

# First and Lasting Impressions

## A Tool for Assessing Your School Environment

A high quality and effective educational program is always the first and most important priority for any school. Beyond that, how do you stand out when there are many quality options for families? It comes down to the school experience. First impressions can leave a lasting impression. How a person experiences your school as a new or regular visitor will determine their level of commitment and involvement and what they tell others about you. Visitors to your school should be able to tell from what they see and the types of interactions they have that your school is a caring place focused on the needs of students – a place where effective learning is taking place. They should be delighted by what they find...so much so that they go out and tell their friends about it!

Look at your school from the perspective of an outsider...someone visiting your school for the first time. How does your school appear? How are visitors of all ages treated in person and over the phone? What kind of programs and information are available for families and visitors? Does your website give visitors a clear impression of the character of your school and what it offers for families? Complete this checklist yourself. Have a “secret shopper” – someone objective who’s never been to your school before – give their honest impressions based on the checklist. Ask your parent leadership to complete this assessment to see what they think. Invite multiple persons to complete the checklist to obtain a well-rounded perspective.

### Creating an exceptional school experience

Score what you see/experience using the following scoring guide. For first-time visitors, some characteristics may not be apparent due to limited exposure to the school culture. These items should be marked N/A and not included in the overall average/scoring.

#### Scoring Guide:

- 4 – Exceptional
- 3 – Good
- 2 – Average
- 1 – Needs Improvement
- 0 – No evidence

N/A – Not applicable/Not able to assess

Total your points for each category and average the number to provide an overall score for the given category.

### Exterior Environment

Score	Characteristics
	Visitor and disabled parking spaces and are clearly marked and located near the front door.
	The grounds are well kept and free of debris, trash and weeds. Landscaped areas are neat, attractive and well maintained.
	Sidewalks and steps are in good repair, with no dangerous cracks.
	Entrances are plainly marked with welcoming signs that kindly point visitors to the front office for sign-in.
	It is readily apparent which door is the main entrance.
	The building looks clean from the outside (sparkling windows; no unsightly dirt, marks or rust on exterior surfaces; no cobwebs in corners).
	Exterior lights are in working order and come on when the sun sets.
	Exterior signs are welcoming and clearly mark important landmarks on the school campus.
	Signs/message marquee is up-to-date and welcoming. Signs often include student congratulations, thanks to supporters and the community.
	Painted surfaces and/or murals look clean and fresh, free of chips and wear/tear.
	Playground areas/athletic fields clean, free of trash/debris and weeds, and well maintained.
	Playground equipment/areas and/or athletic fields are appropriate and well suited for the student use.
Total Points	
Average Rating	
Evaluators comments:	

### Interior Environment

	The lobby/front entrance is clean and appealing.
	“Welcome to Our School” signs are visible and clearly, but politely, direct visitors to the main office.
	Evidence of student work is on display in a colorful, attractive way (student artwork, achievement awards, notices of school events, etc.)
	Hallways are brightly lit and all fixtures work properly.
	Walls are clean or freshly painted. They should be the opposite of drab and dingy.
	Displays of student work or posters/announcements are organized and uncluttered. Out-of-date notices/announcements are removed.
	Drinking fountains are clean and in working order.
	Hallways are clean, free of dirt, debris, trash and cobwebs.
	Classrooms are clean, well organized and reflective of a positive learning environment with age-appropriate décor and signage/posters.
	The library is bright and cheery and decorated appropriate to the age level it serves.
	The cafeteria/lunch room is clean, bright and free of debris/trash. The environment is appealing for eating. Signs on the walls or murals reflect school personality and/or encourage healthy eating.
	Bathrooms are clean and orderly.
	The teachers’ workroom/lounge is cheerful, comfortable and conducive to giving teachers a respite from the classroom.
	Trash receptacles and mop buckets are discreetly stored out of sight when not in current use.
	<b>Total Points</b>
	<b>Average Rating</b>
	<b>Evaluator comments:</b>

**School Office Environment**

Score	Characteristics
	The school office is clean and tidy, bright and cheerful.
	The appearance of the school office reflects the personality of your school (i.e., caring, warm, student-focused, professional).
	There are places for visitors to sit and wait if needed.
	Reading material about the school and district is available for visitors (PTA/O newsletter, event flyers, principal’s newsletter, school handbook, district newsletter, district annual report).
	Age-appropriate reading material is available for children in the waiting area.
	Office staff members are welcoming to visitors – they greet visitors promptly (initiate contact) and quickly ask to offer assistance.
	Office personnel’s appearance reflects a positive, professional image.
	Those assisting visitors appear helpful and service-oriented.
	If one staff member is busy assisting someone else, another staff member in the office quickly offers assistance.
	The secretary’s name is on display (providing a personal connection).
	Visitor badges are available.
	Sign-in logs are easy to find and clearly indicate their purpose if there are separate ones for visitors and/or checking students in and out for appointments or other reasons.
	Voice mail messages and hotline numbers are up to date and include a friendly message saying the phone call will be returned as soon as possible.
	School letterhead, envelopes and fax cover sheets are updated with the most recent information.
	The office layout is designed for optimal interaction with parents/visitors (office staff is situated close to the front for prompt greeting of visitors...it is apparent to visitors who to check in with).
	<b>Total Points</b>
	<b>Average Rating</b>
	<b>Evaluator comments:</b>

