

Cultivating Trust in Video Observations

Successful implementation of video observations requires a safe environment for teachers and students—one in which the right privacy processes and policies are in place and communicated to all involved parties.

In this section, we use the findings of the [Best Foot Forward project](#), a study of video technology in classroom observations, to provide an overview of common concerns around video observations, strategies to address

concerns from teachers and parents, and tips on how to create a trustworthy environment with video.

Please note that you will need to work with your own legal team to assess the policies and requirements in your own state or district. The content here is based on our experience in the Best Foot Forward project from 2012-2015 and may not apply to you, as laws around videotaping in schools are constantly being revised and updated.

IN THIS SECTION:

- What are the concerns that teachers may have about video observations, and what can I do to alleviate those concerns?
- What steps do I need to take in order to be ready to implement video observations in my district or school?
- What should I communicate to parents about the use of video in their child's classroom?

STEP 1:
CREATE A SAFE
ENVIRONMENT FOR
TEACHERS

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STEP 2:
COMMUNICATE WITH
PARENTS AND MANAGE
STUDENT PRIVACY
CONCERNS

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“I’m very shy, I guess. I don’t like people in my classroom. It’s very awkward. After a while I can get over it, but I’m still aware that they’re there, and it’s very uncomfortable for me.”

Best Foot Forward teacher, California (2014)

Step 1: Create a Safe Environment for Teachers

▶ **With the proliferation** of high-stakes in-person observations, it is understandable that teachers may be more nervous than ever to open their doors to administrators or external observers, even when an observation is not for evaluative purposes. Teachers may be even more apprehensive about taping their instruction and sharing a video with others. Who will see it? How will it be stored? Could it be used against me? Is it a permanent record? Some teachers may be concerned about security and access to their videos. For other teachers, it may be the first time that they watch themselves teach, and they may feel exposed and vulnerable. For these reasons, creating an environment where teachers can feel safe sharing instruction is critical.

When you first introduce the idea of using video to support teacher learning and development, you will want to be prepared to address the benefits and risks of using video with teachers. It is important to share that teacher-controlled video observations can actually help increase the feelings of safety and trust that teachers have in being observed. For example, if video observations are used for evaluative purposes, school districts can audit the quality of classroom observations against master raters’ scores and ensure that teachers are getting the fairest possible evaluation. Teachers in the Best Foot Forward project found the video observation process significantly fairer than an in-person observation process.

Furthermore, video can help improve the conditions for discussing professional practice with a manager. In the Best Foot Forward project, researchers found that video observations created the conditions for less adversarial feedback following an observation. As one teacher from California described:

It became an actual conversation. It wasn’t them going through a checklist and saying, ‘We saw this, this, this, do you agree? Okay.’ It was more of, ‘I noticed that...,’ and then we had the video to support it. It didn’t feel personal. It wasn’t an attack.

As such, video observations can help foster a culture of collaboration and improve relationships among teachers and observers.

After learning the benefits of video observations, teachers will also want to know whether videos can be used beyond the intended purpose. Here we describe some steps you can take to address those concerns.

GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR VIDEO OBSERVATIONS

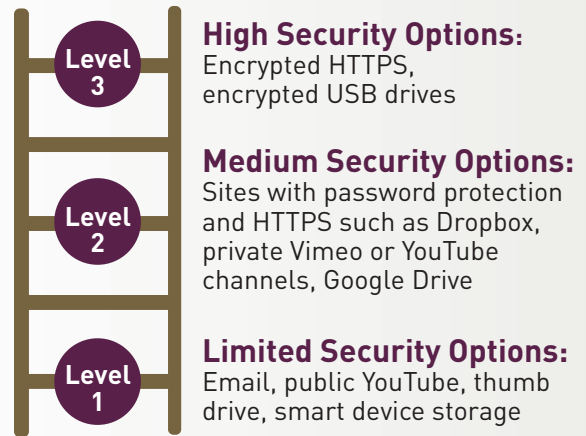
Investigate what privacy policies and practices exist in your district. Most schools and districts have a policy around video use. Local collective bargaining laws may also exist and, if so, must be taken into consideration. A clear understanding of your district's policy environment will allow you to communicate more effectively with both parents and teachers.

Communicate! Share your privacy plan with teachers and parents. Teachers need to be assured that the recorded video will be handled and stored in a secure manner. You may need to create consent forms for teachers if the video will be used for purposes outside of evaluation and professional development. Parents will also need to be informed about video use and what it means for their child and be provided an opportunity to opt out. Consider how teachers will be involved in parent outreach.

