

**LOCAL CLASS®
OBSERVATIONS
BEST PRACTICES
GUIDEBOOK
2020-2021**

To ensure more children enter school prepared for success, Virginia is measuring and strengthening teacher-child interactions and instruction across birth-to-five classrooms in family day homes, child care, Head Start and school-based preschool classrooms.

Virginia Department of Education

Table of Contents - 2020-2021

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Why Local CLASS® Observations? |2 |
| Preparing to Conduct Local CLASS Observations |4 |
| Selecting and Training Local CLASS® Observers | |
| Ensuring CLASS Observer Accuracy | |
| Preparing Teachers to be Observed | |
| Local CLASS Observations – Recommended Protocol |9 |
| Before the Observations | |
| During the Observations | |
| After the Observations | |
| Key Points about Feedback |13 |
| Programmatic Requirements for Local CLASS Observations in 2019-2020 |15 |
| Local VPI Observations | |
| Local ECSE Observations | |
| Local PDG Birth to Five Observations | |
| Resource Links to Support Local CLASS® Observations |19 |
| Appendix: Conducting Local CLASS® Observations during COVID |20 |

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to provide local communities and school divisions with protocols, answers to FAQs, and links to resources for conducting local CLASS® observations in the various settings and programs across the state. Questions about Local Observations should be sent to kris.meyers@doe.virginia.gov

WHY LOCAL CLASS® OBSERVATIONS?

Why the focus on teacher-child interactions?

Effective, engaging interactions serve as the foundation for learning in early childhood classrooms. Children who experience high quality teacher-child interactions learn and grow more, even those who may otherwise struggle in the classroom. As such, measuring these interactions consistently and making concerted efforts to make improvements lies at the heart of offering high-quality, enriching experiences for all children.

Why are we using the CLASS tool?

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is a widely-used and rigorously-validated observational tool. To date, dozens of observational studies utilizing CLASS across a range of early childhood education programs show that children who experience higher observed teacher-child interactions also show higher levels of social-emotional and pre-academic development (For more information see [Why CLASS?](#) and [CLASS Outcomes Studies](#)).

What is a local CLASS observation?

In Virginia, a CLASS observation is considered to be **local** if it is coordinated, scheduled, and recorded by a local school division or local community. Certified observers from the local community (such as principals, site directors, early childhood coordinators and instructional specialists) conduct these local observations. Some communities may also select to secure CLASS observation services with an organization outside of their program to conduct local observations (e.g., Teachstone, VA Quality); however, the coordination, scheduling and recording of observation results is all done at the local level.

What is the difference between an external and a local CLASS observation?

Another type of CLASS observations that occur in Virginia are referred to as “external observations.” External CLASS observations are typically required every 2-3¹ years as a part of program compliance or mandated by a governing body, and are also coordinated, scheduled, and recorded by an external group, state or federal agency. In Virginia, the Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (known as CASTL), Teachstone®, Virginia Quality, and Federal Head Start monitoring use external CLASS observations.

Why are local CLASS observations being conducted in addition to the external observations?

Though valuable, external observations occur relatively infrequently. And, we know that teachers benefit from more frequent and specific feedback, along with individualized supports provided through CLASS observations conducted at the local level. With local observations, teachers are observed more often, and the results are more likely to be used by instructional

¹ As part of the AEII initiative, all classrooms who receive VPI or ECSE funding are required to have external observations every two years.

leaders to inform ongoing professional development and assess growth in teacher-child interactions over time.

Increasing capacity and knowledge of quality interactions at the local level also promotes shared understandings of the strong principles of high-quality teaching in early childhood settings that are highlighted in the CLASS tool. Having site or school division leaders trained to reliability in CLASS enables them to bring the CLASS lens to every aspect of their work.

Who needs to conduct local CLASS® observations?

The following early childhood programs are required to complete local CLASS observations as included in program guidelines.

- *Preschool Development Grant B-5 Pilot Communities* are required to conduct local CLASS observations to guide professional development at least twice a year. Observations for this grant must be completed for classrooms in all publicly-funded programs for infant, toddler, PreK classrooms and family day homes.
- *VPI programs* are required to conduct local CLASS observations for all VPI classrooms at least twice a year. These local observations are in addition to the external CLASS observations (overseen by UVA-CASTL) conducted in all VPI classrooms once every two years.
- **NOTE on 2020-2021:** Due to COVID-19, fall observations may not be able to be completed. However, PDG and VPI programs should still continue to plan & prepare to observe classrooms at least once later in the year. Please see additional information about COVID-19 and CLASS observations in the Appendix at the end of this document.