**School Office Communications**

Score	Characteristics
	Telephones are answered promptly (within three rings) and professionally.
	Those assisting callers appear helpful and service-oriented.
	Person answering the phone has basic, up-to-date information readily accessible.
	Callers are put through to appropriate parties promptly (those transferring calls ensure there is someone on the end of the transfer before releasing the call).
	If staff do not know the answer to a question, they offer to find the answer and call the person back with the answer (instead of making the individual continue to search for the right person).
	Phone messages and emails are returned the same day or no later than within 24 hours when possible.
	<b>Total Points</b>
	<b>Average Rating</b>
	<b>Evaluator comments:</b>

### Website

Score	Characteristics
	The school website is well organized and easy to navigate.
	It is easy for parents and others to find what they're looking for on your website.
	The website is inclusive of all classes and activities at the school.
	The website is frequently updated and has news that changes on a daily or weekly basis.
	Photos on the website give visitors a glimpse into the character and climate of your school.
	Teacher/class websites are up to date.
	The website provides resources for parents to help their children as learners (homework help, class syllabus, tutorials, class expectations, etc.).
	School forms and flyers are posted online and easy to access.
	Up-to-date school documents can be found on your website (handbook, course guide, behavior guide, curriculum guides, etc.)
	It is apparent from the school website that the school belongs to the Fort Osage School District (i.e., district logo is shown on the school website).
	There is a link to the district website on the front page of the school website.
	A link on the website tells "About your school" – what makes the school unique...how the school meets the needs of student learners...what makes the school exceptional.
	A link on the website introduces visitors to the school principal and shares his/her philosophy on meeting the needs of students.
	The school's address, phone number, email address (or link to "contact us" box) and school hours are shown on the front page of your school's website
	An updated school improvement plan is included on the school website and easily located.
	The website includes the opportunity for two-way communication ("Give Us Your Feedback" link, email contact form, surveys, etc.)
	<b>Total Points</b>
	<b>Average Rating</b>
	<b>Evaluator comments:</b>

### Written communication

	The principal uses a variety of methods to communicate with parents on a weekly or monthly basis (email, newsletter, flyers as needed, website, etc.)
	Communication tools clearly and consistently reflect the mission of the school, as well as the school character.
	Key messages about the school are repeated in school publications (important points that people should know about this school).
	Communication tools include updated calendar information.
	Communication tools include accolades for students, staff and parent/community volunteers.
	Communication tools include news about important events or issues related to the school and/or the district.
	Communication tools provide information on how to contact school personnel (phone, email, etc.).
	Communication tools invite parent involvement and provide concrete ways parents can get involved.
	Communication tools are well written and factual, with no grammatical errors or misspelled words.
	<b>Total Points</b>
	<b>Average Rating</b>
	<b>Evaluator comments:</b>

### Teacher interaction

Score	Characteristics
	Teachers provide parents with information on how to contact them and encourage them to call or email with concerns, comments or ways to help their children succeed.
	At the beginning of the year, teachers ask parents about their children's strengths, challenges and interests in order to build relationships and better understand students' individual needs (letter, phone call, email, questionnaire, home visit).
	Teachers know and address students by name.
	Teachers communicate with parents with good news as well as bad (email, notes home, phone calls).
	School pride is evident among the staff at this school.
	Teachers' appearance reflects a positive, professional image.
	Teachers send complimentary notes (mail, email, phone) to students and fellow staff members.
	Teachers share classroom expectations with students and parents (class/course information, behavior, homework).
	Teachers arrange parent-teacher conferences at a time convenient for parents and help prepare parents for what to expect.
	Teachers provide weekly log of accomplishments for students to communicate to parents what they accomplished in school that week.
	Teachers often praise students and also share praise for their students with others outside the classroom.
	Teachers treat students with respect and understanding.
	Teachers treat all school employees as professionals.
	Teachers' voice mail is updated and contains a friendly greeting ensuring they will return the call as soon as possible.
	Teachers promptly return phone messages and emails from parents, staff or community members the same day or no later than within 24 hours when possible.
	<b>Total Points</b>
	<b>Average Rating</b>
	<b>Evaluator comments:</b>

### Programs/services for students

Score	Characteristics
	The school and/or school PTO/A provide a variety of opportunities throughout the school year for family events (for entertainment and/or educational purposes).
	Parents are sincerely invited into leadership positions on the school improvement team and/or PTA/O organizations and given meaningful opportunities to impact the programs and services of their school.
	Parent programs are offered that provide parents with tools/knowledge to help their children learn.
	The school makes efforts to remove barriers to school involvement (holds events at parent-convenient times, provides babysitting or food as needed).
	The school offers programs before or after school that promote student involvement.
	The school offers programs before or after school that assist students who need extra help with their academics.
	School activities and events promote a sense of community.
	<b>Total Points</b>
	<b>Average Rating</b>
	<b>Evaluator comments:</b>