Discuss the purpose of video observations with teachers and highlight the benefits. Be clear about the intended use of the video in your school/district, whether it's for evaluation, peer-to-peer collaboration, self-reflection, etc. Think through the messages that you convey about the use of video as teachers may feel apprehensive about the idea of recording themselves and sharing their video with an observer. Emphasize the goal of growth and learning as a standard for evaluation, as this Delaware administrator from the Best Foot Forward project describes: "We really try to stay away from 'gotchas' as this is always an opportunity for us to grow... [We tell our teachers] it's not about you being in trouble or not getting it right." Remind teachers of the benefits of recording their classroom practice, especially as it relates to giving their students a great education.

Allow teachers to record the lesson of their choice and choose what observers see. In traditional in-person observations, evidence is collected and owned by the observer. This

Climbing the Security Ladder



creates the conditions for dispute over what happened during an observed lesson. However, when teachers are co-owners of evidence, taping and choosing what gets seen, they become much more engaged in the process. By shifting the locus of ownership, the teacher became the primary investigator. Having agency in one's own learning process creates the conditions for safety and learning.

Recognize that teachers might be nervous about the feedback process. Teachers may be worried about being judged negatively by their peers or their administrator, so it is important to emphasize that the video observation process is not meant to be a form of monitoring or fodder for negative accountability. Allow teachers to identify areas for improvement on their own, and scaffold their learning process by asking guiding questions.

Encourage teachers to regularly share their videos with other teachers. If teachers feel uncomfortable sharing video of their classroom with externally appointed observers, start with low-stakes peer observations. You might let teachers choose a qualified friend or colleague to give them feedback. Teachers will learn from one another and become more comfortable in the process. ◻

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Take all steps necessary to ensure data privacy and security.** Read our [Video Privacy Questions](#) to ensure that you have covered all of the necessary steps.
- 2. Assess your existing school climate.** If trust between teachers and administrators is a challenge at a school, video can assist school staff in building their relationships, but start with using video for formative feedback to scaffold trust and feelings of safety.
- 3. Explain the process and its benefits to teachers.** Prepare consent forms for teachers and students as needed. Review our customizable sample forms if you need examples.
- 4. Give teachers a choice in what lesson is recorded and shared.** Remember that video observations should be optional.
- 5. Encourage teachers to build networks of support and feedback within schools.** The culture around video starts with the person implementing it. Create a culture of collaboration that shows that teachers are supported, valued, and heard.
- 6. Collect feedback.** Be sure to check in with teachers who are using video to learn what they like about the process and what is challenging or uncomfortable. Use this feedback to continuously improve your processes.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT TOOLS

TOOL ID	RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION	INTENDED AUDIENCE
C1A	Teacher Letter: Benefits of Video Observations and Common Questions about Privacy and Video Use	A template letter to teachers highlighting the benefits of using video for classroom observations and evaluation, as well as responses to possible concerns over privacy	Teachers (to be modified by district or school administrators)
C1B	Video Privacy Questions: A Timeline	Checklist of the important steps to take when implementing video	District administrators, school administrators, instructional leaders
C1C	Sample Teacher Consent Form	Sample teacher form that can be customized for use in your district and that allows teachers to select what level of video observation they would like to implement	Teachers (to be modified by district or school administrators)
C1D	Collective Bargaining Agreement (Sample)	Sample agreement from a district using video; can be used as a reference when discussing video with your teachers' union	District administrators

Parents will have questions: How can teachers effectively harness the power of video observations while protecting student privacy?

Step 2: Communicate with Parents and Manage Student Privacy Concerns

► **Maintaining student privacy** and clear communication with parents will be a vital part of implementing video observations in your school or district. Parents will have several questions about the role of video in the classroom, including the intended purpose of the video, what their child's participation involves, how the videos will be used, and the benefits and risks of their child appearing in the videos.

You should be transparent in your communications to parents and inform parents that:

- Students are not the subject of the observation;
- Video will be used for educational purposes only, not for commercial endeavors;
- Video will be used to support teachers' development, which will allow them to identify their strengths and areas for growth, in addition to making sure student needs are met;
- All video data collected will be handled in a secure manner;
- Student participation is always voluntary and dependent upon their parents' consent; and
- Students will not be penalized if parents do not allow students to be on tape.

