

Spruce Teacher Observation Framework

At Spruce Community School, we believe that teaching is a craft; that is honed over time through intentional effort, reflection, and continuous improvement. Just as we encourage our students to produce work they are proud of through critique and revision, we hold ourselves to the same standard as educators. Excellence in teaching is not left to chance—it is built through purposeful practice and trusting relationships.

At Spruce, we affirm that the key to transformative education lies in high-quality teaching. The single most powerful factor in student success is an educator who builds strong relationships, fosters deep student thinking, and intentionally cultivates a thriving learning community. This framework is designed to support, challenge, and empower our teachers as they refine their craft, ensuring that every classroom is a place where students think deeply, engage fully, and achieve at the highest levels.

Rubric Domains

The Observation Framework is built around four key domains, each representing a foundational element of an engaging, student-centered classroom. Every domain is guided by an Essential Question, designed to focus observations on the practices that foster curiosity, collaboration, and deep learning



Domain		Essential Question
1	Learning Environment & Classroom Culture	To what extent do the physical space, routines, and interactions create a predictable, inclusive, and engaging learning environment where students feel safe, valued, and ready to learn?
2	Student Engagement & Intellectual Curiosity	To what extent are students actively invested in their learning, engaging in meaningful, rigorous, and inquiry-driven experiences that connect to the real world?
3	Instructional Design & Delivery	To what extent does the design and delivery of learning experiences ensure that all students have access to rigorous, engaging, and meaningful opportunities to think, create, and grow?
4	Responsive Teaching & Student Supports	To what extent does instruction respond to student needs in real time, fostering deep understanding, differentiated support, and data-informed decision-making?

Essential Questions guide classroom observations by focusing on specific Indicators within each Domain. Each Domain contains 5 Indicators measured across four performance levels: Emerging, Approaching, Proficient, and Exemplary. Each indicator shows teacher and student actions.

Domain #1: Learning Environment & Classroom Culture

To what extent do the physical space, routines, and interactions create a predictable, inclusive, and engaging learning environment where students feel safe, valued, and ready to learn?				
	Level 1 - Emerging	Level 2 - Approaching	Level 3 - Proficient	Level 4 - Exemplary
	> 60% of students	At least 60% of students	At least 75% of students	At least 90% of students
Indicator 1.1 Predictable Routines & Classroom Flow We learn best when there are consistent and meaningful routines.	Routines are unclear, nonexistent, or rarely communicated Frequent student disruptions and significant time lost. Less than 60% of students follow routines.	Routines and transitions exist but are inconsistently followed. Frequent teacher intervention is required to keep students on track. Some learning time is lost.	Routines and transitions are clear, well-established, and effectively managed by the teacher. Minimal time is lost to redirection.	Routines and transitions are seamless, clearly communicated, and maximize learning time. Students understand expectations and take ownership of maintaining and leading routines. No time lost.
Indicator 1.2 Classroom Space & Student Representation We learn best in spaces that are organized and designed to promote learning.	The classroom is cluttered, disorganized, or poorly arranged. Students struggle to engage in learning effectively due to space. Student work is not visible or celebrated.	The classroom is partially organized, but layout or accessibility issues create barriers to learning. Student work is minimally displayed, and the space feels more teacher-centered.	The classroom is organized and functional, supporting student learning. Some student work is displayed, but the space could better reflect student ownership and identity.	The physical space is student-centered, inviting, and flexible, allowing for collaboration, independence, and various learning styles. Materials are organized and easily accessible to students. Student work, voices, and cultural identities are represented and celebrated in the space.
Indicator 1.3 Access and Expectations for All We learn best in spaces where we are held to a high standard and supported to do our best.	The teacher inconsistently communicates or models expectations for student learning and achievement. Support is minimal or not aligned to individual student needs, limiting students' ability to meet expectations.	The teacher sometimes demonstrates, models, or communicates high expectations for learning and achievement for all students but does not provide supports or supports are not matched to students' needs.	Teacher almost always demonstrates, models, or communicates high expectations for learning and achievement for all students and provides support matched to students' needs to help meet those expectations.	Teacher always demonstrates, models, or communicates high expectations for learning and achievement for all students and provides support matched to students' needs to help. Students monitor their work and encourage each other to meet expectations.
Indicator 1.4 Community & Relationships We learn best when we feel known, seen, valued, and cared for by a community.	The classroom lacks a sense of safety or belonging. Disrespectful behavior goes unaddressed, and student interactions frequently disrupt learning. The teacher does not demonstrate respect for all students through words and actions.	Respect and inclusivity are inconsistently maintained. Teacher addresses issues reactively rather than proactively. Some students feel excluded. Teacher demonstrates respect for all students through words and actions.	The classroom is positive and respectful, with the teacher setting and reinforcing norms. Students generally treat each other well, with some teacher guidance. Teacher demonstrates genuine care and respect for all students through words and actions.	The classroom feels safe and inclusive, with students demonstrating mutual respect, empathy, and collaboration. Teacher models and reinforces kindness and equity. Teacher demonstrates genuine care, warmth, and respect for all students through words and actions.
Indicator 1.5 Academic Joy We learn best when learning is fun, and relevant to us which creates engagement.	The classroom lacks energy and investment. More than 60% of students appear disengaged, bored, or disruptive. The teacher lacks enthusiasm for content and may exhibit confusion.	Student engagement fluctuates, with some students disengaged or passive (around 60%). Teacher makes efforts to engage students but with mixed success.	Students (~75%) are consistently engaged and enjoy learning. The teacher actively fosters enthusiasm and encourages student input.	Students are highly engaged, curious, and excited about learning. They initiate discussions, ask deep questions, and take ownership of their learning experience. The teacher consistently demonstrates enthusiasm for the academic subject and creates relevant connections for students.

