

Guide to Student Shadows

INTRODUCTION TO STUDENT SHADOWS

What is a Student Shadow?

- The process of following a student through part of a day, or longer, to experience the school environment through a student's lens.

Why Shadow a Student?

- To gain a student perspective on what is going on in your school
- To increase empathy for students' experiences
 - Shadowing is not about evaluating a classroom, student, or teacher; rather, it is an exercise in empathy. It allows you to observe the student experience in various environments throughout the school day.
- To better understand and improve the student experience
 - Use observations and insights to inform future decisions and initiatives.

Insights from Educators' Shadowing Experiences:

- *"I got valuable insights into group dynamics and students' emotional well-being. I gained a newfound appreciation for how self-conscious middle schoolers feel when they make a mistake, whether it's a botched somersault in gym or a missed vocabulary word in Spanish class. (School Counselor)*
- *Lee was struck by how often kids had to sit and be quiet while teachers lectured them. "It's an unnatural way for them to behave," she says, adding that she plans to address that to better reflect the school's commitment to keeping kids active. (Head of School)*
- *Over the course of the day, [Hughes] realized that her student was able to get away with saying nothing in any of his classes. "I want to build in more ways to make sure that students have to talk and produce, even if it's exit tickets or a Google form." She also wants to enhance communication among teachers so that quiet students don't slip through the cracks. (Eighth Grade Teacher)*

HOW TO CONDUCT AN STUDENT SHADOWS: SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Breakdown of total time estimated

<i>Plan:</i>	2 hours
<i>Do (Shadow):</i>	Half Day or Full Day
<i>Study (Debrief):</i>	1.5 hours
<i>Act (Follow Up):</i>	Case by case basis
<i>Total Time:</i>	~ 1.5 – 2 school days

PLAN

Initial Planning Day (One hour, Week 1)

- With your team, decide on a learning goal for the shadow experience. This will inform which students you reach out to.
 - **Example:** Student engagement: I want to shadow an introverted student.
 - **Example:** Student experiences: I want to better understand the challenges experienced by a transfer student.
 - Determine when you will shadow students and who else you need to loop in prior to this day. Send out emails accordingly.
 - **Example:** It looks like we can clear our schedule next Tuesday to shadow students. Let's ask the students we have in mind if they are okay with us shadowing them. After we obtain their consent, we will give teachers and staff a heads up.
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- 💡 **Tip:** If you choose to let teachers and staff know in advance, be sure to clarify that this is not an evaluation of them or students. Be clear in your purpose for shadowing and how you will follow up to share your reflections from the experience
 - 💡 **Tip:** Similar to communicating with teachers and staff, inform students you are reaching out to about your intentions for shadowing. Make it clear that participation is voluntary.
 - 💡 **Tip:** Asking teachers which students would be helpful to shadow given your learning goals for the experience can help connect you to students you might not have reached out to otherwise.

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Follow-Up Planning Day (30 minutes, Week 1)

- Meet with students and any other necessary people to further discuss Shadow Day, as needed. This can include answering questions students or staff may have.
- **Tip:** If you do not personally know the student you will shadow, it is helpful to meet in person before the initial Shadow Day for 20-30 minutes to get to know each other and further explain the purpose for shadowing. This can also be done the morning of the Shadow Day.

Final Prep Day (30 minutes, Week 2)

- Print out or create your own observation and reflection forms that you can use during Shadow Day. This should include questions you want to keep in mind throughout the day or during your reflection period.
- Consider what supplies you will need and what you need to clear off of your calendar to be able to fully participate during Shadow Day.
- **Tip:** Find observation and reflection forms at the bottom of the Overview of Shadowing resource on the last page.
- **Tip:** In order to get the most out of the experience, you should aim to observe without assumptions. Writing down what you expect to see ahead of time can help you notice when you are keeping an open mind throughout the day or looking for ways to confirm what you already think.

DO

Shadow Day (Half day or Full day, Week 2)

- Have a student-centered mindset throughout the day.
 - Your goal should be to experience the school environment through your student's eyes.
 - Ask open-ended questions, rather than leading questions.
- Capture observations
 - Take notes, including any interesting quotes you hear or things you see.
 - Do not attempt to interpret or analyze observations during shadowing experience.

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- 🔗 **Tip:** What to look for when shadowing:
- Actions that students take are informative because they highlight what they wish to accomplish. What specific actions and processes do they go through?
 - Environments show how students modify the spaces they occupy to facilitate their activities. What is the character of the study rooms, libraries, cafes, or other spaces where they spend time?
 - Interactions between students and something or someone else are telling. What is the nature of interactions that are routine versus special?
 - Objects can show unintended uses (thus changing their function and meaning). What are the objects and devices students have in their environments, and how do they relate to their activities?
 - Users are the people whose behaviors, preferences, and needs are being observed. Who is there? What are their roles and relationships? What are their values and prejudices?

STUDY

Debrief Day (1.5 hours, Week 2)

- Identify the most interesting thoughts and observations from the experience, and how they will inform future decisions and initiatives.
- Decide how and when you will share reflections with students, staff, and families. Send out emails or handwritten notes to thank participants for the experience and details on when the follow up will take place.

- 🔗 **Tip:** View observations as opportunities, using the format:

Observation -> Why?-> Opportunity

- Example: I was inactive for most of the day -> Why? Class time didn't integrate movement or mobility of students -> What if we added a physical/movement activity into class?
- Example: Students are doing so much work and we don't see that -> Why? Student work is not showcased -> What if we hosted a student pop-up to share a class project or a student passion?

- 🔗 **Tip:** Also consider using the What? -> So What? -> Now What? format to structure your debrief. An example of a protocol that follows this structure can be found at the bottom of the Overview of Shadowing resource on the last page; the attachment is titled 'Modified What So What protocol.'

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ACT

Follow Up (Case by case basis)

- Create long and short-term action plans based on the information that you learned.
 - This process may raise more questions that you would want to study further as part of your long term action plan.
 - Implement at least one small change that is influenced by your shadow experience soon after Debrief Day. Even though this change might not be long-term or fully address the issue, it builds credibility among students, staff, and families and allows you to gain more insight on the issue you are trying to address.
 - Share reflections with students, staff, and families, including the short-term and long-term action plans that you and your team would like to implement after conducting this focus group.
 - ✦ **Tip:** Continue the relationship with the participants involved. If they have now become more interested in your efforts and would like to get more involved, consider offering them an opportunity to do so.
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SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ✦ **Overview of Shadowing**
 - <https://equitablelearning.org/books/fxysrWu3/ZBwTcSx3/B6UXfR9>
 - Kit includes [observation and reflection forms](#)
- ✦ **How to Shadow a Student**
 - <https://www.shadowastudent.org/how-it-works>
 - Workbook includes [guiding questions and examples](#)
- ✦ **Ways to Begin Turning Observations -> Opportunities**
 - <https://www.shadowastudent.org/how-it-works#Act-Section>
- ✦ **Examples of Insights from Educators' Shadowing Experiences**
 - <https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/792/When-Every-Educator-in-a-Middle-School-Shadows-a-Student-for-a-Day.aspx>