All school divisions are encouraged to complete local CLASS observations in all school-based early childhood programs (including Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) self-contained classrooms and Title 1) to guide professional development.

What are the expectations for CLASS® scores from local observations?

CLASS scores from local observations are used to provide teachers with direct feedback about their actual classroom practices, as well as to guide professional development at the local level for ongoing quality improvement support.

- There are currently no stakes or consequences for CLASS results from local observations in Virginia. However, in addition to scoring guidance in the CLASS manuals, information about thresholds currently used by VPI and Virginia Quality may be helpful for local level professional development planning.
 - VPI PreK CLASS Thresholds - [A Plan to Ensure High-Quality Instruction in All VPI Classrooms \(Submitted to the general assembly in November 2018\)](#)
 - Virginia Quality Thresholds - [Level 4/5 criteria for PreK, Toddler & Infant CLASS](#)

PREPARING TO CONDUCT LOCAL CLASS® OBSERVATIONS

Selecting and Training Local CLASS Observers

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Who | <p>Local observers will be determined and selected at the local level. Localities may consider selecting principals, assistant principals, center directors, coaches, early childhood coordinators, or others to receive CLASS observer reliability training, observe and give individualized feedback to teachers. Consider, for your particular program, the pros/cons of having any of these individuals trained. Factors such as their current and desired roles in supervising/coaching teachers, planning/delivering PD and availability for becoming certified and then re-certifying to observe each year should be considered.</p> <p>A program or school division may decide to additionally train teachers to become observers, but it is not recommended to solely train teachers to complete local observations (considering the potential limits of teachers' roles and time). There are many other training formats and resources for teachers to build their knowledge and skills with teacher-child interactions, including those domains measured by the CLASS tool (see the resources section at the end of this document)</p> <p>Local communities should consider what other early childhood programs within the region may also be using the CLASS observation tool and potentially seek to coordinate observers across programs.</p> |
| Observer Requirements | <p>Local observers must possess current CLASS Observer certification in the appropriate age group tool. These are Observers who successfully complete Observer training and pass the reliability test to receive an official Observer card and certificate from Teachstone, both of which can be used to verify certification status.</p> <p>The CLASS Observer Training is presented over a two-day session followed by an online certification test to be taken within two weeks of completing the training. See Teachstone's Reliability Test Taking Tips (with resources and instructions to help you prep). If you need help getting certified, email Teachstone at reliabilitysupport@teachstone.com.</p> <p>Observers must maintain their certification each year. This is accomplished by purchasing Observer Recertification through Teachstone and then taking the online recertification test within one year of last certification. If more than a year has lapsed, observers need to take the CLASS® Observer Training and certification again.</p> |

FAQs - Selecting and Training Local Observers

1. How many reliable CLASS® observers should a locality have in place per classroom?
 - This is a local decision based on the role and responsibilities of staff selected to be observers. To make this decision you will want to consider a few different factors:
 - Consider the number and age-level of the classrooms that need to be observed in your area. Teachstone has provided [guidance](#) on which category children fall into based on their age.
 - Consider if any of the classrooms serve special populations, such as dual language learners, family childcare and inclusive settings. Observers assigned to these classrooms should have experience working with and/or observing in these types of settings.
 - Consider the availability local observers have to conduct CLASS observations, along with the location of the participating programs. For context, the estimated time per observation is
 - 2 hours observing in a classroom
 - 30 minutes for feedback report development
 - 30 minutes for sharing feedback with the teacher
 - Additional travel time to/from observations may also need to be considered.

2. Will VDOE provide the training for local CLASS® observers to become trained and reliable for local observations?
 - No, not as a general practice. Localities should consider other sources of professional development funds to support ongoing CLASS® training, both to train reliable observers and to provide foundational CLASS® knowledge to teachers.
 - The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) maintains a list of qualified Certified Affiliate CLASS trainers who are able to conduct Introduction and Observer training for PDG B5 and Virginia Quality participants. For a list of current VECF Affiliate CLASS trainers in your locality, please email gris@vecf.org
 - The VDOE will continue to seek opportunities to support local communities and school divisions in building capacity with the CLASS® tool.

3. Where can we find a list of certified CLASS observers in Virginia?
 - To find certified CLASS observers in your area, you can check Teachstone's CLASS Observer Directory for Organizations. There are two types of Observer Directories available:
 - The [Public Directory](#) includes a list of Certified CLASS Observers that are interested in being hired by organizations. (CLASS observers have to opt-in to be listed in the public directory.)
 - The [Private Directory](#) is available to anyone who has a Teachstone website account, and lists all certified observers within the online community forum.
 - Both directories provide an opportunity to search for certified observers by location, age level tool, and language.

