Pilot Alternative Formal Observation Process

2023/2024 PSD Negotiation Meeting

December 5, 2023

RESEARCH AND EVALAUATION

Executive Summary

Ninety-three percent of PSD teachers and evaluators who participated in the alternative formal observation process indicate a positive experience and that PSD should continue to offer this option in future years. This evaluation report presents the findings from the **"PSD 2023/24 Alternative Formal Observation Process Pilot".** Teachers with three prior years of highly-effective ratings were eligible to participate in the AFO process. Teachers who chose to participate in the AFO process but had not started at the time of the survey were excluded from this study.

Two surveys were developed and used to gather input from participating teachers and evaluators. Both surveys were open from November 20th to November 29th, 2023. A total of eight evaluators and thirty-two teachers voluntarily participated in these surveys. All 29 evaluators and 161 teachers who had participated in the AFO process were invited to participate in these surveys. Twenty-eight percent of the participating evaluators (8/29), and 20% of the participating teachers (32/161) completed the surveys.

The AFO process provided a collegial learning environment that encouraged immediate application and reflection, while the *Traditional Formal Observation (TFO) process* is recognized for its structured feedback but criticized for its lack of meaningful impacts on experienced teachers' practices.

The meaningful differences from both evaluators and teachers' perspectives summarized as follows:

The AFO process is highly valued for its emphasis on peer learning and genuine growth. Teachers particularly appreciate the opportunity to observe and implement strategies from their peers' classrooms, finding this approach more meaningful and practical for experienced educators. It rejuvenates teaching practices through direct application of new ideas and focuses on personal growth and reflection. In contrast, the TFO process, while well-structured and familiar, is often viewed as a routine task that lacks the individual goal-setting and learning opportunities of the AFO process. It is perceived as more of a formality, useful for providing structured feedback and setting goals, particularly for newer teachers. However, seasoned educators tend to find less value in the TFO process.

The impacts of participation for both processes were measured by a 4-point scale on various teaching practices include classroom management practices, knowledge and understanding of subject(s), instructional practices, teaching of students with special learning needs, and handling of student discipline and behavior problems. Mean scores are illustrated below in Figure 1.
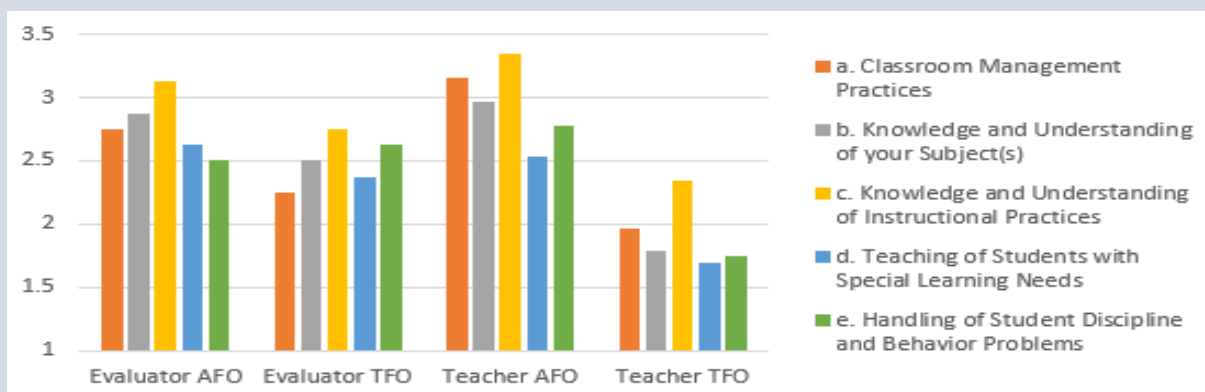

Figure 1: Comparisons of the impacts of both processes on five practices from teachers and evaluators

Paired - t tests were used to examine the mean differences between the impacts of the two processes on the five practices. Table 1 shows the results from the teachers. The results indicate there were positive AFO process impacts across all five practices, with mean differences ranging from 0.84 to 1.19. The associated *p*-values were all below 0.001, suggesting these positive impacts are statistically significant. The AFO process had a meaningful and positive effect on these aspects of teaching practices from the teachers' point of view.

