



OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION

District of Columbia 2023-24 Pre-K Quality Observation Data Collection and Quality Assurance Protocols: Community-Based Organizations

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has contracted with an external vendor, Teachstone, to conduct observations in all District of Columbia’s pre-K classrooms using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) Pre-K measure for the 2023-24 program year. It is OSSE’s expectation that all CLASS observations will be completed by May 31, 2024.

OSSE has developed the following protocols to ensure that Teachstone uses comprehensive systems and procedures to implement a valid, reliable and high-quality observation process. The observation process involves:

- (I) A scheduling system;
- (II) Observations conducted in facilities;
- (III) Training, certification and ensured reliability of observers (also known as data collectors);
- (IV) Data confidentiality and integrity;
- (V) Established guidelines for mandated reporting; and
- (VI) An appeals process as necessary.

These procedures ensure that the observations are carried out with the highest level of data integrity and the process is open and transparent for all involved. The District of Columbia Pre-K Quality Observation Data Collection and Quality Assurance Protocols are described in more detail below:

(I) Scheduling Observations

Observations are scheduled in accordance with the following:

- (A) Every classroom (serving a majority—51 percent or more—of children ages 36 months to 5 years of age as of Sept. 30, 2023) in facilities that entered and maintained the Provider Agreement for Subsidized Child Care Services with OSSE will be observed, regardless of whether or not the facility has an eligible child enrolled during the time of the observation.
- (B) Every classroom (serving a majority—51 percent or more—of children ages 36 months to 5 years of age as of Sept. 30, 2023) in facilities that participate in Capital Quality and/or the Early Childhood Educator Pay Equity Fund will be observed.
- (C) The vendor receives a list of participating facilities from OSSE that identifies an administrator who will serve as the primary contact person for the observation.
- (D) Facilities are sent a survey in which they must indicate all pre-K teachers who will be observed as a part of the observation. In addition, they have the opportunity to indicate “do not observe” dates that they want to be considered during the scheduling process.
 - (1) “Do not observe” dates are days on which the site does not want observations to occur for reasons including, but not limited to, field trips, professional development days and days on which other observations or testing are scheduled.

- (2) “Do not observe” dates must be limited to no more than 15 school days during the observation window.
- (E) CLASS observations are scheduled randomly, with an automated random number generator, and are conducted within a two-week observation window for each facility. Facilities receive email notification of their observation window at least two weeks before the first business day of the observation window. Two-week observation windows may include “do not observe” dates, though actual observations will not be scheduled on “do not observe” dates.
- (F) The exact date of the observation is sent to facilities via email at least one week before the scheduled observation. It is the responsibility of the administrator to make other staff members aware of the observation.
- (G) When observations are cancelled on days with weather-related delays or other unplanned emergencies that impact the typical day experienced by the observed students (e.g., teacher illness), they will be rescheduled as close to the original date as possible. Observations shall not be cancelled for reasons that OSSE considers to be planned in advanced, including, but not limited to, assemblies, field trips and spirit week.

(II) Conducting Observations

Once the observation is scheduled, the observation is conducted in accordance with the following:

- (A) Observers aim to arrive at the start of the program day but begin the observation when a majority of the children expected that day arrive in the classroom. Regardless of start time, the CLASS has been shown to be stable across times/dates if at least four to six coding cycles are conducted during the observation.
- (B) Each cycle consists of a 20-minute classroom observation followed by a 10-minute time period during which the observers complete a score sheet for that cycle’s observation period.
- (C) The CLASS observation usually takes between three and four hours to complete.
- (D) Classrooms will be observed for four to six cycles during each observation. Observations are cancelled and rescheduled if an unexpected circumstance prevents the observer from completing at least four observation cycles.
- (E) Nearly all of the activities that take place during a typical day are observed for coding. This includes specials (such as music and art), meals (including breakfast and lunch, see exception below in Part (F)) and snacks, language arts and/or academics, free choice, centers and transition times. When necessary, the observer may follow the students and teacher(s) outside to code an activity (e.g., for a walk or science discovery lesson). Observers will verify if outside activities are observable by following the students and teacher(s) outside.
- (F) Observers will not conduct observations during meals in a cafeteria when students are allowed to sit with peers from different classrooms and are not supervised by one of their lead teachers.
- (G) Observations will not be conducted during times where the students are free to play and the teachers primarily supervise students, including indoor and outdoor recess. However, organized activities in which the teachers are engaging with the students will be observed (e.g., nature walks or organized playground games).
- (H) Observers will not formally observe and/or code CLASS cycles during foreign language instruction unless the observer has been deemed proficient in that language.
- (I) For dual language immersion programs, observations will be conducted in the language of instruction by observers who are fluent in both English and the language of instruction, as available.