Ensuring CLASS® Observer Accuracy

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Drift | <p>All early childhood programs implementing local CLASS observations have the responsibility of ensuring that CLASS scores and the accompanying feedback provided to teachers is always accurate. Even the most experienced CLASS observers need practice to ensure their CLASS observations remain fair and accurate.</p> <p>It is important for local CLASS observers to be aware of the possibility of “drift” and to take steps to avoid it. Drift can happen to observers who have passed the CLASS reliability test but score less accurately over time. Their coding and scoring may “drift” away from CLASS master coders and the CLASS manual protocols.</p> |
| Double Coding/Shadow Scoring | <p>Double coding, also referred to as shadow scoring, occurs when two reliable CLASS observers conduct a CLASS observation at the same time to sharpen their skills. This is an important method for maintaining inter-rater reliability, accuracy, and fidelity to the CLASS tool.</p> <p>During observations being double coded, the two observers begin and end the four observation cycles at the same time. Observers score the first cycle independently. Once scoring is completed for the cycle they review scores for the cycle (outside of the classroom) and discuss any dimension scores that do not align. Observers determine who has the supporting evidence that most closely aligns with the CLASS manual and come to a consensus on the score for the dimension. This process repeats for all four cycles.</p> |
| Calibration | <p>CLASS calibration provides an avenue for observers to check themselves between annual recertification tests. Teachstone offers online calibrations for all certified CLASS observers which can be completed on a yearly, quarterly, or monthly basis. Participants practice coding classroom video and receive immediate feedback on their scoring.</p> |
| Observer Resources | <p>All Certified Observers have access to Teachstone’s online Observer Resource Village, which contains print resources, videos, webinars and more. These resources are designed specifically to support observers at all levels – from first time observers to experienced observers. Observers can access the online Observer Resource Village by logging into their Teachstone accounts, via the online course tab.</p> |

FAQs - Ensuring CLASS® Observer Accuracy

1. How often should double coding or calibrations be completed?
 - The practice of double coding or calibrations are encouraged for new observers, as well as for more practiced observers, at least once every six months to avoid drift.
 - Additional guidance is provided in this blog post - [What Should Your Observers Do During the Year to Stay Reliable?](#)

2. Is there a possibility that a local observer may have predetermined biases that could impact the CLASS score?
 - Concerns about bias and conflict of interest can be addressed. Double-coding, calibration sessions and comparing local and external observation results can help local observers become more accurate.

Preparing Teachers to be Observed – Providing Foundational Training

| | |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Teachstone</p> | <p>The following online introduction courses are available from Teachstone which can help teachers and program leaders become familiar with the CLASS methodology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLASS Foundations for Teachers (PreK) • Introduction the Toddler CLASS tool • Learn about Infant CLASS Dimensions • A CLASS Primer for Leaders (Infant through Elem) <p>The VDOE currently has a state contract with Teachstone for certain services. This contract is for use by Virginia public school divisions, PDG and Virginia Quality. Information about Virginia training options and pricing can be found on Teachstone’s Virginia Planning Page or by contacting Paloma Panesi</p> |
| <p>CLASS Affiliate Trainers</p> | <p>The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) maintains a list of qualified Certified Affiliate CLASS trainers who are able to conduct Introduction and Observer training for PDG B5 and Virginia Quality participants. For a list of current VECF Affiliate CLASS trainers in Virginia, please email gris@vecf.org</p> <p>Additional information can also be found on the CLASS Train the Trainer program page.</p> |
| <p>CASTL/AEII</p> | <p>PreK CLASS information, tools and resources can be found on the Advancing Effective Interactions & Instruction (AEII) website.</p> <p>When external CLASS® observations for VPI and ECSE classrooms occur in the school division (once every two years) CASTL will provide VPI leaders and teachers across the state information about the purposes of CLASS®, the importance of implementing quality teacher-child interactions, and what to expect with observations. This will be accomplished through webinar formats and online materials provided to VPI leaders to disseminate to teachers.</p> |
| <p>Head Start</p> | <p>Head Start has a set of 15-minute In-service Suite Modules that align with the PreK CLASS domains and dimensions. These modules, which include PPT presentations with embedded videos and handouts, are a great resource for teachers/assistants to help prepare them to be observed.</p> |

FAQs - Preparing Teachers to be Observed

1. Are there other organizations in Virginia that can help prepare teachers for observations in birth to five classroom and family day home settings?
 - Yes. Virginia Quality and the Infant Toddler Specialist network provide training and technical assistance on teacher-child interactions. For additional information about the services these organizations offer, please contact the regional office in your area.
 - [Virginia Quality Regions](#)
 - [Virginia Infant Toddler Specialist Regions](#)

2. How can we find out if the curriculum we currently use, or an accreditation, is aligned with the CLASS tool?
 - Several early childhood curricula and accreditations have been cross-walked with the CLASS tool. Please refer to the [Official Teachstone Crosswalks](#) for this information.

