



# Third Party Observer Protocol

Early childhood observations using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (*CLASS*<sup>®</sup>) are designed to provide compelling evidence related to the nature of interactions between children and teachers. *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> looks at interactions that research has proven promote children's social/emotional and cognitive development. Observers should conduct observations with sensitivity and professionalism, and everyone involved should be clear about their role in the observation.

## **Purpose of Observation**

*CLASS*<sup>®</sup> assesses the extent to which teachers effectively support children's social and cognitive development. Each *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> tool contains one or more domains, which include several dimensions. Each dimension is defined by observable indicators and behavior markers. For example, within the domain of Emotional Support, the Positive Climate dimension includes the indicators of relationships, positive affect, positive communication, and respect. Each of those indicators contain observable behavior markers, such as physical proximity, smiling, enthusiasm, eye contact, etc.

**Pre-K *CLASS*<sup>®</sup>:** The Prekindergarten (Pre-K) *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> tool is organized to assess three broad domains of interactions among teachers and children. The Pre-K *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> tool is designed for classrooms with children 3-5 years old.

### **Domain 1: Emotional Support**

Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Regard for Student Perspectives

### **Domain 2: Classroom Organization**

Behavior Management, Productivity, Instructional Learning Formats

### **Domain 3: Instructional Support**

Concept Development, Quality of Feedback, Language Modeling

**Toddler *CLASS*<sup>®</sup>:** The Toddler *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> tool is organized to assess two broad domains of interactions among teachers and children. The Toddler *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> tool is designed for classrooms with children 15-36 months old.

### **Domain 1: Emotional and Behavioral Support**

Positive Climate, Negative Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Regard for Child Perspectives, Behavior Guidance

### **Domain 2: Engaged Support for Learning**

Facilitation of Learning and Development, Quality of Feedback, Language Modeling

**Infant CLASS®:** The Infant CLASS® tool is organized to assess one broad domain of interactions among teachers and infants. The Infant CLASS® tool is designed for classrooms with children birth to 18 months old.

### **Domain I: Responsive Caregiving Domain**

Relational Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Facilitated Exploration, and Early Language Support.

## **Observation Scheduling and Classroom Selection**

1. Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) provides a list of early childhood sites participating in the Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Network. The Picard Center's data team randomly selects 50% of the total number of classrooms; ensuring at least one infant, toddler, and pre-K classroom is selected at each site (when applicable).
2. Monthly, the Picard Center staff schedules observations for each third-party observer in their assigned regions.
3. The Picard Center contacts each site by phone or email prior to the month they will be observed in order to verify site level information:
  - Site contact person
  - Mailing and physical address
  - Phone number
  - Email Address

***For in-person observations*** the Picard Center will also verify additional information on the initial call including but not limited to: arrival times, the number and age type of the classrooms with teacher information, unique classroom configurations and any site-specific COVID-19 protocols observers may need to be aware of prior to the observation(s).

***For virtual observations*** the Picard Center will verify with the site that they prefer a virtual observation, ask for unavailable dates for scheduling the virtual observation, and verify the site's email address.

4. Physical letters are mailed to the sites with electronic letters emailed to Lead Agency contacts, notifying them of the month window in which the observation(s) will occur.
  - The letter states, "If you have scheduled events during this time that preclude our observations (e.g., scheduled field trips, picture day, health screenings, holidays, teacher absences, professional development days), please contact the Picard Center

by email [classactull@gmail.com](mailto:classactull@gmail.com) no later than 1 week before the scheduled timeframe of the observation.”

5. Each site will be contacted 1-5 days prior to the observation(s) to determine if there have been any confirmed COVID-19 cases at the site or in any of the classroom(s) scheduled for observation; and to request and review site-specific health and safety protocols in advance of the observation.
  - **For virtual observations-** the Picard Center will ask additional questions related to virtual scheduling, confirm the observation date and inform the site of the follow up email from [classactull@gmail.com](mailto:classactull@gmail.com) 1-3 days before the scheduled observation containing the Zoom link and virtual observation protocols.
6. If an observation needs to be cancelled, The Picard Center will work with the Lead Agency and LDOE to re-evaluate if observation(s) can be safely conducted after two weeks’ time.

### **COVID-19 Protocol Requirements**

For in person observations conducted during COVID-19, observers will follow COVID-19 health and safety protocols and procedures found in the [Local Observation Protocol Guidance for Early Childhood Community Networks](#), inclusive of the following requirements:

- Observers will request and comply with, the health and safety procedures required by each site, inclusive of participating in any required health screenings that the site conducts upon entry to the facility prior to each observation visit;
- Observers will have access to and utilize required personal protective equipment needed for each observation visit;
- Observers will report if they are exposed to, or diagnosed with, COVID-19 to the Picard Center; and
- Observers will maintain appropriate social distancing throughout the observation.