Table 2 shows the results from the evaluators. Statistically significant differences between the two processes were not found, which might be due to the small sample size (8). Overall, teachers indicated the impacts of the AFO process on five practices were greater than what the evaluators observed. For evaluators, the AFO did have a larger impact than the TFO process. One exception was the evaluators rated the impacts of the TFO process on handling of student discipline and behavior problems higher than that of the AFO process.

Table 1: The result of statistical comparisons of the AFO and TFO process from teachers

Statement about the impacts on teaching practices	N	Mean of Differences	SD	*t*	*p* value
Classroom Management Practices	32	1.188	1.306	5.144	<.001
Knowledge and Understanding of your Subject(s)	32	1.188	1.120	5.999	<.001
Knowledge and Understanding of Instructional Practices	32	1.000	1.320	4.286	<.001
Teaching of Students with Special Learning Needs	32	.8438	1.110	4.299	<.001
Handling of Student Discipline and Behavior Problems	32	1.031	1.282	4.550	<.001

Table 2: The result of statistical comparisons of the AFO and TFO process from evaluators

Statement about the impacts on teaching practices	N	Mean of Differences	SD	*t*	*p* value
Classroom Management Practices	8	.500	1.195	1.183	.275
Knowledge and Understanding of your Subject(s)	8	.375	1.188	.893	.402
Knowledge and Understanding of Instructional Practices	8	.375	1.506	.704	.504
Teaching of Students with Special Learning Needs	8	.250	1.035	.683	.516
Handling of Student Discipline and Behavior Problems	8	-.125	1.246	-.284	.785

Participants provided suggestions for improving the teacher observation processes:

1) Emphasize the value of cross-building observations, especially within the local feeder system, to enhance learning and reduce stress associated with same-grade observations.
2) Teachers advocate for built-in time for post-observation debriefs and suggest making observations available to all, highlighting their benefits for both seasoned and less experienced educators.
3) A yearly observation in place of traditional formal evaluations for veteran teachers is proposed.
4) Support in the form of substitute teachers to facilitate visits to other schools.
5) Communicating more information about the observation
6) Streamline administrative workloads by modifying the 5D rubric evaluation for highly effective, long-term teachers, possibly replacing it with an alternative evaluation rubric.

BACKGROUND

PSD evaluated the pilot Alternative Formal Observation (AFO) process during the 2023/24 school year to provide meaningful feedback on this pilot process during the 2023/24 negotiations process. The **Traditional Formal Observation (TFO) process** involves an administrator/evaluator observing a teacher's class, followed by feedback. The **Alternative Formal Observation (AFO) process** includes peer observations, where teachers observe each other and participate in a reflective process. To explore how classroom observation processes and associated professional reflection have impacted/benefited teaching practices, two separate surveys were administered to gather valuable insights from teachers and their evaluators, who have participated in this new evaluation process. A total of eight evaluators and thirty-two teachers voluntarily participated in these surveys.

Among teachers who responded to the survey, sixty-nine percent are experienced teachers with over 20 years in teaching. The remaining teachers are distributed as follows: 16% have 16 – 20 years of experience, 9% have been teaching for 11 – 15 years, and both the 6-10 years and 3-5 years ranges are represented by 3% each. Teachers also come from a diverse range of class sizes: half taught classes of 11 to 30 students, 16% had classes of 31 to 50 students, 6% were responsible for 71 to 150 students, and 28% instructed more than 150 students this year. The majority of the teachers instruct grades K through 5, with 23 teachers in this range, followed by 9 teachers serving 9th through 12th grades, and one teacher specializing in Technology and Gifted and Talented (GT) education. Seventy-five percent of teachers provide reading and writing instruction, while 63% teach math and science. Additionally, 59% are involved in teaching social studies, 22% specialize in technology, and 6% focus on art and social-emotional life skills. A smaller percentage, 3%, is dedicated to Gifted and Talented (GT) and Work-Based Learning programs.