Domain #2: Student Engagement & Intellectual Curiosity

To what extent are students actively invested in their learning, engaging in meaningful, rigorous, and inquiry-driven experiences that connect to the real world?				
	Level 1 - Emerging	Level 2 - Approaching	Level 3 - Proficient	Level 4 - Exemplary
	> 60% of students	At least 60% of students	At least 75% of students	At least 90% of students
Indicator 2.1 Questioning We learn best when we grapple with important and complex questions.	Teacher questioning is mostly factual or procedural. Student questioning is minimal or absent. There are multiple missed opportunities to ask questions that encourage application, synthesis, and extended thinking.	The teacher asks basic or recall-level questions with some effort to encourage deeper thinking. Student questions are limited. There are missed opportunities to ask questions that encourage synthesis and extended thinking.	The teacher facilitates meaningful questions at a variety of levels that drive learning, and students engage in some independent questioning and inquiry.	Students consistently ask and engage with complex, thought-provoking questions, challenging ideas and exploring multiple perspectives. Questioning is student-driven, fostering deep inquiry.
Indicator 2.2 Active Learning + Ownership We learn best when students do the thinking, talking, and creating.	Students are disengaged or passive, relying on teacher direction for all aspects of learning. Little evidence of student ownership.	Students engage in tasks but often passively follow instructions rather than take initiative. The method of delivery of content (e.g., questioning, writing tasks, group work) actually has the teacher mostly doing the thinking, speaking, writing and/or creating. Some reliance on teacher direction.	Students are actively engaged in their learning, demonstrating consistent participation and effort. The teacher encourages student voice and leadership. Students are almost always doing the thinking, speaking, writing and/or creating.	Students take full ownership of their learning, leading discussions, making choices, and actively engaging in thinking, speaking, writing, and creating throughout the lesson.
Indicator 2.3 Discussion & Discourse We learn through connection and conversation with a community that cares.	Little to no discussion or student-to-student dialogue occurs. Conversations are teacher-led and lack depth or student engagement. The teacher rarely provides prompts or encourages students to listen and respond to their peers.	Discussions occur occasionally, but student responses are surface-level or require heavy teacher prompting. The teacher inconsistently provides prompts, and students rarely build on each other's thoughts.	Students regularly participate in discussions, listening actively and contributing their ideas with teacher guidance. The teacher provides prompts to encourage deeper dialogue and ensures students respond to each other's ideas.	Students engage in meaningful, sustained discussions, respectfully challenging ideas, building on each other's thinking, and co-constructing knowledge. Teacher consistently provides prompts and guidance to help students build on ideas and respond.
Indicator 2.4 Collaboration We learn best when we feel known, seen, valued, and cared for by a community.	Collaboration is minimal or ineffective. Students work individually with little interaction or struggle to work productively and kindly with peers.	Students collaborate inconsistently; some work well in groups, but others struggle with communication, inclusion, or teamwork. Students have uneven distribution of work and talk time.	Collaboration is structured and encouraged, with most students working well together and supporting each other in learning.	Students work effectively and inclusively in teams, demonstrating trust, care, and shared accountability for their learning. The classroom operates as a learning community.
Indicator 2.5 Relevance & Real-World Connections We learn best when learning is fun, and relevant to us which creates engagement.	Learning feels disconnected from real-world applications, and students view it as just another assignment rather than meaningful work.	Some attempts are made to connect learning to the real world, but students may not fully understand its relevance.	Lessons include some real-world connections, and students can see some relevance to their lives, but connections could be more explicit.	Learning is highly relevant and meaningful to students, incorporating real-world applications, personal interests, and hands-on experiences that spark joy and engagement.