LOCAL CLASS® OBSERVATIONS – RECOMMENDED PROTOCOL

Before a Local Observation

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Scheduling | <p>It is recommended that localities create a written schedule to ensure all classrooms will be observed at least twice a year.</p> <p>Remember that teachers should receive foundational CLASS training prior to their observation.</p> |
| Length | <p>PreK & Toddler Observations include four 20-minute observation cycles with a 10-minute coding session following each cycle (approximately 2 hours total). Infant CLASS observations include four 15-minute cycles with a 10-minute coding session following each cycle.</p> |
| Announcement | <p>When it comes to announcing the date of the observation there are no specific requirements at this time for local observations.</p> <p>Some localities may want to provide teachers with a predetermined window of time during which unannounced observations may take place. Alternatively, localities may decide to tell teachers the exact time and date.</p> <p>Note that external observations happen unannounced within a 1-2 week window, so localities may want to practice this with their own observations as well.</p> |
| Activities | <p>Observers should ask about the typical classroom schedule prior to the observation to ensure that both structured and unstructured times of the day can be observed.</p> <p>Activities, transitions and routines in the morning or afternoon may be observed (mornings are typically preferred).</p> <p>Time periods that should not be observed include: “specials” outside of the classroom (such as PE, music, art), when the whole group visits the restroom, and recess.</p> |
| Health & Safety | <p>Local setting (e.g., school-based, community-based) procedures and requirements for volunteers and visitors should always be followed (e.g., health & safety; background check, identification presented). Observers should ask about these procedures prior to the observation.</p> |

FAQs - Before the Observation

1. What time of year should local observations be conducted?
 - It is recommended that at least one take place in fall and one in spring.
 - Localities choosing to observe more frequently might distribute observations across fall, winter, and spring.
 - Due to COVID-19, fall observations may not be able to be completed. Programs should continue to plan & prepare to complete at least one local observation later in the year.

During a Local Observation

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher and Assistant | <p>The lead teacher should be present. Short-term substitutes for the lead teacher should not be observed. Long-term substitutes may be observed (e.g., typically any lead teacher present in the classroom for 10 consecutive days.)</p> <p>CLASS® observations provide a classroom-level score that includes overall teacher-child interactions including children’s interactions with the lead teacher and any other adults (e.g., instructional assistant). Observers should follow the CLASS manual, which states that observers watch children’s interactions with all teachers/adults in the room/area.</p> |
| Observer Interactions | <p>Observers should use a gaze that appears to float over the teacher, child or group rather than directly staring at individuals for long periods of time.</p> <p>If children approach the observer, observers should only acknowledge their presence with a warm smile or a nod. More engagement than this may cause the observer to distract from classroom processes being observed, and potentially disrupt the classroom and observation results.</p> |
| Note Taking | <p>All notes and scores should be recorded on the official Teachstone CLASS score sheets. Notes <i>must</i> be taken for each dimension during every observation cycle.</p> |
| Scoring Cycles | <p>For the 10-minute coding sessions following each 20-minute observation cycle, observers may select to remain in the classroom or leave the classroom to complete coding.</p> <p>Observers do not conduct observations during the 10-minute coding sessions.</p> <p>Observers do not conduct more than four cycles of observations.</p> |

FAQs - During the Observation

1. What happens if the observer has to end the CLASS cycle early?
 - There may be times when the observer will need to terminate a CLASS® observation due to an uncontrollable disruption such as a fire drill or other emergency. Please note a disruption, such as a child displaying challenging behavior, would not prevent continuing an observation cycle.

- If the observer is in the middle of a CLASS® cycle, and a cycle needs to be stopped, ratings may be assigned to the CLASS® codes, based on what was observed up to that point, as long as 10 minutes of the observation have been completed. The ratings will be based upon what was observed during that 10-minute observation time. Note the end time of the cycle on the protocol.
- All four observation cycles should occur on the same day. If for some reason that is not possible, then a new observation should be started at the next scheduled possibility. The data collected for the incomplete observation needs to be discarded.

