

Teacher-Powered School Site Visit Guide

Visiting another school and spending time talking with their team is one of the best ways to understand the power of shared leadership. We want to ensure the time and money you spend visiting a school is well used. This guide is designed to help your team get the most out of your visit.

If you are hosting another team, thank you for sharing your school! You will find helpful suggestions throughout this guide to ensure the visit goes smoothly, to highlight the innovative teaching and leading at your site, and to provide ways to share your teacher-powered structures and processes. Look for this icon 🏠 specifically denoting tips for host sites.

At first, visiting a teacher-powered school looks similar to visiting any other strong student-centered school. To really understand how those student-centered practices result from teacher-powered governance, you need to spend time asking questions about the school's structures and processes related to decision-making and autonomies. This guide will help you organize your visit, collect and process the information you hear, and take your observations and new knowledge back to your other team members to design or improve your own school.





⚙️ Setting Up A Site Visit

There are several factors your team should consider when deciding to visit another teacher-powered school. It is logical to want to visit a school with similar grades, demographics, and environment; but there is also value in visiting schools that are different from yours. The focus in teacher-powered is on governance, how decisions are made, and which autonomies teams have secured to better meet the needs of their students. You will learn valuable ideas and strategies regardless of how similar your school is to the one you are visiting.

Start on our National Inventory of Teacher-Powered Schools (<https://www.teacherpowered.org/inventory/list>). You can sort by state, grade levels, environment, and type of school. Each school has a profile page that tells about the school's learning program, which of the 15 autonomies the school uses, how they have authority to make decisions, and includes a link to their website. Once you narrow your list, reach out to the school and ask about arranging a visit.

There are over 20 Teacher-Powered Ambassadors who work at a variety of schools across the nation (<https://www.teacherpowered.org/about/ambassadors>). These are excellent schools to visit and each ambassador has a deep understanding of teacher-powered and the variety of ways other schools beyond their own use this innovative type of school leadership. If you have the opportunity to visit an ambassador's school we encourage you to make the time!

🏠 **Looking to host more visitors?** Your team has so much to be proud of and to share with other educators. Hosting a site visit is a very positive experience. This is your chance to shine and share the innovative ways your team teaches, leads, and positively influences students.

Many schools have a section on their website for visitors. This allows prospective visitors to learn the basics about what a site visit to your school entails. Some schools schedule site visits on specific days of the month or quarter to make it easier on staff and students; others are more flexible and host visits whenever a mutually agreeable time can be found. There are also some teams that charge a nominal fee to visiting teams; this fee might cover a shared lunch or the cost of materials. Discuss with your team, or have a committee decide on a system that will work best for your students and your teachers.



To make the most of your visit:

1. Schedule time to meet before your visit as a whole team (including those who aren't participating in the visit).
 - *What are your team priorities?*
 - *What are areas in which your own team is struggling that you want to discuss with the host team?*
 - *What are the top three things your team hopes to learn?*
 - *For those that aren't attending, what do they want to know when you return?*
2. Decide on a process for gathering notes, sample documents, photos, etc., from the visit.
 - *Who will keep track of all of these items and be responsible for sharing them with others?*
3. If you are breaking into small groups during the tour, find out from your host the size limits for each group and decide who will be in each group ahead of time.
4. Spend some time on the website of the school you are visiting to learn the basic information before your visit. This helps you have more time to ask the questions you really want answered during the visit.
5. Ask your hosts if there are any documents that would be especially helpful to review ahead of time. For example: their daily schedule or organizational chart.


🏠 **Host schools:** think about what would be helpful to know ahead of time and send it to the visiting team in digital form.

Suggested Site Visit Structure


Schedule time with each site to design a visit that works best for each school and your team. Be flexible and willing to adjust, as you well know things often come up at schools that you can't plan for!

We suggest you spend at least three hours at a site and include:


1. A group meeting with an overview of the school, how they use teacher-powered practices and structures with their teacher teams, their educational program, innovative practices, and an explanation of what you will see in classrooms and around the school.

 **Host schools:** It is helpful to get the basics of your learning program and educational philosophy down before visiting classrooms and talking with panels. Consider creating a packet of information to hand out to each person visiting your school. Items to potentially include: leadership structure (including committees); grade level or subject teams; vision; mission; basic data; any MOUs or agreements you have with your board, district, union, or authorizer; teacher schedules if designed to have common prep time; EWA; etc.