- (J) Observations focus primarily on the lead teacher identified by the program. However, CLASS observations include interactions of all adults in the room as they interact with the children during the day, so the coding/scoring should reflect the experiences of the typical or average child in the classroom during a given observation cycle.
- (K) In all cases, attempts will be made to observe the lead teacher. If the lead teacher is on extended leave during or resigns immediately prior to the scheduled observation, and:
 - (1) **The teacher has plans to return to the classroom three weeks before the CLASS observation window closes (May 31, 2024):** Observations will be rescheduled, and the lead teacher will be observed. Attempts will be made to observe the lead teacher after they have settled back into the classroom for at least two weeks.
 - (2) **The teacher will not return three weeks before the CLASS observation window closes AND there is a long-term substitute in place:** Long-term substitutes who have been providing instruction in the classroom for at least two weeks will be observed. The program administrator should share the context for the observation during the long-term substitute's orientation to the classroom assignment, so they are aware and part of the process.
 - (3) **The teacher will not return three weeks before the CLASS observation window closes AND a long-term substitute has not been identified or has not been in the classroom for at least two weeks:** Observations will not take place.

(III) Training and Reliability of Observers

- (A) Observers must have a bachelor's degree, and priority of hiring will be given to candidates who have experience in early childhood education.
- (B) All observers must have passed a background check, have a current negative tuberculosis screening and receive training on their role as mandated reporters for child abuse and neglect (see additional information about mandated reporting below).
- (C) Each observer must hold a current CLASS Pre-K certificate with Teachstone.
- (D) Each observer must participate in monthly calibration activities to ensure that they demonstrate ongoing reliability with the CLASS measure. To complete calibration activities, observers code Teachstone videos used to check for calibration to the CLASS measure. Observers watch videos of classroom interactions and score across all three CLASS Domains (i.e., Emotional Support, Classroom Organization and Instructional Support). Within each CLASS Domain, there are several dimensions (10 total). Each observer must demonstrate ongoing reliability by meeting the 80 percent threshold. This requires that observers score within one point of the master codes for the calibration video on at least eight of the 10 dimensions. Observers who do not pass their calibration assessment (as described above) will be removed from the observation team until the observer demonstrates—via a subsequent calibration assessment (as described above)—that they have met the requirements for demonstrating ongoing reliability to the CLASS measure (i.e., by scoring at 80 percent or higher on the calibration assessment). Observers who fail to demonstrate ongoing reliability will be required to participate in training and coaching prior to retaking the calibration assessment to be eligible to rejoin the observation team.
- (E) Each observer is screened (by the vendor) for fidelity to the data collection protocol (e.g., time of arrival) during an actual observation visit. Observers must pass the fidelity check in order to continue collecting data. Those who do not pass their fidelity check participate in ongoing training and coaching before resuming observations. Fidelity checks are unannounced.

- (F) In addition, a random sample of 10 percent of all pre-K classrooms, stratified equally across the sectors (local education agencies and community-based organizations), are double-coded throughout the entire data collection window to ensure ongoing inter-rater reliability between observers for the CLASS measure. Both classrooms and observers are randomly selected for these observations. Observers must score within 80 percent of one another across all dimensions (as described above in Part D). Observers who fail to meet this threshold will be required to participate in recalibration activities (as described above in Part E) and will be removed from the observation team until the observer demonstrates—via a subsequent calibration assessment (as described above in Part D)—that they have met the requirements for demonstrating ongoing reliability to the CLASS measure (i.e., by scoring at 80 percent or higher on the calibration assessment). CLASS observations that were obtained during double-coded observations that do not meet the required threshold for inter-rater reliability will be voided and new observations will be scheduled. A classroom will only be selected for double-coding one time during the observation window. These observations are scheduled in accordance with the scheduling protocols; whether a classroom is randomly selected for double-coded observations will be unannounced.