### **COVID-19 Observer Considerations**

- I. If an observer exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive for COVID-19, they will stop conducting in-person observations immediately.
  - The observer may resume conducting in-person observations after:
    - 14 days since symptoms first appeared AND
    - 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications AND
    - Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving (e.g., cough, shortness of breath).

2. If an observer is exposed to COVID-19 through close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19, but the observer is not exhibiting symptoms and has not tested positive, they should stop conducting in-person observations immediately and quarantine. (NOTE: A close contact occurs when a person is within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting from 48 hours before illness onset until the time the infected patient is isolated.)
  - The observer may resume conducting in-person observations 14 days after last contact with a person confirmed to have COVID-19. The observer should also watch for fever (100.4 F), cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms of COVID-19. Additionally, the observer should stay away from people in their household, especially individuals who are at a higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19.
  - However, if an observer is fully vaccinated, the observer does NOT need to quarantine after contact with someone who had COVID-19 unless the observer is exhibiting symptomsOR
  - If the observer had COVID-19 illness within the previous 3 months AND
    - Has recovered AND
    - Remains without COVID-19 symptoms
3. If an observer is sick with an illness other than COVID-19, they should stop conducting in-person observations immediately.
  - The observer may resume conducting in-person observations when recovered from their illness.

## Observer Protocol Steps

1. Each observation will take place at an assigned **date** and **time**. Prior to the observation, the site/school being assessed will be provided written notice and telephone contact by the Picard Center as noted above.
2. Observers must follow all required health and safety procedures including, but not limited to:
  - Completing a self-health check the morning of the observation visit and canceling the visit if they are having any symptoms of illness such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, etc.;
  - Masking prior to entering the site and throughout the visit;
  - Handwashing upon arrival and as needed throughout the visit;

- Maintaining appropriate social distancing throughout the visit; and
  - Maintaining a static room presence throughout the visit.
3. Prior to the scheduled observation:
- Observers review their schedule for potential conflicts and notify the Picard Center prior to the scheduled observation to change their assigned teacher and/or site location.
  - Before entering the site/school, the observer should know the age type (infant vs. toddler vs. pre-K) they are assigned to observe and the teacher's name. Observers should refer to their schedule and observation ticket for the observation details.
4. Upon arrival at the site/school:
- The observer must report to the administration office and:
    - Introduce himself/herself to office staff and administrator (if available),
    - Present identification and sign-in on appropriate site documentation,
    - Present a *Child Care Criminal Background Check (CCCBC)*,
    - Request to review site health and safety protocols to ensure compliance,
    - Work with administration and/or teacher to determine the best place to sit or stand during the observation (understanding that observers may need to stay in one place due to social distancing protocols),
    - Verify classroom information with administrator/director or designee (i.e., classroom locations by age, ensure 50% of enrolled students are in attendance),
    - Verify the correct spelling of the teacher's name, and
    - Receive an updated daily schedule for the classroom being observed.
  - If a second observer/double coder is present for the observation, he/she must follow the same procedures above. The lead observer will select the classroom according to his/her schedule and the double coder will accompany the observer to that classroom. Double coding/shadow scoring will only take place when it is possible to meet the safety protocols outlined by the site as well as local, state, and national guidance.
5. If the observer determines that required health and safety protocols are not being followed at the site, the observer will contact the Picard Center immediately to discuss steps to terminate the visit and to reschedule the observation.
6. Classroom selection:
- A classroom must have the regularly assigned lead teacher present during the observation.
  - The lead teacher must have been working in that role for at least 10 school days.
- Exceptions: Lead substitute teachers are eligible for a *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> observation if they have been in the classroom for at least 10 consecutive school days.**