2. Classroom visits by small group, 15-20 minutes per classroom. Remember that if you are there to learn about teacher-powered practices, you need more time talking with other teachers than time in classrooms.

 **Host schools:** Keep small groups to 4-6 people. This keeps the disruption to a minimum for students and allows the group to have a variety of experiences.


3. Time to talk with students, either as a panel, or more informally (perhaps over lunch). Ask students how they see their teachers collaborating or working together. Students are quite observant and are often able to articulate the impact teacher-powered has on their own education.

 **Host schools:** Include parents and community partners whenever possible.

4. Time to talk with teachers, either as a panel or in a small group. This is the most important part of your visit—make sure you arrange at least an hour for this. If possible, it is quite helpful to observe a whole staff, grade level or subject team, or committee meeting and observe firsthand how decisions are being made.

5. Closing for questions and a short debrief.

Ask ahead of time if you can take photos of classrooms, the school, and students. Each school has their own policy. When possible it is helpful to have photos to look back on to jog your memory and to share with team members who aren't attending the visit.

 **Host schools:** People will want to take photos. Make sure you communicate what is allowed and any restrictions (for example: no student faces) at the beginning of the tour.

After Your Site Visit

Hopefully your team ends the site visit inspired and excited about the potential to bring some of the things you observed and discussed back to your school. Make sure you thank your host school!


To make the most of your visit:

1. Schedule time to debrief with the whole group who attended the site visit.
 - Give time for each person to share their insights and questions.
 - Decide as a group what things that you saw and learned that you want to incorporate into your own school.
 - Keep notes and upload sample documents to a shared drive where all team members can look over the materials
2. Schedule time to share what you observed and learned with your whole team (unless your whole team was on the site visit together).
3. If you are visiting more than one school, take time after all site visits have been completed to compare your visits and the lessons learned at each site.

The best part of being teacher-powered is that YOUR TEAM gets to decide what is BEST FOR YOUR STUDENTS and school. You will be most successful when you take ideas from multiple sources, multiple schools, and multiple people and create something new as your own. What works well for one team may or may not work well for another. No teacher-powered school is the exactly same as another teacher-powered school. **This is not a model that can be replicated exactly.**

We often say that every teacher-powered school is constantly in rough draft form. What works well one year may not work well the next. Every time a new teacher joins your team, this shifts the dynamics and successful teacher-powered schools have well-developed cultural on-boarding programs that help new teachers adjust to their innovative teacher-powered practices and autonomies.

We encourage all teams to use our Steps Guide (<https://www.teachpowered.org/guide>) and Discussion Starters (<https://www.teachpowered.org/starters>) as you create and re-create your own teacher-powered schools.

 **Host schools:** No matter what stage you are in or how long you have been open, there is value in visiting other schools and building relationships with other progressive educators. Make site visits a regular part of your professional development. Hosting visiting teams is a great way to build relationships and collaborate with other schools. Consider visiting some of the teams that have visited your school.

Graphic Organizers for Your Visit

In this next section of the guide you will find two graphic organizers to help you organize your observations, thoughts, and questions. The first, starting on page 7, relates specifically to teacher-powered teams and their own observations about their work. The second, starting on page 17, is related to Education Evolving's seven Principles of Student-Centered Learning.

In an effort to help you get at the heart of what teacher-powered is and how it lives at the school you are visiting, we suggest starting with the following questions and using the graphic organizer during your time at the site. **These questions are meant as a guide and conversation starters, rather than a script.** Your team may find it helpful to divide up the graphic organizers so each person is responsible for filling out only certain sections; this will make gathering information less daunting.

*The questions in the Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer were developed by Kim Farris-Berg and Edward J. Dirkswager, based on an extensive literature review on high-performing organizations. The original purpose of this interview instrument was to evaluate whether teacher-powered schools had the same characteristics as high-performing organizations, in the research phase of the study that led to the book *Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots* (<https://www.educationevolving.org/teachers/trusting-teachers>). Modifications were made to the questions.*

A note about equity: Teacher-powered teams create student-centered learning environments where many, if not all, of the Seven Principles of Student-Centered Learning are implemented (see page 17 for more info). When these principles are fully realized, the result is learning that is not only equitable, but also designed to meet the unique needs of all students. We have not included a specific section on equity in the guide because we know that equity cannot be separated out; it is intrinsic to the design and implementation of every part of the school program and culture. We highly recommend Education Evolving's *Equity in Student-Centered Learning Design* (<https://www.educationevolving.org/equity-guide>) to use with your team.