The evaluators are the administrators associated with each teacher that was eligible and chose to participate. Four evaluators are associate with Elementary Schools, three with High Schools and one with a K-12 School. Of the eight evaluators, four have been an evaluator in PSD for 6-10 years, and one each of the remaining 4 evaluators served in PSD for 1-2 years, 3-5 years, 16-20 years, or more than 20 years respectively.

SURVEY RESULTS

Evaluator Insights

Five of the eight evaluators chose **Positive (1) and Very Positive (4)** as their overall opinion regarding the AFO and the others chose **Neutral (3)**. Eighty-eight percent of evaluators **recommended** that PSD should continue the AFO process as an option for future evaluations in PSD. One evaluator disagreed with continuing the AFO process and provided the following open-ended response: *"Formal observation every other year for tenured teachers would be a way to decrease workload."*

Evaluators who advocated for the continuation of the AFO process in the future made the following comments:

- *"I really enjoyed the experience and other teachers at my school raved about observing teachers at our school and having the option to go to another school and observe there as well. I think this in the most beneficial way to go to grow as a teacher."*
- *"Could we remove some of the required meetings? Still takes a decent amount of time. If teachers can waive the second observation, can we just call it one observation per year for continuing contract?"*

- *"Allow evaluators to give permission to teachers to participate in the alternative evaluations if they are effective."*
- *"More education and information for teachers."*
- *"Continuing to complete the 5D rubric evaluation at the end of the year does not help with the administrator's workload. For teachers who have been highly effective for many years, is it possible that they could do the alternative formal observation and forego a formal summative evaluation that year?"*

Evaluators rated the extent to which five areas of teaching practices were impacted by participation in both processes. They used a 4-point scale, with 1 = No Impacts, 2 = Small Impacts, 3 = Moderate Impacts, and 4 = Large Impacts. Responses counts for the impacts of the AFO process and the TFO process are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

Although there were no statistically significant differences between the impacts of the AFO process and the TFO process on any of the five teaching practices from the evaluator's perspective (See Table 2), the impacts of both processes on the five areas showed variation. Figure 2 presents the impacts of both processes on five areas from evaluators' observations, suggesting the impacts of both processes have their respective strengths, with the AFO process being stronger in four of the five areas, and the TFO process rated slightly higher in handling of student discipline and behavior problems.

For the impacts of the AFO process, the highest two means were seen in knowledge and understanding of instructional practices and the subject(s), which indicated that teachers who participated in this process might be particularly effective in enhancing their instructional strategies and content knowledge. The next highest means were in classroom management and teaching students with special learning needs. Handling of student discipline and behavior problems rated as the least impacted area. Detailed comparisons of the impacts of both processes on these five areas can be seen in Figure 2.

Table 3: Evaluator responses of the impacts of the AFO process.

Statement about the impact of AFO process on teaching practices	No. of Responses				N	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4			
a. Classroom Management Practices	1	2	3	2	8	2.75	1.035
b. Knowledge and Understanding of your Subject(s)	1	1	4	2	8	2.875	.991
c. Knowledge and Understanding of Instructional Practices	1	0	4	3	8	3.125	.991
d. Teaching of Students with Special Learning Needs	2	1	3	2	8	2.625	1.188
e. Handling of Student Discipline and Behavior Problems	1	3	3	1	8	2.500	.926

Table 4: Evaluator responses of the impacts of the TFO process.