(IV) Data Confidentiality and Integrity

- (A) During the data collection window, data collected by observers meeting the 80 percent calibration threshold referenced above in Section (III) Part (D) will be reviewed by Teachstone in an ongoing manner to monitor for patterns of systematically lower and/or higher scores by the same observers, on average, compared to other observers at the CLASS dimension level. If such patterns are detected, these observers will be identified and provided with additional re-training and coaching to further strengthen the observation process.
- (B) An observation shall not be considered valid where there is a conflict of interest (including, but not limited to, previous employment or prior existing relationships) whether known or unknown at the time of observation. Each observer signs a confidentiality agreement and a “conflict of interest” document listing any schools or community-based organizations where they have had a previous relationship to ensure that they will not be scheduled to observe at any of these locations. If an observation occurred where there was a conflict of interest, the observation will be voided and a new observation may be scheduled at OSSE’s discretion. Facilities that believe there is a conflict of interest may file an appeal (see Section VI for the appeal process).
- (C) All CLASS observation notes are recorded on hard-copy score sheets during the observation.
- (D) After each observation, observers enter all scores (and notes) into a secure online database. Observers are required to deliver their hard copies to the vendor. Observers are prohibited from making any copies.
- (E) The vendor reviews the data weekly to ensure score alignment between CLASS hard-copy score sheets and the database. All errors (if any) are corrected and observers are contacted, if needed. All CLASS score sheets will also be scanned and stored in the database.
- (F) Once the observation window is complete, the CLASS hard-copy score sheets are stored in a secure, locked cabinet and no team member is permitted to remove them from the office. Similarly, all electronic data files (including scanned CLASS score sheets) are stored on a protected computer in a protected space for data analysis.
- (G) Scores are reviewed by the vendor for a second time during data analysis to ensure the highest level of data accuracy.

(V) Mandated Reporting

- (A) All observers receive training to identify incidents and signs of child abuse and neglect.
- (B) If an observer witnesses or suspects mistreatment of a child, the observer is required to end the observation cycle and call the vendor's project manager.
- (C) If the child is in imminent danger, the observer will also contact OSSE immediately.
- (D) If the incident meets DC's child abuse and neglect criteria, the observer will also contact the DC Child and Family Services Agency.
- (E) If an incident is reported, the vendor will notify the facility administrator and OSSE within 24 hours of the incident being reported.

(VI) Appeals Process

Facilities have the right to appeal their scores if they believe that the process for observations detailed above was not followed.

- (A) To request an appeal, facilities must adhere to the following steps:
 - (1) Submit a detailed written appeal including, but not limited to, the name of the classroom(s)/teaching team(s) the facility is appealing; the section of the Data Collection and Quality Assurance Protocols the facility believes was not followed; and documentation to support the facility's position. The appeal can be submitted to Appeals.OSSE@dc.gov. Appeals may be submitted from the date of a facility's first observation up to 10 business days after the date the program-level report was sent via a secure link.
 - (2) Appeals should be directly related to a suspected inconsistency in the process. Please note that changes that occurred in the facility after the observation date cannot be considered in the appeals process.
- (B) Upon receiving your appeal, OSSE will review the facility observation documents (e.g., observer notes and report(s) from the day of the visit, conflict of interest claims, etc.), alongside the CLASS manuals, scoring booklets and observation protocols and interview the vendor to determine if the observation complied with this Protocol.
- (C) If OSSE finds that the initial observation did not comply with this Protocol, OSSE may schedule a second observation.
 - (1) In the case of a second observation, OSSE will require the vendor to send a different observer that has demonstrated reliability within the past 30 days (by the above criteria, as outlined in Section (III)) to conduct the second observation, and upon the completion of the second observation, the vendor will issue an updated program-level report with the updated scores.
 - (2) If a report is generated prior to a final validation of the data, then the vendor will issue a revised program-level report using only official, valid data.