- Picard Center staff will provide teacher names for each observation along with a monthly calendar.
  - The age configuration of classrooms may fluctuate more than usual during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the teacher with the corresponding age-type for their classroom has changed, the observer must contact the Picard Center for assistance.
  - If the teacher provided is no longer employed by the site or the teacher is in a classroom with a different age type, the observer should contact the Picard Center for assistance.
  - If observers are unsure whether a classroom has been observed by another third-party observer, they should contact the Picard Center before they begin observing.
7. Upon entering the classroom, the observer will introduce herself and request a daily schedule (if they have not received one from the office). Based on the daily schedule, the observer will plan for the approximate two-hour observation/scoring. The teacher should notify the observer of any schedule deviations, which may affect the observation. The observer may be accompanied by a second observer to double code/shadow score simultaneously. The primary purpose of double coding/shadowing scoring is to ensure inter-rater reliability, which has no reflection of the quality of the site being observed or alters the score.
  8. Observers will not interact with teachers beyond requesting a daily schedule and will do their best to refrain from and minimize any communications, distractions, or intrusions into the classroom.
  9. Observers will maintain appropriate social distancing throughout the observation.
  10. The observation will consist of **four 20-minute observation cycles** each followed by **10-minute scoring cycles** (average 120 minutes total time) for pre-K and toddler observations and **four 15-minute observations cycles** followed by **10-minute scoring cycles** (average 100 minutes total time) for infant observations. Observers will remain in the classroom when scoring for all age types (preK, toddler, infant). When the observers remain in the classroom, they will turn their back on the class and quietly complete the scoring. If children approach an observer, he/she will kindly redirect the child into classroom activities.
  11. Based upon site reported optimal learning times, the **CLASS®** observation typically starts at the beginning of the school day and continues throughout the morning for approximately 2 hours. The total time the observer is present at the site is dependent upon the daily schedule and extracurricular activities. The following activities, pull-outs, and specials **will not** be observed:

- Physical Education, Music, Computer, Library, Art,
- Cafeteria-based meals,
- Toileting in pre-K classrooms where the whole group visits the restroom,
- Outdoor recess **is not** included in pre-K observations but is included in infant and toddler observations (as per Teachstone® guidelines). However, if pre-K teachers are leading instructional or interactional activities outside, these interactions can be observed.

12. Observers **will not**:

- Ask teachers to change schedules, move rooms, wake up children or rearrange children or groups
- Engage in back and forth conversations with children or teachers
- Conduct observations during the 10-minute break time between cycles
- Conduct more than four cycles of observations
- Use their phone during the observation (time must be kept via a clock, watch, or stopwatch)
- Share feedback immediately following an observation

At the conclusion of the observation, the observer will confirm with the teacher that the observation is complete. ***There will not be an exit interview after the observation, however, general feedback of the highest and lowest scoring dimensions for infant CLASS® observations and the two highest and lowest dimension scores for pre-K and portal.***

13. Observers should consider how teacher-child interactions may be changed and in what ways due to the restrictions for health and safety during COVID-19. Although certain behavioral markers may not be present or be more difficult to assess due to COVID-19 related health and safety procedures, Teachstone (2020) states that all CLASS® indicators remain codable.

14. Observers should read and review Teachstone’s guidance when considering how observations during a pandemic may be different from past observations for each age type they are trained.

15. Solutions to expected problems on the day of the observation:

- Teacher not available/Classroom not available/Unable to complete the observation
  - If it is practical (close enough/time available) and the classroom is likely to become available for observation, the observer should wait until the observation can begin.
  - If the site/school has multiple classrooms with children of the same age as the originally assigned classroom, the observer should contact the Picard Center for reassignment.

- New teacher
  - New lead teacher (employed or with group of children less than 10 school days) – see method above.
- Fifty percent of enrolled children are not present on day of the observation
  - Fifty percent of children must be present. See method above.
- The observer **MUST NOT** exchange infant for toddler rooms, toddler rooms for pre-K classrooms (or the reverse).
- Children approach observer(s)
  - Observers will not ignore children’s bids for attention or greeting; they will simply state their purpose of being in the classroom (to do their work) and kindly redirect the children to their activities.
- The site/school may have mixed classes with infants and toddlers or toddlers and preschoolers
  - Contact the Picard Center to determine which age type the classroom is classified as in the LDOE Early Childhood CLASS® portal.
  - For mixed infant and toddler classrooms, the infant CLASS® tool will be used if the majority of the children are 15 months or younger and the toddler CLASS® tool will be used if the majority of the children are 15 months up to 36 months of age.
  - For mixed toddler and pre-K classrooms, the toddler CLASS® tool will be used if the majority of the children are 15 months up to 36 months of age and the pre-K CLASS® tool will be used if the majority of the children are 3-5 years of age.

*Note: A September 30 cut-off date determines the initial classroom configuration each academic year.*

16. If an observer enters a classroom and determines that he/she is related to or associated with someone in the room, he/she must **IMMEDIATELY** notify the Picard Center and remove himself from the room. Additionally, if there is any question as to whether a perceived or potential conflict of interest exists the observer will contact the Picard Center and allow them to make the final determination.
17. In the event an observation is unable to be completed due to non-compliance by a site, the Picard Center will notify the LDOE immediately. If the observers determine that required health and safety protocols are not being followed at the site, the observers may terminate the visit and contact the



Picard Center to reschedule the observation. In the unusual circumstance of any suspected abuse or neglect observed at the time of the observation the observer must report the observed behaviors to the Department of Children and Family Services as mandated by law.