Depending on your staff capacity, additional techniques to maintain student privacy may be used, such as face blurring. Certain software programs, such as Adobe Premiere, Final Cut Pro, iMovie, or Camtasia include features that allow you to blur a face on screen (or even track a specific pixel pattern, such as a face, depending on your tech savviness), and instructions can be found online. YouTube also provides a face blurring technology for videos shared through their platform.

TYPES OF PARENTAL CONSENT FORMS

Is your media release form opt-in or opt-out?

Opt-out (passive) consent:

Parents only need to return the form if they do not allow their child to participate.

Opt-in (active) consent:

Parents must return the form regardless of whether they choose to give permission.


There are a number of ways to inform parents about video observations, including webinars, back-to-school night sessions, sending letters home, or presenting at PTA meetings. It may be beneficial to speak with a few parent leaders and discuss the best way to reach parents with concerns. We have developed a few tools that can serve as a starting point in your efforts to communicate with them.

STUDENT DATA PRIVACY

While many states and districts do not currently have policies or laws in place that govern the use of video technology in classrooms, it is important that you are aware of regulations that may exist in your district. It is also important that you review your district's policy on consent—every district has specific requirements.

Currently, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) does not specifically cover the use of video observations for teachers because these video recordings are managed by teachers.

However, classroom video observations will be subject to regulations under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) when identifiable students appear on film. Even if the video is not maintained for the purpose of student record keeping, a video of students is treated as a student record. FERPA does not apply if students cannot be identified in the video. In all other cases, parental consent forms should describe the specific security features in place and grant permission for the videos to be shared on the Internet or any other medium. Because the video is considered to be a student record, parents have the right to request access to any video of their child. If this happens, it then becomes necessary to mask other students in the class because their records may not be disclosed. Also note that under FERPA, videos may only be used to share best practices when in the legitimate interest of the district, and then only within the district. We strongly recommend that you use active (opt-in) parental consent forms to receive permission to record students.

Please refer to your district or state department of education website or contact them directly to learn more about your area's policies and practices. When implementing policies that include minors, audio and/or video recordings, and the Internet, you should always consult with your legal team. In addition, there are a multitude of resources on the web that focus on this issue, and we have included some of these below. 

WHAT IS FERPA?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act is a federal law that was created to govern the protection of student records in all schools who receive funds from the U.S. Department of Education. Classroom observation videos are considered a student record and therefore will be governed by FERPA, so you should **always consult with your district's legal team** before enacting policy. You can learn more about FERPA on the [Department of Education website](#).

WHAT IS COPPA?

The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act is a Federal Trade Commission regulation that prevents the online collection of personal information from children under 13. It regulates what a Web site operator must include in a privacy policy, dictates when and how to seek verifiable consent from a parent, and what responsibilities an operator has to protect children's privacy and safety online. Classroom observation videos are uploaded by teachers and therefore are not governed by COPPA, but you should **always consult with your district's legal team** before enacting policy. You can learn more about COPPA and schools on the [FTC website](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Review the current policies that may exist in your state or district around student data use.**
2. **Take all steps necessary to ensure data privacy and security.** Read our [privacy timeline](#) to ensure that you have covered all of the necessary steps, and verify that you are in compliance with local, state, and federal laws by reviewing your policies with a legal team.
3. **Communicate clearly and thoroughly with parents.** Review the [frequently asked questions](#) to ensure that you have addressed the most common questions and concerns.
4. **Engage in discussions.** The idea of videotaping can make parents uncomfortable, so be sure to open doorways for ongoing communication of concerns and feedback.



PARENT COMMUNICATION TOOLS

TOOL ID	RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION	INTENDED AUDIENCE
C2A	Common Questions Around Privacy and Video Use: Parents	A list of frequently asked questions that you can share with students' parents	Parents (to be modified by district or school administrators, instructional leaders, or teachers)
C2B	Student Privacy: What Parents Need to Know about Video	Slides that can be customized to inform parents about video observations and what it means for the students involved	Parents (to be modified by district or school administrators, instructional leaders, or teachers)
C2C	Student Media Release Form: Opt-in	Sample forms that can be customized for your context	Parents (to be modified by district or school administrators)
C2D	Student Media Release Form: Opt-out		
C2E	Face Blurring: When Footage Requires Anonymity	Tools from YouTube to conveniently blur faces in a video	District technology staff