| Statement about the impact of TFO* process on teaching practices	No. of Responses				N	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4			
a. Classroom Management Practices	0	6	2	0	8	2.250	.463
b. Knowledge and Understanding of your Subject(s)	0	4	4	0	8	2.500	.535
c. Knowledge and Understanding of Instructional Practices	0	3	4	1	8	2.750	.707
d. Teaching of Students with Special Learning Needs	0	5	3	0	8	2.375	.518
e. Handling of Student Discipline and Behavior Problems	0	3	5	0	8	2.625	.518
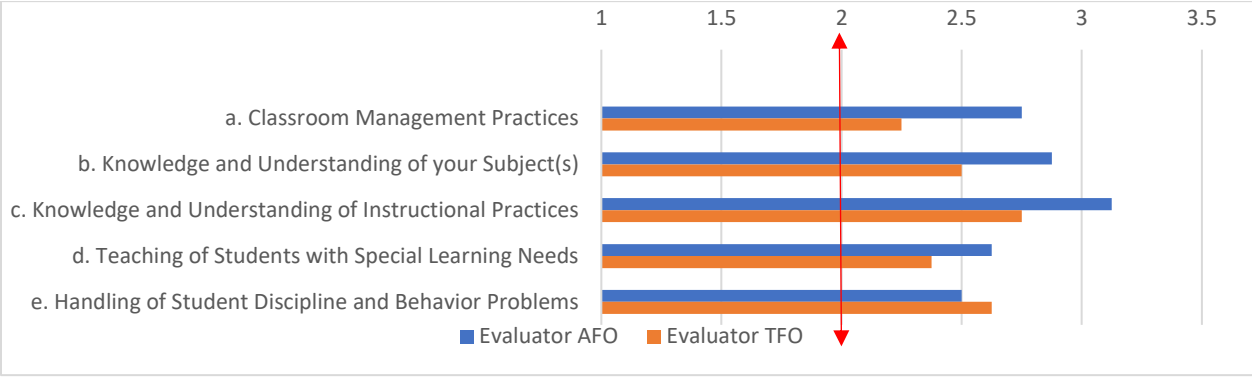
Figure 2: Comparisons of the impacts of both processes on five areas from evaluators

Evaluators were asked the frequencies of observing and providing feedback to their teachers (formal & informal), who participated in the Alternative Formal Observation process and for those that did not participate in the AFO process. The results indicated that evaluators tended to observe and offer a bit more feedback to teachers not involved in the AFO process. This could be because these teachers either have less teaching experience as a group or simply have opted for the TFO process, which necessitates more direct feedback from the evaluators. Evaluators might have had the opportunity to slightly decrease their observation and feedback time for teachers who have selected the AFO process.

Table 5: Counts of the times of observation and providing feedback.

Number of Times	In AFO process	Not in AFO process
a. Once this semester	2	2
b. Twice this semester	1	0
c. Three times this semester	1	2
d. More than three times this semester	1	3
e. No observations this semester	2	1

Evaluators identified a few *"meaningful differences"* between the AFO process and the TFO process. The evaluator who did not want to continue the AFO process stated that only one of his/her teachers opted into the pilot as it felt like more work. Other "meaningful differences" included:

- The AFO process
  - Highlighted peer learning as a significant benefit.
  - Observing peers in action provides validation, motivation, and a platform for teachers to reflect and improve their practices. It is valuable for continuing contract teachers.
  - Teachers value the chance to implement what they observe from their peers into their own teaching.
  - There is a strong appreciation for the organic and authentic learning that comes from observing the natural flow of the classroom, which offers insights that are not possible through formal evaluations alone.
- The TFO process
  - Is structured and well-known among the teachers and administrators.
  - Might be more beneficial or preferable for some, possibly due to its familiarity or structured approach.

- The traditional formal observation process lacks the individual goal setting and learning opportunities.

