

Just Ask Liz

Dear Liz:

I do not trust my principal and am not comfortable attending my post observation conference alone. Can you or our EASMC building representative attend?

Liz's Wisdom:

I am very sorry to hear that you do not have a trusted relationship with your principal; that is certainly unfortunate. If there are valid reasons for the weak relationship, then I would suggest that you contact me to see how we can be of service in helping improve it. Meanwhile, post-observation conferences are meant to reflect a dialog, an exchange, and a partnering for student success. They are not supposed to be punitive or disciplinary in nature and thus, neither the EASMC representative nor I would attend under normal circumstances.

The purpose of a proper post-observation conference is to review the draft report, and to share ideas about what was observed and the impact it had on student learning. It is supposed to be a "meeting of the minds" that informs the final report. Show up at the conference confident and armed to sell yourself. Bring artifacts such as student data, student work samples, photos of your classroom, and anything else that will demonstrate and confirm effective performance. Don't miss this pivotal opportunity to weigh in, make your case, and positively influence the final report.

Don't be passive at the post-observation conference. Ask questions. Inquire. Participate. Evaluators may have initial perceptions based on their firsthand observations, but ideally, they should not have made up their minds about scores until AFTER you confer, exchange ideas, and talk through those initial perceptions. Read the draft report prior to the conference and highlight any critical comments. Ask questions like the following. Often the answers will lead the evaluator to change the draft report.

- "I don't recall that happening (or didn't get that impression). What did you observe that lead you to that conclusion?"
- How would I have known about that? I don't recall us discussing that; have I forgotten something? Had I known, I certainly would have attended to it since I am working hard to get exceptional results in my classroom."
- "What would you say went well? What were my strengths?"
- "Ideally, what would that look like (referring to something they have criticized)?"

Having been prepared and asked the right questions, don't be afraid to ask for change. This is your BEST CHANCE to effect change. An evaluator is significantly more likely to agree to modifications in a low-level one-on-one meeting with you than in a subsequent problem-solving meeting. Ask for changes to your observation report and avoid an ineffective evaluation. Ask questions like the following.

- "In light of the information I just shared, would you be willing to remove (or change/clarify/amend) that comment?"
- "I am working really hard on behalf of students and will certainly embrace all of your suggestions for improvement. Would you mind adding a few comments about the things that went well and the strengths that you observed?"
- "Since this is my first awareness of this concern (or need/interest/expectation), would you be willing to remove it and give me the opportunity to incorporate your recommendation? I am confident that I can do so to your satisfaction."

- “I understand this comment, but I am concerned that others who read this report might not. Would you mind adding a few clarifying or explanatory comments, or stating exactly what you observed instead of this general statement?”

In the end, if you still believe the final observation report to be unfair, you can write a rebuttal and/or we can schedule a follow-up meeting, depending on the nature of your concerns. If you reach out to me from your personal email address with an overview of the situation, I am happy to give you my frank opinion about the situation and the best approach for solutions given your specific circumstances (tenure status, experience, assignment, performance history, relationship with evaluator, etc.).