

Welcoming Walk-Through Overview

What is the Welcoming Environment Walk-Through?

As a team, your selected staff members and school community members will take a tour of your school. The team will look at four components of the school that let parents and community members know they are welcome there as partners in the school. Based on their observations, the team will complete a Welcoming Recommendation Form that will inform your school plan for improving the school environment for parents.

What is the purpose of the Welcoming Environment Walk-Through?

The purpose of the walk-through is to examine how inviting the school appears to its diverse community. Teams will look at positive aspects of the school and also gather information that will aid in setting goals for the future.

What are the components of the Welcoming Environment Walk-Through?

The Welcoming Walk-Through has 4 components:

- **The Physical Environment:** Parking areas, classrooms, lobby, hallways, etc.
- **School-Wide Practices and Policies:** Interview with principal/administrative staff.
- **Customer Service (Personal Interaction):** Observations in the main office, hallways, and places open to the public; listening and looking for inviting, friendly tones.
- **Written Materials and Communications:** Newsletters, parent handbook, fliers, and other materials distributed by the school. Web sites and telephone message lines are also included, if applicable.

Who will do the Welcoming Environment Walk-Through? (Teams can have 8-16 members)

You should select 12 persons (four staff members and eight representatives of your school communities) for your teams. Consider choosing team members who represent the diversity of your parents, your staff, and your community. For example, you may want to include an administrator, a teacher, a custodian, a secretary, a bus driver, a cafeteria worker, a neighbor, a community leader, a special education parent, a PTA board member, an English as a Second Language parent, a general education parent, and/or others who represent the various cultures in your school community.

What is the Welcoming Environment Walk-Through procedure?

- Select walk-through team members who are representative of your school community. Schools may wish to schedule evening walk-throughs for "schoolwide practices and policies" and "written materials and communications" components to accommodate those who cannot meet during the day.
- Provide a meeting room large enough for your team members and space for each of the four teams to meet and talk separately. This could be the same room with teams moving to separate corners.
- Provide the name of the administrator(s) who will be interviewed.
- You will need a map of the school.
- You will need samples of all written material sent to school communities from your school, i.e., a parent/student handbook, two recent newsletters, a student directory, and a packet of materials for new students and families, and so on.

Welcoming Walk-Through Team Members

Physical Environment Team:

School Staff Member: _____

Community Member 1: _____

Community Member 2: _____

Practices and Policies Team:

School Staff Member: _____

Community Member 1: _____

Community Member 2: _____

Customer Service Team:

School Staff Member: _____

Community Member 1: _____

Community Member 2: _____

Written Materials and Communications Team:

School Staff Member: _____

Community Member 1: _____

Community Member 2: _____

HISD's FACE Group Facilitator: _____

Welcoming Walk-Through Meeting With Your Teams

Thank you for being a part of the school's Welcoming Environment Walk-Through Team. Your input will be helpful in making future visitors to the building feel a welcomed part of the school. As you participate in the walk-through today, please think about the things that say "Welcome!" to you when you enter a school.

Try to assume a role as a visitor new to the school. Look at your school from any or all of the following perspectives:

- You are a parent of a child who will go to kindergarten next fall.
- You are thinking about moving into the area.
- You are a first-time volunteer.
- You just moved here from another state.
- You just moved from another area within this state.
- You know a little English.
- You are a father.
- You just moved to the USA.
- You have difficulty walking.
- You have difficulty seeing.
- You are a neighbor of the school.
- You did not complete high school.
- You obtained a GED.
- Your high school experience was horrible.

During the day's walk-through, you will become a member of one of four Welcoming Environment Component Teams. These teams will examine the following elements:

- The physical environment
- School-wide practices and policies
- Customer service
- Written materials and communications

In order to remember your thoughts during the walk-through process, please put your name at the top of your individual Welcoming Environment Walk-Through Commendations and Recommendations Form and make notes about the following:

- What is the school doing well?
- What could the school do to make the school more welcoming for parents and visitors?

At the conclusion of the walk-through time period, each team will discuss its observations and complete The Prioritizing Recommendations Form that has been provided for the team. The teams will then gather to share each of their findings. When all teams have shared their observations, we'll rank order the recommendations and set the time line for outlining improvement goals and implementation plans for this school year.

