**Comparing the Leading Classroom Observation Tools**

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Different observation tools are available to suit various needs. Policy makers in states from coast to coast are demanding more rigorous teacher evaluations that lead to real improvements in instruction—and school systems are changing their practices as a result.

Central to this effort are software tools that help school leaders record their observations during classroom walkthoughs and share this information with teachers to foster their professional growth.

Many programs include free apps for conducting walkthroughs using a mobile device—though not all solutions can be used both online and offline. Other features to compare include the software’s flexibility (can it be customized to meet each school’s evaluation needs?) and what sharing and reporting capabilities it includes.

To help school leaders compare some of the leading options, we’ve assembled this handy guide.

eCOVE Observer

**Platform**: Runs on Windows and Macintosh laptops and netbooks; each computer license includes a free license to an iOS or Android app.

**How it works**: The system can be used in walkthroughs, sit-downs, and in-depth observations. Evaluators can create objective data collection tools, plus checklist and scale tools. Observers can take notes or check off from a checklist.

**Sharing**: Users can print or eMail reports to teachers and other stakeholders.

**Customization**: Users can choose from a number of add-on tools for further customization.

**Cost**: Each license for a computer-based eCOVE edition includes one complimentary syncing license for an iPad, iPhone, or Android device; licenses for additional devices syncing to the same computer are available. A single license for the basic edition is $189, with bulk licensing available. [http://www.ecove.net](http://www.ecove.net/) [2]

eWalk (Media-X)

**Platform**: Web-based, with free offline clients for iOS, Android, Kindle Fire, Playbook, Mac/Windows laptops, Palm, BlackBerry, and Windows Mobile.

**How it works**: Users can collect data through web-based forms or use a handheld device to perform walkthroughs, assessments, building audits, and more. An authoring system allows users to create their own data collection templates for observations or surveys. The system includes more than 15 question types, such as rubrics, checklists, drop-downs, and a selection of pre-built counters and timers. Built-in graphs, charts, and dashboards can be updated and aggregated instantly.

**Sharing**: Data collection templates can be shared across an entire district or with individual schools and users. Users can attach photos as part of an observation, or attach a PDF or other files. **Customization**: Yes; see above.

**Cost**: Varies; contact Media-X for details. [http://www.media-x.com](http://www.media-x.com/) [3]

iObservation (Learning Sciences International)

**Platform**: Web-based, with offline functionality available for buildings and locations without wireless access.

**How it works**: iObservation is a complete instructional and leadership improvement system. It provides content and video resources that elevate classroom walkthroughs above traditional observation checklists—including electronic access to Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching, Robert Marzano’s Art and Science of Teaching Observation and Feedback Protocol, and Douglas Reeves’ Leadership Performance Matrix. The system can be used to conduct informal classroom walkthroughs, teacher observations, instructional rounds, and teacher self-assessments.

**Sharing**: Feedback can be sent to teachers immediately following the classroom visit for a transparent and effective process.

**Customization**: Able to be customized based on school or district needs.

**Cost**: Varies; contact the company for details. [http://www.iObservation.com](http://www.iObservation.com/) [4]

Observation 360 (School Improvement Network)

**Platform**: Web-based, with apps for both iOS and Android devices.

**How it works**: Administrators can use Observation 360 to conduct observations on almost any mobile device. They can use the software’s standard observation templates and evaluation rubrics, which are based on a framework developed by educational consultant Harvey Silver, or they can create their own. In this way, the system supports virtually any framework or methodology. Users also can attach an unlimited number of prescribed resources to any template, including links, videos, and courses.

**Sharing**: Once an observation is finished, it can be sent immediately to the teacher who was observed, as well as other administrators who should have access. Teachers receive observations with prescribed content (videos, links, files to download, or lesson plans) attached by the observer based on the observation results. The dialogue created by the observation then continues, as the system tracks the educator’s use of the prescribed content, as well as the continuing conversation between the teacher and observer during this learning loop. Administrators also can grant access to determine which templates are used by which specific observers (and in which schools). For example, all third-grade math teachers in an entire district can be observed with the exact same template, while all the science teachers can be observed using a different one. This ensures confidentiality, compliance, and consistency throughout a district.