2. What if an observer suspects abuse or neglect while conducting an observation?

- In the unusual circumstance of any suspected abuse or neglect, the observer must report the observed behaviors as mandated by law.

After a Local Observation

| | |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Calculating Scores</p> | <p>When calculating CLASS scores, observers should always follow all guidelines on the CLASS Scoring Summary Sheet and appropriate pages of the CLASS manual.</p> <p>As an option, PreK observers may use this CLASS Calculator score template provided by VDOE to enter raw data and get output of tables and graphs. This is an optional tool that may be helpful in computing or double-checking scores. It does not take the place of CLASS score summary sheets or feedback reports.</p> |
| <p>Submitting Scores</p> | <p>This will vary by program & grant participation. Observers should contact the local organization or agency that scheduled the observation for information about score submission.</p> |
| <p>Record Keeping</p> | <p>Observers will need to send their CLASS notes/score sheets to the local organization or agency that scheduled the observation. Score sheets and notes should be kept on file as back-up documentation for at least 2 years.</p> |
| <p>Professional Development</p> | <p>All teachers should have access to high-quality professional development, enabling them to provide the quality of interactions and instruction needed to support young learners. Professional development should be based on CLASS observation data. Teachers should receive ongoing coaching and professional development specifically targeted to their CLASS scores in an effort to provide the quality of interactions and instruction needed to support young learners.</p> <p>Research points to five elements of effective professional development, including: well-articulated objectives, data-driven focus, specific focus on practices, sufficient intensity/dosage, and feedback loops. For information about what effective PD looks like, including a PD rubric for program self-assessment, visit the Professional Development page on the AEII website.</p> |

FAQs - After the Observation

1. How are local CLASS scores and data used?

- The primary purpose of local observations is to provide feedback to teachers/assistants to support continuous improvement efforts and increase learning outcomes for children at the local level.
- For School Division and PDG classrooms, the VDOE would like to collect a record of any local CLASS observations completed to collect a baseline for the state. Please see protocols for submitting data in the programmatic requirements section of this document.

2. How can CLASS observation data be used to assist with changing teacher practice?

- Ensure observation data are translated into a useful feedback form for teachers. For observational data to be useful to teachers, feedback must be understandable, objective, and specific. Teachers benefit from information that includes scores (1-7) and/or a description of the given range for each CLASS® dimension (low/mid/high) as well as clear examples within each area. Further, for this feedback to add meaningfully to a teacher's practice, more regular observations and feedback sessions (at least twice) across the school year are necessary. Additional guidance and resources to help with providing effective feedback are available in the next section, and on the [AElI Feedback page](#).

KEY POINTS ABOUT FEEDBACK

Providing Feedback

Providing teachers quality feedback regarding their local CLASS observation is a critical component of the improvement practice.

The observer (or assigned feedback provider, in the case that a local observer is not in a position to provide the teacher feedback) should schedule a time to meet with each teacher or teaching team within 2 weeks of the observation.

Observers should use either the feedback [template provided by VDOE](#) or another chosen template to share not only scores/ranges, but notes on what was observed (remember to include positive examples!). It's advised to share the written feedback with the teacher/teaching team at least a few days before the scheduled meeting so they can reflect on their practice.

Feedback providers should draw from CASTL's Feedback protocols on the [AEII Feedback page](#) to guide effective feedback sessions:

- Part 1 – CLASS Feedback Quick Start Guide explains the steps to take before, during and after a session.
- Part 2 – CLASS Feedback Principles lays out six principles to help feedback providers be mindful of approaches that promote teacher engagement, reflection, and motivation in feedback sessions.
- A Teacher-Child Interactions Self-Assessment tool is provided for teachers to complete prior to a feedback session to facilitate teacher reflection and promote engaging feedback discussions.

Recommended approaches from the CLASS feedback protocols above include:

- Start with a general conversation and work to make the teacher feel comfortable.
- Orient the teacher to the structure of the local feedback form.
- Review domain level scores, calling attention to general trends.
- First highlight areas of strength (focus on the positive) and then one area for growth by domain, unpacking specific examples.
- Work with the teacher to determine a dimension or one aspect of a dimension to be an area of focus.
- Discuss how the teacher can focus on this area of interactions in the coming weeks in his/her daily classroom interactions with children.
- Identify specific strategies or action steps so that the teacher can practice teacher interactions in a targeted manner.

If possible, either email or print out a quick summary of your feedback session and the specific action steps for the teacher to put into practice.