Evaluators were asked, "Did anything occur before, during or after utilizing the AFO process that you would like to share with us to better inform our evaluation of this process?" One expressed, "*Prior we wanted staff to get into one another's rooms. This created a positive way to do it that was teacher driven as opposed to admin driven.*" Another remarked, *"We added a coaching component that most teachers liked. Some that were eligible still wanted a formal observation."* Others said, *"More real and applicable practices being brought into classrooms." And "I was pleased with having freedom to who and what I wanted to observe."*

Teacher Insights

Eighty-eight percent of teachers chose **Positive (5) and Very Positive (23)** as their overall opinion regarding the AFO process, two of the participates criticized this pilot process as **Negative (1) and Very Negative (1)**, and the others chose **Neutral (2).** Ninety-four percent of the participants **recommended** that PSD should continue the AFO process as an option for the future evaluations in PSD and would like to recommend the AFO process to other teachers. One disagreed with continuing the AFO process.

He/She explained, "*It takes so much time to adequately debrief after someone observes and it seems backwards that there is no benefit or compensation for the teacher opening their classroom and giving their time to allow someone else to come learn from them".* He/She feels the AFO process was *"like a giant waste of time for me (being observed and debriefing with the teacher). They seemed to really need it and appreciate the time and knowledge I shared but it was a lot to add on to our already overflowing list of duties".* He/She also remarked that *"The traditional process at least allowed for constructive feedback from an experienced evaluator who has a greater lens on the big picture than a teacher from across the district that just needs to see good instruction."* At the end, He/She suggested that PSD *"Have it count for both participants, have it be stipend based so it feels we are valued for our time and expertise."*

The teachers who advocated for the continuation of the AFO process in the future made the following observations:

- *"Being able to observe teachers in our grade level in other buildings in the district, especially from our local feeder system. This would be better in a few years after everyone gets comfortable observing peers from their own buildings.*
- *"Time needs to be built in for the observer and the teacher who was observed to debrief after the observation."*
- *"I think that grade level another grade level or specialty teacher would be a beneficial route. Same grade level can cause stress with teammates."*
- *"Make observation an option for ALL teachers! If a "seasoned" teacher like myself was able to make such great use and implement what I saw, it would be an EXCELLENT idea for less experienced teachers to have the chance to see other professionals as often as possible!!!"*
- *"I think we should make it a yearly thing in place of a formal observation for veteran teachers."*
- *"I would encourage support in the way of subs for us to observe in other schools to broaden our learning spectrum even more."*
- *"Provide more information to teachers. It was presented to us in the following way. Regular Observation in the fall, can participate in alternative in the spring if you want to."*

Teachers were asked about their experience or specific examples about how the AFO process has impacted their teaching practice. The AFO process appeared to have a profound impact on teaching practices including:

- Professional Development and Learning:
    - Learning from break-out sessions and gathering new resources.
    - Gaining understanding of curriculum and standards.
    - Acquiring organizational and classroom management practices.
    - Observing and implementing new lab structures and hands-on learning.
    - Learning from observing different content areas.
    - Implementing new student desk rubrics and goals.
    - Experiencing the role of an observer to reflect and improve teaching practice.
- Peer Observation and Collaboration:
    - Observing a colleague for new teaching methods.
    - Sharing and discussing observations with colleagues.
    - Collaborating to understand and support other teachers' practices.
    - Observing peer classrooms to see different instructional strategies.
- Personal Growth and Reflection:
    - Reflecting on self-identified areas of growth.
    - Decreasing stress by focusing on relevant instructional practices.
    - Gaining confidence by comparing own practice with peers.
- Classroom Management and Student Engagement:
    - Observing classroom management structures.
    - Seeing student engagement and discipline strategies.
- Cross-Grade Learning and Curriculum Implementation:
    - Understanding how other grades work and run their classrooms.
    - Observing and adapting teaching for different grade levels.
- Curriculum and Instructional Strategies:
    - Observing interactive notebooks in use.
    - Watching peers to gain new ideas for teaching.
- Evaluation of the Observation Process:
    - Some expressing it had no impacts or mentioning the lack of compensation for the observed teacher.
    - Others mentioning that it's a more effective approach than traditional observation.
    - Acknowledging the value of observing and learning from peers.
- Curriculum Adaptation and Instructional Improvement:
    - Adapting literacy instruction and engagement practices.
    - Returning to concepts of internal growth and community building within the school.