**Customization**: Observation 360 is built to customize. Observations can include any number of data points, with a choice of nine different ways to record the observation information (multiple choice, check box, open ended, etc.).

**Cost**: $1,995 per site, including an unlimited number of individual licenses. Observation 360 also is included within School Improvement Network’s educator effectiveness system. <http://www.schoolimprovement.com/products/observation-360> [5]

Observe4success

**Platform**: Web-based only.

**How it works**: The system is fully customizable; forms can include any categories with any look-fors that the user enters. Users can customize the way they collect data as well: with checkboxes, open-response questions, point scales, timers, and/or drop-down menus. Users can create as many custom forms as they’d like, at no additional cost. Once an observation has been logged, a user can upload any type of file and attach it to the observation, including audio, video, photos, and lesson plans.

**Sharing**: The system is intended to create opportunities for face-to-face conversations and collaboration between teachers and administrators. Observations can be eMailed to teachers, downloaded as PDFs, or exported to Excel files. All of the data are aggregated for a given teacher, specific grade level, school department, and schoolwide to identify trends over time. These trends are displayed graphically, making them easy to understand.

**Customization**: Observe4success’ biggest differentiator is its ease of use and customization, the company says. Its interface is simple, clean, and user-friendly, allowing any administrator to jump in and start the observation and feedback process.

**Cost**: $1,200 per school site for a single school. Districts get bulk discounts based on the number of schools purchasing. [http://www.observe4success.com](http://www.observe4success.com/) [6]

**Teacher Compass (Pearson)**

**Platform**: Web-based, with support for mobile devices both online and offline.

**How it works**: Part of Pearson’s Compass suite of software, Teacher Compass contains a flexible rubric builder that enables districts to use any framework for which they have rights. The software enables traditional, self, and peer observations; walkthroughs, instructional rounds, formative observations, and summative evaluations; and differentiated professional development. School leaders can use a variety of rating scales, checklists, open responses, and artifacts (videos, documents, and images).

**Sharing**: Teachers and administrators have the ability to upload and rate artifacts such as lesson plans, student work, and classroom videos, and administrators can make automatic recommendations of relevant professional development. In addition, teachers can provide their own response to a given observation prior to submission.

**Customization**: Able to be customized based on school or district needs.

**Cost**: Site and individual pricing is available; contact the company for details. <http://www.pearsonschool.com/index.cfm?locator=PS1sBo> [7]

Teachscape Reflect

**Platform**: Web-based service, available on handheld wireless devices (iPhone, iPod Touch, BlackBerry, Android), tablets (iPad), and laptops. Apps can be used to collect data even when there is no internet connectivity.

**How it works**: Teachscape Reflect is a complete teacher observation and evaluation system. Users can observe and assess the quality of instruction through informal walkthroughs, formal teacher observations, and evaluations. Standard look-fors incorporate the research of Robert Marzano (High Yield Strategies), Benjamin Bloom (Bloom’s Taxonomy), Phillip Schlechty (student engagement), Charlotte Danielson (Framework for Teaching), and Carol Ann Tomlinson (differentiating instruction). The system allows districts to integrate multiple measures of teaching, including student growth data; student, parent, and peer surveys; teacher self-assessments; and lesson plans and other artifacts. Longitudinal reports combine data from multiple observations to provide a view of teaching practices over time.

**Sharing**: Users can eMail results to the teacher and any administrator; plan and schedule observations and post-observation conferences; and invite the teacher to include artifacts, lesson plans, and self-assessments. What’s more, learning coaches can use video to augment their lesson analysis—and teachers can view their own teaching, along with observer and coach feedback, online.

**Customization**: Districts can configure evaluation processes and workflows according to their own processes; add and edit rubrics and surveys for walkthroughs and observations; and set their own formulas and weighting rules to calculate summative evaluation scores.

**Cost**: Priced per user; contact the company for details. <http://www.teachscape.com/products/reflect> [8]

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