Domain #3: Instructional Design & Delivery

To what extent does the design and delivery of learning experiences ensure that all students have access to rigorous, engaging, and meaningful opportunities to think, create, and grow?				
	Level 1 - Emerging	Level 2 - Approaching	Level 3 - Proficient	Level 4 - Exemplary
	> 60% of students	At least 60% of students	At least 75% of students	At least 90% of students
<u>Indicator 3.1</u> Lesson Focus We learn best when we know the what and why of the content.	Lesson objectives are vague or missing, and students lack clarity on what they are learning or why it is important. Students could not answer the question "What are you learning today and why is it important"	The lesson includes a stated objective, but connections to real-world relevance or prior learning are unclear. Some students struggle to explain what they are learning or why. Student could answer "What are you learning?"	The teacher explicitly communicates the lesson's purpose, ensuring students understand what they are learning and why it matters. Most students can explain what they are learning and why it matters.	Learning objectives are clear, compelling, and deeply connected to students' prior knowledge and interests. Students can articulate the purpose of their learning and its relevance beyond the classroom.
<u>Indicator 3.2</u> Lesson Pacing We learn best when the lesson is sequenced in an intentional manner that maximizes learning time.	Lesson pacing lacks structure, leading to frequent disruptions, wasted time, or student disengagement. Students are spending too long or too little on tasks creating boredom or confusion.	The lesson has pacing inconsistencies, with some rushed or drawn-out segments. Transitions may cause minor disruptions to learning time.	The lesson follows a clear, intentional sequence, allowing for engagement and reflection. Transitions are smooth, with minimal loss of instructional time. Students spend the appropriate amount of time on a task to promote deeper learning.	The lesson is expertly paced, with students moving seamlessly between tasks. Learning time is maximized, and students take ownership of transitions and task completion. Students time on task maximizes their learning.
<u>Indicator 3.3</u> Rigor We learn best when we are appropriately challenged and supported.	The lesson lacks intellectual challenge, relying on rote memorization or procedural tasks with minimal student thinking required. The content is too easy or too challenging (w/o scaffolds of support). Students often give up on challenging assignments or check out when too easy.	Some elements of rigor are present, but students struggle to engage in higher-order thinking. The teacher provides too much or too little scaffolding. Students often give up on challenging assignments.	The lesson includes rigorous tasks that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving, with appropriate scaffolding to support student success. Rigor is tied to grade-level content.	Students engage in complex, high-level thinking and persist through challenging tasks. The teacher scaffolds just enough to support independent problem-solving and deep learning. The rigor resembles the professional world.
<u>Indicator 3.4</u> Multiple Modalities We learn best when we have multiple ways of engaging with material (kinesthetically, orally, visually etc.)	The lesson is one-dimensional, relying primarily on lecture or passive learning, with little to no variety in engagement methods.	The lesson includes some variety in how students engage, but one modality dominates, limiting access for different learning styles.	The lesson includes intentional use of different modalities, such as visuals, movement, discussion, and hands-on activities, to support diverse learners.	The teacher seamlessly integrates multiple learning modalities, ensuring all students can engage physically, verbally, visually, and interactively. Students choose methods that best support their learning.
<u>Indicator 3.5</u> Voice + Presence We learn best when we feel our teacher's excitement, care, and consistent presence.	The teacher lacks presence or emotional engagement, and students do not feel a strong connection to their teacher.	The teacher is present but inconsistent in demonstrating enthusiasm or connection with students. Some interactions feel routine or disengaged.	The teacher demonstrates enthusiasm and warmth, actively engaging with students and fostering a positive, attentive classroom presence.	The teacher creates a dynamic learning atmosphere, using their voice, movement, and presence to inspire curiosity, foster connection, and sustain student engagement.