Teachers rated the extent to which five areas of teaching practices were impacted by participation in both processes. They used a 4-point scale, with 1 = No Impacts, 2 = Small Impacts, 3 = Moderate Impacts, and 4 = Large Impacts. Responses counts for the impacts of the AFO process and the TFO process are presented in Table 6 and Table 7.

There were statistically significant mean differences between the impacts of AFO process and the TFO process on each of the five teaching practices from the teachers' point of view (See Table 1). The

impacts of the AFO process on each of the five practices were larger than the impacts of the TFO process, suggesting there were improvements in all five areas from the TFO process to the AFO process, particularly in the areas of classroom management and knowledge and understanding of instructional practices and your subject(s). Figure 3 presents the impacts of both processes on five areas, suggesting both the AFO and the TFO processes were seen as most effective in improving knowledge and understanding of instructional practices. It indicated that teachers agreed that both the AFO and the TFO processes enhanced their pedagogical skills. Classroom management practices was identified as the second most positively impacted area for both processes, suggesting that the teachers received support in effectively managing their classrooms from either of the process. Knowledge and understanding of subject(s) was the next most positively impacted area, indicating a good emphasis on content mastery, followed by handling of student discipline and behavior problems, and lastly teaching students with special learning needs, which might suggest that the both processes could be further developed to better address the specialized strategies required for teaching students with special learning needs.

Table 6: Teacher Responses of the impacts of the AFO process.

Statement about the impact of AFO process on teaching practices	No. of Responses				N	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4			
a. Classroom Management Practices	1	6	12	13	32	3.156	.847
b. Knowledge and Understanding of your Subject(s)	3	6	12	11	32	2.969	.967
c. Knowledge and Understanding of Instructional Practices	1	3	12	16	32	3.344	.787
d. Teaching of Students with Special Learning Needs	7	7	12	6	32	2.531	1.047
e. Handling of Student Discipline and Behavior Problems	4	7	13	8	32	2.781	.975

Table 7: Teacher responses of the impacts of the TFO process.

| Statement about the impact of TFO* process on teaching practices	No. of Responses				N	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4			
a. Classroom Management Practices	9	16	6	1	32	1.969	.782
b. Knowledge and Understanding of your Subject(s)	13	13	6	0	32	1.781	.751
c. Knowledge and Understanding of Instructional Practices	5	15	8	4	32	2.344	.902
d. Teaching of Students with Special Learning Needs	13	16	3	0	32	1.688	.644
e. Handling of Student Discipline and Behavior Problems	13	15	3	1	32	1.750	.762
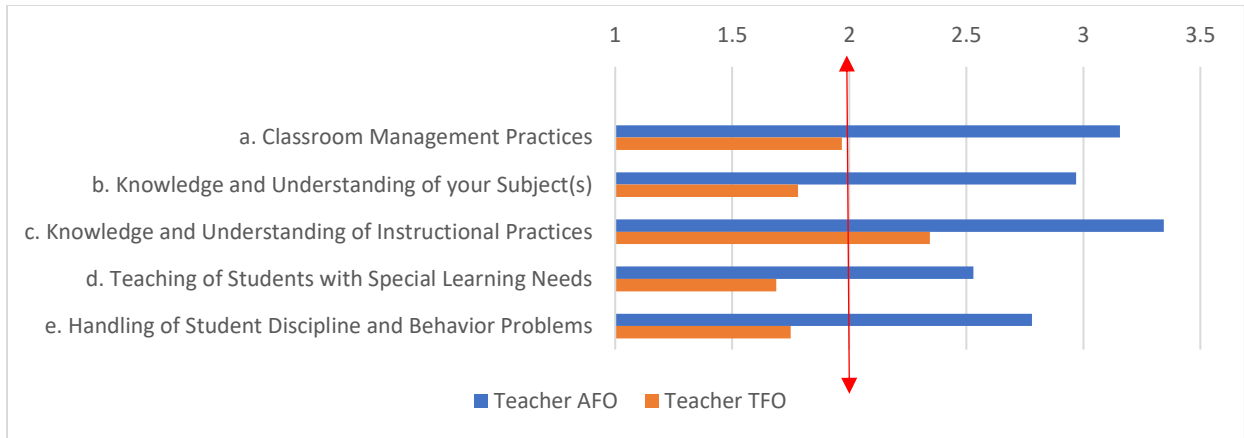
Figure 3: Comparisons of the impacts of both processes on five areas from teachers