Support for Growth

Feedback providers and other PD providers support teachers to grow in areas of need through individualized PD. This may include activities like:

- Practice-focused PD (in whole/small group sessions or online module formats) that introduce key knowledge pieces and then help teachers plan for and practice improvements.
- Action Planning (in coaching or peer-learning communities) followed by regular feedback/analysis loops with colleagues (coach/admin/peer teachers) where teachers reflect on what worked in their classrooms and how to incrementally improve.
- Informal “walk-throughs” or “focused observations” targeted to specific Action Plan areas (e.g., one CLASS dimension) so that teachers can focus on improving one practice at a time and receive frequent feedback on that practice. You may find [Teachstone’s informal observation form and guidance](#) helpful.
- Consider looking at CLASS data alongside other data sources (curriculum fidelity, environment, child outcomes) to identify common needs. Research suggests that children benefit the most when interactions and instruction, guided by a strong curriculum, are maximized.

See also Teachstone Webinar - [Using CLASS Data to Provide Effective Feedback](#)

PROGRAMMATIC REQUIREMENTS FOR LOCAL CLASS® OBSERVATIONS IN 2020-

Additional information on the external and local CLASS observations conducted in 2020-2021, and how these observations can be used to meet programmatic requirements, can be found in the document [Maximizing CLASS Observations](#).

Local VPI Observations

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ages & Classrooms | VPI classrooms in schools and centers |
| Who Observes | Locally determined |
| Current Expectations | <p>All VPI classrooms will be required to conduct local CLASS® observations twice per year. (NOTE - Due to COVID-19, fall observations may not be able to be completed. VPI programs should continue to plan & prepare to observe classrooms at least once later in the year.)</p> <p>Local observations are in addition to any observations conducted by CASTL or other external parties.</p> |
| Data Collection | <p>Divisions can use the CLASS calculator summary template provided by VDOE for another chosen score summary template that includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First and last name for both teacher and instructional assistant (place both on teacher line). ● School name (center) and school division name (place both on center/ID line). ● Observer's first and last name. ● Start time (time first cycle began) and end time (time last cycle ended). ● Scores for each of the 4 cycles. <p>Please send a scanned copy of each VPI CLASS® <i>Scoring Summary Sheet</i> to VDOE at earlychildhood@doe.virginia.gov.</p> <p>Note: School divisions that are participating in PDG B-5 will submit local CLASS observation scores through Link B5, see below for more information.</p> |
| Professional Development and Planning | <p>All VPI teachers should have access to high-quality professional development, enabling them to provide the quality of interactions and instruction needed to support young learners. Professional development should be based on CLASS observation and other data, including information gained from local and external CLASS observations.</p> <p>Professional Development Planning resources are available on the AEII Planning Professional Development page.</p> |

Local ECSE Observations

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ages - Classrooms | Self-contained classrooms for children ages 2-5 with Individualized Education Programs in schools and centers that are taught by an Early Childhood Special Education teacher. This also includes a reverse inclusion classroom that also serves non-disabled children from the community. |
| Who Observes | Locally determined (Observers should have a background in special education). |
| Current Expectations | All school divisions are encouraged to build capacity and to complete local CLASS observations twice a year to guide professional development. (Due to COVID-19, fall observations may not be able to be completed. ECSE programs are encouraged to continue to plan & prepare to complete local observations later in the year). |
| Data Collection | <p>Divisions can use the CLASS calculator summary template provided by VDOE for another chosen score summary template that includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First and last name for both teacher and instructional assistant (place both on teacher line). ● School name (center) and school division name (place both on center/ID line). ● Observer's first and last name. ● Start time (time first cycle began) and end time (time last cycle ended). ● Scores for each of the 4 cycles. <p>Please send a scanned copy of each VPI CLASS® Scoring Summary Sheet to VDOE at earlychildhood@doe.virginia.gov.</p> <p>Note: School divisions participating in PDG B-5 will submit local CLASS observation scores through Link B5, see below for more information.</p> |

FAQs - Local ECSE Observations

1. What are the recommendations for observing in classrooms that contain a large percentage of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)?
 - Many VPI classrooms will include children who have IEPs. In addition, the CLASS tool is being used in self-contained classrooms in which most, if not all, of the children have an IEP. To obtain valid information about the efficacy of the teacher-child interactions, the observer must follow the protocol outlined in the CLASS manual and look for evidence of all of the CLASS dimensions during the observation, regardless of the composition of the classroom. Dimensions or indicators may not be skipped as the types of interactions described by the CLASS are important for all learners, regardless of ability. Additionally, we provide the following recommendations:
 - Observers should have a background in special education.