Domain #4: Responsive Teaching & Student Supports

To what extent does instruction respond to student needs in real time, fostering deep understanding, differentiated support, and data-informed decision-making?				
	Level 1 - Emerging	Level 2 - Approaching	Level 3 - Proficient	Level 4 - Exemplary
	> 60% of students	At least 60% of students	At least 75% of students	At least 90% of students
<u>Indicator 4.1</u> Active Monitoring We learn best when our teacher knows where we are and support us in being our best.	The teacher rarely monitors student learning through checks for understanding or moving about the room and looking at student work to assess students' progress resulting in confusion or mistakes.	The teacher checks in on students occasionally through CFUs and movement, but feedback is general or only to a select group of students.	The teacher monitors student learning consistently and provides frequent feedback, adjusting instruction as needed.	The teacher actively circulates, observes, and listens to students, providing timely, targeted feedback that guides learning and deepens understanding.
<u>Indicator 4.2</u> Feedback + Cycles of Critique We learn best when the lesson is sequenced in an intentional manner that maximizes learning time.	Feedback is rarely provided or lacks specificity, and students do not engage in cycles of critique or revision. Students do not know how to provide feedback in a kind, specific, and helpful manner.	Feedback is inconsistent or vague, and revision opportunities are limited or unstructured, making it difficult for students to improve. Students provide feedback that is kind but does not advance thinking.	The teacher provides specific and timely feedback, and students have opportunities to revise their work based on teacher or peer critique. Students are giving each other feedback that is kind, specific, and helpful.	Students regularly receive and act on meaningful, specific feedback from their teacher and peers, engaging in multiple revision cycles to refine their thinking and work. Students give one another feedback that is purposeful and elevates the thinking and products produced.
<u>Indicator 4.3</u> Differentiation We learn best when we have the accommodations and adaptations we need to support and/or challenge us.	Instruction is one-size-fits-all, with little to no differentiation, leaving some students under-challenged or unsupported.	Some differentiation occurs, but strategies may not fully align with individual student needs. Some students struggle due to lack of appropriate challenge or support.	The teacher differentiates instruction through scaffolding, flexible grouping, and choice, ensuring students access content at the right level.	Instruction is highly responsive to individual student needs, with multiple entry points, scaffolds, and extensions ensuring all students are appropriately challenged and supported.
<u>Indicator 4.4</u> Data-Driven Decisions We learn best when instructional decisions are rooted in what students in the room know or need to know.	Instruction is not informed by data, and lesson adjustments are rare or ineffective. Students do not know the results of their assessments (their strengths and areas of growth).	The teacher refers to student data but does not consistently use it to guide instruction or interventions. Students know how to check their data and their current level but do not know what it means or how to act on it.	The teacher regularly uses assessment data to guide instruction and adjust lesson pacing or grouping. Students feel comfortable talking about their data and are motivated to improve.	The teacher uses real-time and ongoing assessment data to adjust instruction, target interventions, and challenge students at appropriate levels. Students talk about their data with family members and are motivated to improve.
<u>Indicator 4.5</u> Progress Monitoring We learn best when we are working towards individual and collective goals.	There is no clear system for tracking student progress, and students do not regularly reflect on their growth.	Goal-setting and progress tracking occur sporadically, with limited opportunities for student reflection or adjustment.	The teacher establishes clear student goals and students track progress. The class celebrates growth. Teacher adjusts supports as needed.	Students set and track meaningful academic and personal growth goals with teacher support, reflecting on their progress regularly. Students co-create classroom wide goals and support one another in reaching them. Families know their student's goal and support them in achieving them.