Welcoming Walk-Through Sample Agenda

[School Name]
Welcoming Walk-Through

10:00 - 10:10 Welcome: Principal

10:10 - 10:25 Introduction: Facilitator of the Walk-Through

- History
- Purpose and Objectives
- Guidelines
 - Form 4 teams with 2 to 4 staff members and 2 to 4 parents and/or community members on each team.
 - Team 1: Physical Environment
 - Team 2: School Wide Practices and Policies
 - Team 3: Customer Service
 - Team 4: Review of Written Materials and School Website
 - Team members complete their own checklist.

10:25 – 10:55 Walk-Through

- Each team member should first read over his or her checklist.
- Check “YES” or “NO” to answer questions on the checklist.
- Team 1 will walk through the school using the Team 1 Checklist on Physical Environment
- Team 2 will interview the Principal using the Team 2 Checklist on School Wide Practices and Policies
- Team 3 will walk through the school using the Team 3 Checklist on Customer Service
- Team 4 will review Written Materials and School Web Site using the Team 4 Checklist

10:55 – 11:45 Individual Team Discussions and Completion of Forms

- Choose a Note-Taker; one master checklist should be submitted to the Facilitator as well as all participants’ notes.

11:45 – 12:15 Summary Report Out from Each Team

Other Comments from all Team Members

Next Steps:

- HISD’s FACE Team Member review findings with Principal
- Create Action Plan for school campus
- Reserve future dates to meet with FACE School Based Team for plan implementation

Welcoming Walk-Through Checklist #1 – Physical Environment

The physical appearance of the facility is an essential element in creating a welcoming environment. Your team will tour the school's entrances, offices, hallways, cafeteria, gym, library, clinic, work room, and so on, and a sampling of classrooms. While you and your teammates tour the building, consider the items listed below. Be sure to check "YES" or "NO" according to your observations.

Parking, Entry, and Main Office

- YES___ NO___ Are the parking lots, landscaped areas, and playground areas and sports fields clean?
- YES___ NO___ Is there signage to direct visitors from parking lots to the main entrance?
- YES___ NO___ Is a welcome sign displayed near the entrance?
- YES___ NO___ Is the Welcome sign in more than one language?
- YES___ NO___ Is the sign welcoming?
- YES___ NO___ Are signs giving clear directions from the main entrance to the office clearly posted near the main entrance?
- YES___ NO___ Is there a school directory near the main entrance that highlights frequently requested locations?
- YES___ NO___ Are the school day hours and office hours clearly noted near the main entrance?
- YES___ NO___ Are there friendly, clear instructions for all visitors to sign in at the office and obtain a building badge/pass?
- YES___ NO___ When entering the school, are visitors directed to pick up a badge that says "Parent," "Volunteer," or "Visitor," indicating that the school considers them to be especially important?
- YES___ NO___ Is a guest book kept in the main office for guests to sign when they come into the school?

Hallways, Environmental Print, and Persons with Disabilities

- YES___ NO___ Are hallways well lit?
- YES___ NO___ Do bulletin boards thank volunteers, the PTA/PTO, and community members for their contributions?
- YES___ NO___ Are bulletin boards and displays throughout the building student-oriented, colorful, well maintained, and current?
- YES___ NO___ Do pictures, bulletin boards, showcases, and displays reflect the faces of the school's children and their families, including cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity and varied family structures?
- YES___ NO___ Is there a place where district and school publications are displayed and easily accessible to visitors?
- YES___ NO___ Are restrooms clean and orderly?
- YES___ NO___ Is there signage for people with disabilities to let them know which doors are accessible?

Welcoming Walk-Through

Note-Taking – Physical Environment

Use this sheet to take notes as you conduct the Welcoming Walk-Through.

Commendations "What's Working"	Recommendations "How to make your school more welcoming"
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through Prioritizing Recommendations – Physical Environment

Use this sheet to prioritize the recommendations your group has selected to address the physical environment. List the recommendations and then first decide if the school has the power to change the problem. If the answer is “yes,” next determine if the recommendation needs to be addressed immediately or if it can wait. Finally, for those items that should be addressed immediately, rank the recommendations in the order that they should be addressed.