- Observers should briefly talk with the teacher or administrator to learn about any special circumstances they should take in account when coding (e.g., types of disabilities, alternative or augmentative communication systems in use, behavior intervention plans). These circumstances would not alter CLASS codes, but rather would provide context to help the observer understand the nuances of the behaviors they observe.
 - Use the CLASS tool that corresponds to the chronological age of the majority of the children in the classroom. Keep in mind this may be the Toddler CLASS tool for many self-contained ECSE classrooms.
 - Additional recommendations for completing observations in self-contained ECSE classrooms are in development and will be made available in the near future.
2. Are there resources to support completing observations in classrooms with a large percentage of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)?
- There are two resources designed to provide recommendations when the CLASS tool is used to observe in classrooms with children receiving special education services. They are [Recommendations for Using CLASS® in Inclusive Early Childhood Programs, Birth-Age 8](#) and [Using the CLASS® to Promote Responsive Interactions that Benefit All Children](#).

PDG B5 Local Observations

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ages / Classrooms | Infant, toddler and PreK classrooms in publicly-funded settings in participating communities |
| Who Observes | Locally determined |
| Current Expectations | All classrooms in sites participating in PDG B-5 activities are expected to be observed twice during the 2020-2021 school year – once in the fall and once in the spring. (NOTE - Due to COVID-19, fall observations may not be able to be completed. PDG programs should continue to plan & prepare to complete local observations at least once later in the year.) |
| Data Collection | All classrooms should enter their local observation scores into the LinkB5 data portal. Please see the LinkB5 User Manual for more guidance on how to enter CLASS scores into LinkB5. |
| Record Keeping | After the observation and feedback form has been completed, observers will need to send their CLASS Score sheets to the PDG community lead agency. PDG Lead agencies should keep score sheets on file as back-up documentation for at least 2 years. |

FAQs - PDG Birth to Five Local Observations

1. Can I count any of my other local observations as PDG Birth to Five local observations?
 - Yes. Local VPI observations can be counted as Local PDG observations. Other local observations may also be used if they meet the requirements described in the “Preparing to Conduct Local CLASS Observations” section of this document.
 - If Local VPI or other local observations are used for PDG observations, please send photocopies of the CLASS Score Summary sheets to the PDG community leads in addition to the reporting requested for those protocols.
2. Who should I contact if I’m having difficulties logging into or using the LinkB5 data portal?
 - The LinkB5 User Manual provides a detailed walkthrough of how to enter CLASS observation scores into the system. However, if you are still having difficulties using LinkB5, you may contact LinkB5 support either via phone (1-833-554-6525) or via email (linkb5support@virginia.edu).
3. How should I provide feedback to teachers after conducting an observation?
 - Please check to see if your PDG community lead has a specific feedback form they would like you to use. If not, you may consider using the VDOE template linked in the “Key Points about Feedback” section & resources. *Please note that this template corresponds to the PreK CLASS® tool and will need to be modified for other versions of the CLASS tool.* For best practices about providing CLASS feedback, please reference the “Key Points about Feedback” section of this document.
4. If I’m observing a mixed-age classroom, which CLASS tool should I use?
 - If the classroom contains a mix of infants, toddlers, and PreK aged children, please use the tool that matches the majority of the children. For instance, if a classroom includes 1 infant, 1 toddler, and 5 PreK children, use the PreK CLASS tool.
 - If there are an equal number of children across age groups, please use the Toddler tool. For instance, if a classroom includes 3 toddlers and 3 PreK children, use the Toddler CLASS tool.
 - If you are observing a mixed-age classroom, please contact someone from the site to learn about the classroom composition and choose the CLASS tool you will use ahead of your observation. Even if the classroom composition differs on the day of the observation from what you had planned, please do not change the tool used.

RESOURCE LINKS TO SUPPORT LOCAL CLASS® OBSERVATIONS

CLASS Explainers:

- Why CLASS? (e-book) - [LINK](#)
- CLASS Outcome Studies - [LINK](#)
- Infant/Toddler "At a Glance" - [LINK](#)
- Pre-K "At A Glance" - [LINK](#)

Using CLASS in Diverse Environments:

- Using the CLASS Measure in Family Child Care Homes - [LINK](#)
- Using CLASS in Inclusive Early Childhood Programs - [LINK](#)
- Using CLASS with Dual Language Learners - [LINK](#)

Preparing for Local Observations in Virginia:

- Maximizing CLASS - [LINK](#)
- Sample PDG template for inventory of local CLASS® observers - [LINK](#)
- A Plan to Ensure High Quality Instruction in All VPI Classrooms - [LINK](#)