🏠 “We feel fortunate to host teacher teams at Avalon because the experience always leaves us inspired. We appreciate the thoughtful discussions with teacher teams and learning about the creative ways they use the teacher-powered model to meet the needs of their students.”

—Carrie Bakken, Avalon School in Saint Paul, MN

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

You will learn some of the answers during your initial group orientation and classroom visits. Typically, the time set aside to specifically talk with teachers is a good time to ask these questions. Unless you are spending an entire day at the school, it is unlikely that you will have time to ask every question. Depending on your own team's needs and interests, you may choose to skip some sections and focus entirely on others. Highlight the questions you definitely want to discuss ahead of time.

1. Leadership & Governance Structure	
How is your school different from traditional schools? <i>How leaders are selected here?</i> <i>Who are the important decision-makers?</i> <i>What are their roles? Who do they serve?</i> <i>Do you have an organizational chart? Are there committees?</i>	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:
How does your teacher team have authority to make decisions? <i>Who are they accountable to?</i>	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

1. Leadership & Governance Structure (continued)	
Do students have a role in decision-making or school governance?	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:
What type of training does your team receive to build leadership capacity? <i>How are leaders trained and coached?</i> <i>How do they train and coach others?</i>	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:
2. Mission & Purpose	
How was the shared purpose developed? <i>How are school goals developed?</i> <i>Is everyone involved?</i> <i>Who has decision-making capacity?</i>	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

2. Mission & Purpose (continued)

How does your team create a continuous cycle of reflection?

How are you able to tweak what already exists, recommit to shared values, and still be a place of engagement and innovation?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

In what ways does the school culture reflects your shared purpose?

*How is your shared purpose part of discussions and decision-making (formally; informally)? Examples?
What are ways you share your mission when hiring or on-boarding new colleagues?
What are ways teachers see connections between the shared purpose and their teaching?*

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

3. Authority, Responsibility, & Accountability

Do you sense that collectively/as a group, teachers have all of the authority needed to make the school successful? How about individual teachers?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

3. Authority, Responsibility, & Accountability (continued)

What, if anything, is different-from-traditional about teachers' willingness to be held accountable for the success of this school (as a group)? Individually accountable for their students' success?

How do teachers hold one another accountable? Give examples. Is this different?

How do teachers behave differently here? Are there different expectations? If so, what kinds of differences?

How are these related to authority and accountability?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

How are collective decisions made?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

4. Collaboration

Please note: The definition of collaboration is not to form consensus. It is the act of working jointly with one another.

Give an example of collaboration working well for your team? How about not working?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

4. Collaboration (continued)

Please note: The definition of collaboration is not to form consensus. It is the act of working jointly with one another.

What are the results of this sort of collaboration?

Listen for commitment to departments or commitment to purpose.

Does everyone feel obligated to participate?

Do people feel comfortable participating fully?

Is there an open flow of ideas?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

How much time are teachers spending in the classroom vs. working on teacher-powered responsibilities in a week?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Does teachers' collaboration influence student learning? If so, how?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

4. Collaboration (continued)

Please note: The definition of collaboration is not to form consensus. It is the act of working jointly with one another.

Do you collaborate with other schools or teams? If so, how is this helpful?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Share about the time you schedule for collaboration and team building.

If you have a team retreat, describe some of the activities that have helped your team build trust and shared vision.

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Are support staff members who are not teachers included in decision making?