Teachers identified a few *"meaningful differences"* between the AFO process and the TFO process. The one who did not want to continue the AFO process stated, *"The traditional process at least allowed for constructive feedback from an experienced evaluator who has a greater lens on the big picture than a teacher from across the district that just needs to see good instruction."* Other "meaningful differences" included:

- The AFO process
    - is seen as a genuine learning experience.
    - is considered more meaningful, especially for experienced teachers who find the old method to be of little value.
    - is appreciated for peer-to-peer learning and the opportunity to observe and reflect on other teachers' practices in action.
    - supports authentic growth, rejuvenates their teaching practices, and leads to the implementation of new strategies.
    - is favored for its immediate practical takeaways and for providing a window into other classrooms.
    - is described as more conducive to personal growth and understanding, with a focus on applicable practices and reflection rather than just planning lessons.
    - is lauded for its reflective nature and practical learning opportunities, allowing teachers to observe expert educators and directly apply new ideas to their classrooms.
    - Seasoned teachers find more value in observing their peers for fresh insights.
- The TFO process
    - is seen as a routine task.
    - is noted for providing constructive feedback from experienced evaluators with a broader perspective on teaching.
    - is more about confirming adequacy and setting goals.
    - is seen as a formality or a "hoop to jump through."
    - can feel inauthentic, like a "dog and pony show."
    - Newer teachers might benefit more from the structured feedback of formal observations.

Teachers were asked, "Did anything occur before, during or after utilizing the AFO process that you would like to share with us to better inform our evaluation of this process?" One expressed, "The

reflection form for after the alternative process was helpful. It was a meaningful way to share what I observed and not overly burdensome and lengthy*."* Another remarked, *"I was able to share ideas that we are looking to implement school wide."* Others said, *"Time has been given to support learning and understanding from ourselves as professionals to grow as educators."* Additional specific comments were as follows:

- *"It solidified and reassured that my practices are similar from 4th to 5th and that we are doing complimentary things for warms ups etc. I also walked away with a very different structure that could really increase student engagement for math that I am really looking forward to trying out as a result of this opportunity."*
- *"Today, I was able to implement "labs light" as a way of dipping my toe into the idea of blending labs with my IB lessons."*
- *"I am still working through the process but I'm excited to learn more about Psychology and the Psychoanalytic lens, so I can implement it in my senior English class where we look through different literary criticism lenses."*
- *"It felt like a giant waste of time for me (being observed and debriefing with the teacher). They seemed to really need it and appreciate the time and knowledge I shared but it was a lot to add on to our already overflowing list of duties."*
- *"I am still working through the process but being able to open communication with middle school teachers and establish a connection is only going to help our students in the future."*
- *"Great changes were made in my instructional structure for literacy that are better meeting my students needs after having the observation opportunity!"*
- *Classroom management improved after peer observation!*
- *I asked my admin for a recommendation of a teacher to observe in a different, but similar content area.*
- *I reflected on what I wanted to learn before I observed. I reflected on new learning during the observation. After I reflected with colleagues on the learning. REFLECTION!!!*