## **Additional Protocol Information**

1. All observers must have proficient computer skills (i.e. typing, computer access, scanning documents, etc.) to be able to complete electronic forms.
2. Observers are **not allowed** to perform more than one observation per day and cannot directly contact sites/schools to reschedule an observation.
3. At all times observers should be professional in demeanor and attire and never let personal preferences influence scoring.
4. Notes must be detailed and must provide concrete examples of observations from the classroom. Summary statements for each dimension should address each indicator noting the presence/absence of particular behaviors. Picard staff will conduct random data checks on 5% of the total number of observations completed. Feedback will be provided on the quality, completeness, and accuracy of observation data and corresponding evidence. If the information is not well-supported and is questioned by the LDOE then the observer may be required to provide additional information or re-writing. If there are significant delays between cycles, observers should note the reasons. If there are any interactions that go beyond the ones stipulated here, the observer should document those interactions at the time of the observation.
5. Observers should contact the Picard Center via email ([classactull@gmail.com](mailto:classactull@gmail.com)) by **3:00 pm the SAME** day the observation is completed with the site name, classroom code, teacher name, and age group. *Exception: If you conduct an observation on a Friday, please email us by 12:00 pm that same day.*
6. For all shadow scoring observations both the lead observer and the shadow observer must enter their observation data into the Picard Center's designated system by **3 pm the SAME day** of conducting the observation. For audited observations, the lead observer must send the observation feedback via email to the shadow observer within **3 days** of the reliability observation (copy the Picard Center). The shadow observer must review the feedback and provide comments on the accuracy, quality, and completeness of their work using the Picard-approved form within **7 days** of the observation.

NOTE: If an observer does not achieve 80% inter-rater reliability, the observer will cease observing classrooms and will work with Picard staff to increase reliability to 80% or higher by coding additional observation videos and participate in a second shadow observation before conducting observations alone. If an observer is deemed unreliable over two consecutive shadow scoring observations, they will be relieved of their duties. Picard will track observers' scoring trends to ensure observer drift is not occurring throughout the observation year.

7. New Picard observers will participate in at least one practice observation (per age type) with a veteran observer prior to conducting observations alone. The observers will follow the same procedures for shadow scoring observations (see number 6). Due to COVID-19 safety precautions, these observations may take place virtually.
8. The *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> scoring form must be entered into the LDOE's designated data system with the accompanying feedback (one highest and one lowest for infant observations and two highest and two lowest scores for each dimension for pre-K and toddler observations) within **2 days** of the completed observation.
9. The observation scoring booklet and related notes must be postmarked within **3 days** of the completed observation. Observation materials may be turned in earlier, but any materials turned in later will result in corrective action. All materials should be mailed to the following address:

Picard Center, Attn: Kara Farmer-Primeaux, 200 East Devalcourt, Lafayette, LA 70506.
10. Picard Center staff will answer all questions from observers within **48 hours** of submission. Direct questions should be emailed to **classactull@gmail.com**.
11. Questions to observers from Picard Center staff related to *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> scoring **MUST** be answered in a timely manner within **2 days** of receiving the inquiry.
12. At **no time** should an observer discuss classroom observations or *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> scores with another observer. All information is confidential and should only be discussed with Picard Center staff.
13. Yearly *CLASS*<sup>®</sup> recertification is the duty of the observer. Proof of current certification must be provided to Picard Center staff and updated as needed. A *CCCBC* is also the duty of the observer. A copy of the background check must be received by the Picard Center (via e-mail) prior to the

observer's first scheduled observation. The observer should have a copy of the *CCCBC* with them for each observation and present it to the director.

### **QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

Questions regarding classroom observation procedures or interpretation can be directed to:

**CLASS Main Email Account** [classactull@gmail.com](mailto:classactull@gmail.com)

Kara Farmer-Primeaux, Project Director	<a href="mailto:kara.farmer@louisiana.edu">kara.farmer@louisiana.edu</a>	337-482-1569
Alisha Bourque, Project Administrator	<a href="mailto:alisha.bourque@louisiana.edu">alisha.bourque@louisiana.edu</a>	337-482-0512
Kimberly C. Mouton, Project Coordinator		337-482-1558
Christy Clement, CLASS Coordinator		337-482-1961