If so, how?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

5. Student Assessment	
What, if anything, is different-from-traditional in how you assess students?	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:
In what ways do you assess student satisfaction? <i>How about student motivation?</i>	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:
Please give an example or two of using assessments to improve the school (operations, performance). What did you do? What were the outcomes? <i>Any unsuccessful attempts? What was the response to the lack of success in that case?</i>	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

6. Innovation	
What, if anything, is different-from-traditional about the culture of innovation here? Do people (including students) come up with new ideas regularly?	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:
Share two examples of innovations you've tried—one that worked and one that didn't. What have been the consequences of each?	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:

7. Engagement & Motivation	
Are students motivated and engaged? How do you know?	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

7. Engagement & Motivation (continued)	
What, if anything, is different-from-traditional about the way you discipline here?	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:
In what ways students are aware of their own strengths, interests, and areas to improve upon?	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:
In what ways do students exercise freedom (choice, movement, interests, etc.)?	
Notes from host school:	Questions/ideas for your own team:

Teacher-Powered Team Graphic Organizer

8. Learning Culture, for Teachers and Students

This is covered more in the section on student-centered learning. Please note, if needed: A culture that supports learning is often characterized as one where teachers and students feel supported in being curious, admitting difficulty, and trying things in new ways.

What, if anything, is different-from-traditional about the culture of learning here among teachers?

Is there a value for professional development? What kind of development? Do you perceive any social costs for admitting difficulty? Have you in other teaching jobs?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

What, if anything, is different-from-traditional about the way students learn here?

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Is learning always teacher-to-student here? Do teachers always act as instructors? (e.g. Do they act, too, as 'guides' or 'advisors'?)

Notes from host school:

Questions/ideas for your own team:

Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer

Education Evolving believes that teacher-powered governance is the most effective way to create student-centered learning programs and ultimately increase student success. By moving the decision-making to those closest to students, teachers are better able to meet the unique needs of their school community. As Krista Kaput writes in *Evidence for Student-Centered Learning*, “It’s time to design a system that not only sets all students up for success but that is also equitable and meets their unique needs.” (<https://www.educationevolving.org/content/evidence-for-student-centered-learning>) Teacher-powered governance allows teams to do just this.

At each site you will learn ways the host team uses teacher-powered practices and structures; and at the same time you will be looking and listening for evidence that there is student-centered learning intentionally occurring. Some of this you will see and hear in classrooms; other times it might be when listening to or interacting with students, families, and teachers.

On the next page is a graphic that Education Evolving uses to illustrate the seven Principles of Student-Centered Learning. When these principles are realized the result is learning that is equitable and designed so all students can be successful.

Instructions for the Student-Centered Graphic Organizer: As you tour each school, spend time in classrooms, and listen to and interact with students, teachers, and families. Use this graphic organizer to capture evidence of how you see each of the seven Principles of Student-Centered Learning being lived out in practice, and any questions you have. Then, plan to go over the “questions” boxes during your team debrief, and fill out the “design ideas” boxes together as a group.

🏠 **Host schools:** It is a good exercise for your own team to think about which principles you use in your own learning program and which ones you may want to incorporate or improve on.

Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer

Principles of Student-Centered Learning



Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer



Students develop strong relationships with other students and with adults who care about them, believe in their potential, and hold them to high expectations.

Evidence observed at the school:	
Questions:	
What design ideas does this spark for your school?	

Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer



Students are supported in meeting fundamental physical, psychological, and safety needs. Students get help navigating social services, or may receive them directly in a community school environment.

Evidence observed at the school:	
Questions:	
What design ideas does this spark for your school?	

Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer



Students are fully embraced for who they are, in the context of their communities and cultures, and feel that they belong. They develop a positive sense of their own identities, including elements such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation and see those identities reflected at school.

Evidence observed at the school:	
Questions:	
What design ideas does this spark for your school?	

Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer



Students take responsibility for their learning, exercising choice to pursue their interests and passions, and agency to shape their school environment. Teachers serve increasingly as facilitators and guides.

Evidence observed at the school:	
Questions:	
What design ideas does this spark for your school?	

Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer



Students solve problems that exist in the real world, learning skills and knowledge in a multidisciplinary context that they will use in their future lives and careers.

Evidence observed at the school:	
Questions:	
What design ideas does this spark for your school?	

Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer



Students advance by demonstrating mastery of clearly articulated learning objectives, rather than by age, receiving extra support when they struggle and new challenges when they're ready to move on.

Evidence observed at the school:	
Questions:	
What design ideas does this spark for your school?	

Student-Centered Learning Graphic Organizer



Students have flexibility in when and where they learn within the school, as well as places outside of school (at home, out in community, at local businesses, etc.) and times beyond the typical school day and year.

Evidence observed at the school:	
Questions:	
What design ideas does this spark for your school?	



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