Recommendations: <i>How to make your school more welcoming</i>	<i>Does the school have the power to change this?</i> (Yes or No)	<i>Does it need to be addressed immediately?</i> (Yes or No)	<i>Rank Order</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through

Checklist #2 – School-Wide Practices and Policies

School-wide practices and policies can enhance or undermine a welcoming atmosphere. Your team will interview the school's principal/chief administrator. Use the list of questions on this page to conduct the interview. You can ask the principal/chief administrator to provide samples to support his/her answers. Please take notes so that you will be able to discuss the answers with your teammates at the conclusion of the interview.

(Recommendation: Choose 10-15 questions for principal.)

1. How does your back-to-school program engage families?
2. How are school emergency procedures and rules from the student conduct code outlined for families at the beginning of each year?
3. How does the school provide information packets for new families?
4. How often do teachers call each student's family early in the school year to invite them to an event or report something positive?
5. How are parent-teacher conferences offered at convenient times for parents?
6. How is school office hours convenient for parents?
7. How are the principal's office hours convenient for parents?
8. How do school staff and families have informal occasions/events during which they can get to know each other?
9. Describe alternative communication methods used with parents speaking limited English in order for them to understand the curriculum and participate in activities.
10. How is information about school and classroom policies, school rules, parent-teacher conferences, and bus and lunch schedules available to parents who don't speak English as their primary language? How is this information provided?
11. How does the school assist parents in choosing appropriate educational programs for their children?
12. How/when does the school provide bilingual speakers who can be called upon to translate or become a "buddy family" if needed?
13. How are parent leaders kept informed about important school matters and encouraged to form a parent network to pass the word?
14. How are parents and others in the school community invited to use the school for planned events?
15. How does the principal involve parents in making decisions?
16. How are volunteer opportunities available to parents and others in the school community?
17. How is parent engagement activities linked to learning?
18. How do you promote two-way communication?
19. How often do school faculty and staff go out into the community?

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through

Note-Taking – School-Wide Practices and Policies

Use this sheet to take notes as you conduct the Welcoming Walk-Through.

Commendations "What's Working"	Recommendations "How to improve school-wide practices and policies"
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through Prioritizing Recommendations – School-Wide Practices and Policies

Use this sheet to prioritize the recommendations your group has selected to address the school-wide practices and policies. List the recommendations and then first decide if the school has the power to implement new tactics. If the answer is "Yes," next determine if the recommendation needs to be addressed immediately or if it can wait. Finally, for those items that should be addressed immediately, rank the recommendations in the order that they should be addressed.

Recommendations: <i>How to improve school-wide practices and policies</i>	<i>Does the school have the power to change this? (Yes or No)</i>	<i>Does it need to be addressed immediately? (Yes or No)</i>	<i>Rank Order</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through Checklist #3 – Customer Service (Personal Interaction)

The interaction between school staff members and the public is an essential element of a welcoming atmosphere. Your team should quietly observe the school staff and visitors, watch their behavior, and listen to interactions between staff and adults who call or visit the building. This assessment isn't intended to be an evaluation tool for individual staff members, but rather is intended to evaluate the climate and culture of the building.

While you and your teammates are touring the building, please check "YES" or "NO" next to the items listed below. Be sure to take notes so you will be able to discuss your observations with your teammates at the conclusion of your tour. You can have multiple team members call the school to gather some of this data.

You may want to use tally marks to indicate the number of staff members observed and the number of times you observed a particular behavior. For example, when six staff members passed a parent in the hall, two asked if she or he could be helped, three did not acknowledge the parent at all, and one looked at the parent and smiled.

YES___ NO___ Does the office staff greet visitors quickly with a smile and in a friendly, courteous way?

YES___ NO___ Do people who answer the telephone do so in a friendly, professional way?

YES___ NO___ Is prompt attention given to telephone calls and messages?

YES___ NO___ How does the person answering the phone invite two-way communication?

YES___ NO___ When a person with limited English proficiency calls (if possible, simulated by a phone call from a team member who fluently speaks another language), how does the staff member answering the phone demonstrate patience and attempt to find someone who can speak his or her language or refers him or her to a phone number or person who can help?

YES___ NO___ When an irate parent calls (if possible, simulated by a phone call from a team member), does the staff member answering the phone remain calm, listen attentively and attempt to solve the problem or find someone who can?

