-5 minutes to write what they saw, heard and felt thus far in this quality school.

DEBRIEF: Now find a partner. Someone ideally you do not know well. Introduce yourself and then share up to five things that you either saw, or heard, or felt during this exercise. Afterwards, we will have a few of you share some examples. PAUSE 3-4 minutes. STATE: Now thank your partner. Who can share an example of what came up for you in that envisioning exercise? (Validate with enthusiasm what is shared. State back what you heard so others hear it and they know you were listening.) End by stating that we will collect their index cards as they exit and that we will add their visions to the growing body of quality school descriptions.