



## Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

### *A Standardized Assessment of Quality in Head Start Classrooms*

CLASS is an observational tool that assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions at the classroom level in center-based preschools. Head Start uses the CLASS: Pre-K tool to assess three domains of interactions:<sup>1</sup>

- **Emotional support:** CLASS assesses whether everyday teacher interactions with children promote a positive classroom climate. This includes evaluating teacher responsiveness and sensitivity to children, teacher regard for student perspectives, and the degree to which the classroom climate is emotionally supportive.
- **Classroom organization:** CLASS assesses the “management of children’s behavior, time and attention in the classroom,” with an emphasis on predictability and stability. This includes evaluating the consistency of schedules and routines and the quality of guidance or teaching strategies.
- **Instructional support:** CLASS assesses how teachers implement the curriculum to promote child cognitive and language development. This includes evaluating teacher support of children’s analytical and conversational skills and the quality of teacher feedback.

The three domains are measured on a seven-point scale, where higher scores indicating higher quality of teacher-child interactions.

For Head Start center-based programs, CLASS reviewers observe and assess teacher-child interactions in a random sample of classrooms. The scores of all observed classrooms are then averaged to determine whether satisfactory classroom quality has been achieved by the grantee as a whole. In fiscal year 2012, average Head Start grantee-level scores were 5.90 for emotional support, 5.45 for classroom organization, and 2.98 for instructional support.<sup>2</sup> As a comparison, a 2009 study examining the quality of pre-kindergarten classrooms (including Head Start classrooms) serving low-income children in 11 states found lower classrooms scores in the CLASS instructional support and emotional support domains (2.04 and 5.49, respectively).

### **When and how is CLASS used for Head Start quality assessments?**

Head Start uses CLASS to evaluate classroom quality in compliance with the 2007 Head Start Act, which mandates that research-based observational tools focused on teacher-child interactions be used for classroom quality assessment. The Office of Head Start maintains that teacher-child interactions are important, given research showing that adult-child interactions are key forces behind child development and learning.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Head Start incorporates CLASS assessments into two major monitoring activities: the on-site federal monitoring reviews and the Designation Renewal System (DRS).

- A CLASS assessment is incorporated into the Child Development and Education domain of each grantee’s **triennial on-site federal monitoring review**. Grantees receive a report with their scores for each of the three CLASS interaction domains, but the triennial review does not implement any penalties in response to low CLASS scores.<sup>4</sup>

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- **In the DRS review**, which occurs every five years, grantees with an unsatisfactory CLASS assessment from the triennial review are required to re-compete for funding. An unsatisfactory CLASS assessment consists of an average score across all observed classrooms that is one of the following:
  - Below a specified minimum threshold for any of the three CLASS domains. (The minimum threshold score is 4 for emotional support, 3 for classroom organization, and 2 for instructional support.<sup>5</sup>)
  - In the bottom 10% of all Head Start programs for any of the three CLASS domains, unless the score is 6 or above, which represents a standard of excellence.

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) requires minimum thresholds of quality for CLASS domains in the DRS, in acknowledgement of a growing body of research showing that “a minimum level of quality must be achieved before positive changes can be made in children’s outcomes.” ACF requires a relative standard of quality for several reasons. First ACF acknowledges that “there is no ‘good enough’ level of quality,” that is, higher levels of quality are always better. Secondly, if a grantee scores in the bottom 10% of all Head Start programs for any CLASS domain, this indicates that 90% of grantees are providing a higher quality program in that domain. It is then reasonable to require this grantee to re-compete for Head Start funding to determine if there is a different provider in the community that could provide a higher quality program. Lastly, a relative measure of quality guards against score inflation, which could lead to less rigorous standards over time.<sup>6</sup>

#### Sources & notes:

<sup>1</sup> Office of Head Start. (2013). *Use of Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS™) in Head Start*. Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Resources. Retrieved from [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/sr/quality/class\\_](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/sr/quality/class_)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Office of Head Start. (2012). *FY 2013 Office of Head Start Monitoring Protocol*. Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Resources. Retrieved from [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/mr/monitoring/fy2013pdf/FY2013\\_OHS\\_On-Site\\_Review\\_Protocol.pdf](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/mr/monitoring/fy2013pdf/FY2013_OHS_On-Site_Review_Protocol.pdf); Personal correspondence with Head Start Region One Officer on Nov 1, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> CLASS is measured on a seven-point scale, and a CLASS score of one or two indicates low quality in a particular domain. By setting the instructional support threshold at two, Head Start allows grantees with low quality classroom instructional support to continue serving children. However, this decision should be considered within context. Head Start’s average classroom instructional support score was 2.98 in 2012, while the average classroom instructional support score for pre-k and Head Start classrooms combined was even lower at 2.04. Therefore, instructional quality is generally low on average for early childhood education settings across the nation, and Head Start’s thresholds reflect this.

<sup>6</sup> Final rule: Head Start program. 76 Fed. Reg. (217), 70010 (Nov 9, 2011) (to be codified at 45 CFR Pt 1307).