YES___ NO___ Do staff members passing in the hall ask visitors if they may be of assistance?

YES___ NO___ When a team member attempts to walk through the hallway without a badge or pass, do staff members approach him or her politely and cordially and then invite or escort him or her to the office to sign in?

YES___ NO___ Are there parent and community volunteers in the building?

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through

Note-Taking – Customer Service (Personal Interaction)

Use this sheet to take notes as you conduct the Welcoming Walk-Through.

Commendations "What's Working"	Recommendations "How to improve customer service"
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through Prioritizing Recommendations – Customer Service (Personal Interactions)

Use this sheet to prioritize the recommendations your group has selected to address customer service. List the recommendations and then first decide if the school has the power to implement new behaviors. If the answer is "Yes," next determine if the recommendation needs to be addressed immediately or if it can wait. Finally, for those items that should be addressed immediately, rank the recommendations in the order that they should be addressed.

Recommendations: <i>How to improve customer service (personal interactions)</i>	<i>Does the school have the power to change this? (Yes or No)</i>	<i>Does it need to be addressed immediately? (Yes or No)</i>	<i>Rank Order</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through Checklist #4 – Written Materials and Communications

A more welcoming atmosphere is created when the written materials and communications sent from the school are clear, understandable, and meaningful to parents and others reading them. While you and your team mates review the school's handbooks, newsletters, directories, calendar of school events, web sites, fliers, and other printed materials, check "YES" or "NO" next to the items listed below. Some questions require a written sentence or phrase. Be sure to take notes so you will be able to discuss your observations with your teammates at the conclusion of your review.

- YES___ NO___ Are printed materials clear and understandable to someone who is new to the school?
- YES___ NO___ Does the schools provide a regular newsletter with information for parents? Frequency? _____
- YES___ NO___ Are printed materials free of educational jargon; are acronyms explained?
- YES___ NO___ Do printed materials use a font that is easy to read and are they neat and clean?
- YES___ NO___ Are a variety of school programs highlighted, including special education, music programs, general education, English as a Second Language, Head Start, etc.?
- YES___ NO___ Is collaboration with the school's PTA and other parent groups obvious?
- YES___ NO___ Is collaboration with the community obvious?
- YES___ NO___ Does the publications mirror the diversity of the student body and school community?
- YES___ NO___ Are parent and community volunteers are recognized?
- YES___ NO___ Do articles about staff members, volunteers, students, and their families appear in the publications?
- YES___ NO___ Is student work (drawings, photographs, poems, etc.) highlighted in the publications?
- YES___ NO___ How are translated publications made readily available and distributed to families who need them?
- YES___ NO___ Is the school website up to date? When was it last updated?
- YES___ NO___ Are hotline messages and voice mail messages up to date?
- YES___ NO___ Are phone calls returned within 24 hours?

Additional Questions:

1. How is the school website address communicated?
2. How are families notified when safety issues arise?
3. How does the school make available to families resources on parenting and becoming involved in their child's education?
4. How are new students and their families officially welcomed?
5. How are the school's educational and extra-curricular programs explained?
6. How does the school communicate regularly with non-custodial parents?

Welcoming Walk-Through Written Materials and Communications

Use this sheet to take notes as you conduct the Welcoming Walk-Through.

Commendations "What's Working"	Recommendations "How to improve written materials and communications"
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through Prioritizing Recommendations – Written Materials and Communications

Use this sheet to prioritize the recommendations your group has selected to address written material and communication. List the recommendations and then first decide if the school has the power to implement new tactics. If the answer is “Yes,” next determine if the recommendation needs to be addressed immediately or if it can wait. Finally, for those items that should be addressed immediately, rank the recommendations in the order that they should be addressed.

Recommendations: <i>How to improve customer service (personal interactions)</i>	<i>Does the school have the power to change this? (Yes or No)</i>	<i>Does it need to be addressed immediately? (Yes or No)</i>	<i>Rank Order</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

Additional Notes:

Welcoming Walk-Through FACE Team Recommendations

After reviewing Walk-Through components with your team, use charts below to list action items for school principal.

Physical Environment
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
Practices and Policies
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Welcoming Walk-Through
FACE Team Recommendations
(Continued)

Customer Service
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
Written Materials and Communications
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.