Tools for Feedback:

- Sample Feedback Template from VDOE - [LINK](#)
- AEII Providing Observation Feedback - [LINK](#)
- CLASS Feedback - Teachstone Webinar - [LINK](#)

Coaching

- Coaching Fundamentals (e-book) - [LINK](#)
- Informal Coaching Observation Form - [LINK](#)
- Practice Based Coaching - [LINK](#)
- MMCI (Group Coaching) - [LINK](#)

Additional Resources:

- AEII CLASS Support Page - [LINK](#)
- Teachstone Virginia Support Page - [LINK](#)
- Teachstone Resource Library - [LINK](#)
- Use of CLASS in Head Start - [LINK](#)
- Observer Directory (Public) - [LINK](#)
- Curriculum & Accreditation Crosswalks - [LINK](#)

Please send questions about Local Observations and Professional Development to kris.meyers@doe.virginia.gov

CONDUCTING LOCAL CLASS® OBSERVATIONS DURING COVID-19

The decision of when to observe in-person instruction will depend on many factors including the impact of the illness rate on a given community and whether or not in-person observations can occur in accordance with current health and safety regulations. For example:

- A community may have very few or no COVID-19 cases. Once teachers and children have had time to adjust and establish new routines, classroom observations may proceed for the purpose of professional development.
- A community may have had many cases and experienced widespread effects. Observations may continue to be suspended until adequate time for teachers and students to adjust to being back at school, and then may proceed for the purpose of professional development.
- In-person CLASS observations may simply not be possible in some localities for longer periods as programs work to limit exposure, or when instruction is occurring via online.

It is typically recommended that formal CLASS observations are not conducted in the first few weeks of school, giving teachers and children an opportunity to adjust to the classroom setting. This advice remains, but it is important to note that the length of adjustment time may be longer for some schools/programs depending on how different the classroom settings are from the time prior to the pandemic.

Since the purpose for conducting local CLASS observations is to support teachers through feedback and professional development, every effort should be made to try to reduce teacher anxiety so that the observation process is as supportive as possible.

Additional In-person Observation Guidance due to COVID

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ensuring CLASS Observer Accuracy | <p>Double coding practice can be done by having two or three observers watch a video clip online and then debrief on the phone.</p> <p>Teachstone’s calibration provides an online method for observers to practice coding skills and check themselves between annual recertification tests.</p> |
| Before conducting a local observation | <p>While preparation is key to a successful observation at all times, this is even more true during a pandemic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Observers should verify the date and time of the observation and learn what procedures the program has in place to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. ● Observers should understand the health and safety requirements for being onsite and obtain appropriate personal protective equipment. ● Observers will need to follow the required mask-wearing and sanitizing procedures upon entering the classroom and maintain the suggested or required physical distance from others, both adults and children, at all times. |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition, observers can ask the site leader and/or teachers about other items such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of children likely to be present at the time of observation and the number of adults in the classroom • The best place to sit or stand, understanding that they may not be able to freely move around the room while observing • How teacher’s interactions may be changed due to the restrictions for health and safety during COVID-19 |
| During a local observation | <p>During an observation, observers may need to look for evidence of the CLASS indicators outside of the behavioral markers listed in the manual. Observers should remember the listed behavioral markers are designed to illustrate the kinds of interactions that an observer <i>might</i> see, but they are not exhaustive. Additional behavioral markers, not listed in the manuals, can meet the overarching intent of both the indicators and the dimensions.</p> <p>Observers will need to pay close attention to body language to determine the intent and efficacy of interactions given the social distance and mask-wearing during observations that may make it more difficult to both see and hear.</p> <p>Observers should use the following dimension level COVID-19 guidance provided by Teachstone when conducting in-person observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PreK COVID in-person observation guidance • Toddler COVID in-person observation guidance • Infant COVID in-person observation guidance |
| Providing Feedback | <p>During COVID, feedback can be provided in-person as long as all health & safety guidelines are followed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This includes mask-wearing, sanitizing procedures and maintaining the required physical distance from adults and children, at all times. <p>Feedback may also be provided via a phone call or an online meeting.</p> |
| Additional Information & Resources | <p>Teachstone’s Coronavirus Resources for Educators and Parents</p> |

NOTE: Virtual-Only Instruction due to COVID-19 - The VDOE is in the process of developing a Virtual PreK Observation Tool in alignment with CLASS. This tool will allow program leaders to collect information and provide teacher feedback while instruction is temporarily being conducted virtually. This tool will be made available on the [AEII website](#).