



## Maximizing CLASS Observations in Virginia

### Guide for the Field

---

#### Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this document is to provide a comparison of the various types of formal CLASS® observations taking place in Virginia's early learning communities. This document will provide information on who is completing the observations and for what reason.

Some CLASS® observations in Virginia are considered to be External CLASS® observations, while others are considered to be Local CLASS® observations.

- External CLASS® observations are coordinated, scheduled, and recorded by an organization that is external to the early learning program or community, such as the Center for the Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL), Teachstone®, Virginia Quality, or Head Start. External CLASS® observations are completed as part of program/grant compliance or are mandated by a governing body. For school-based preschool programs, external observations take place once every two years.
- Local CLASS® observations are coordinated, scheduled, and recorded by the local community or school division. Observers from the local community (such as principals, directors, early childhood coordinators) often conduct local observations. Some communities may select to secure CLASS® observation services with an organization outside of their program to conduct local observations (e.g., Teachstone®, VA Quality). Local observations follow the full protocol for a CLASS® observation (must be four cycles long with a certified observer). For VPI programs and PDG B-5 programs, local observations take place twice a year (once in the fall and once in the spring).

This chart provides an overview of CLASS® observations happening in early childhood classrooms:



<b>External Observations For all Communities</b>					
<b>Type</b>	<b>Ages/Classrooms and Frequency</b>	<b>Who are Observers</b>	<b>Volume/ Timing</b>	<b>Observer Requirements</b>	<b>How Data are Used</b>
<i>VA Quality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infant, toddler and PreK classrooms in all settings</li> <li>• Required for higher levels only (4/5)</li> <li>• Sample of classrooms every 3 years</li> </ul>	VA Quality Observers	Ongoing; Volume varies based on # of requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLASS reliable</li> <li>• Ongoing reliability checks and calibration</li> <li>• No relationship to program or classrooms</li> <li>• VA Quality Protocol</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determines level (along with ERS scores)</li> <li>• Allows for evaluation of accuracy of regional observers</li> </ul>
<i>School-Based Preschool External</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School-based Preschool Classrooms</li> <li>• All classrooms every 2 years</li> <li>• VPI classrooms began in 2018</li> <li>• All other school-based preschool to begin in 2020</li> <li>• Required as part of state legislation</li> </ul>	UVA/CASTL	All classrooms every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLASS reliable</li> <li>• No relationship to program or classrooms</li> <li>• Protocol identical to VA Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare to statewide threshold required by legislature</li> <li>• Allows for evaluation of accuracy of local observers</li> </ul>
<i>Head Start</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PreK classrooms in Head Start programs</li> <li>• Required as part of federal review, uses federally determined protocol</li> <li>• Sample of classrooms every 3 years</li> </ul>	Federal contractors	Every Head Start grantee every 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLASS reliable</li> <li>• No relationship to program or classrooms</li> <li>• Federal protocol (which is different from state protocols)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determines whether program will be subject to recompetition</li> </ul>

<b>For PDG B5 Communities</b>					
<b>Local Observations</b>					
<b>Type</b>	<b>Ages/Classrooms and Frequency</b>	<b>Who are Observers</b>	<b>Volume/ Timing</b>	<b>Observer Requirements</b>	<b>How Data are Used</b>
<i>PDG B-5 Local</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infant, toddler and PreK, and family day home classrooms in publicly-funded settings in participating PDG communities</li> <li>• Coordinated by PDG B-5 Community Leads</li> <li>• All classrooms 2x year (fall and spring)</li> <li>• PDG B5 Local Observations count towards other local observation requirements (e.g., VPI)</li> </ul>	Locally determined	In 2019-2020, ~1900 classrooms in family day homes, child care, Head Start and schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLASS reliable</li> <li>• Flexible on relationship of observers to classrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback and support to classrooms</li> <li>• Evaluate accuracy of local observers</li> <li>• No consequences; for improvement purposes only</li> <li>• Data is entered into <a href="#">LinkB5</a></li> </ul>

<b>For Communities NOT Participating in PDG B5</b>					
<b>Local Observations</b>					
<b>Type</b>	<b>Ages/Classrooms and Frequency</b>	<b>Who are Observers</b>	<b>Volume/ Timing</b>	<b>Observer Requirements</b>	<b>How Data are Used</b>
<i>VPI Local</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VPI Pre-K classrooms in schools and centers</li> <li>• Required to begin in 2020-2021</li> <li>• All classrooms 2x year (fall and spring)</li> </ul>	Locally determined	All VPI Classrooms (~1300) in both fall and spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLASS reliable</li> <li>• Flexible on relationship of observers to classrooms</li> <li>• See <a href="#">Local CLASS Observations Best Practices Guidebook</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback and support to classrooms</li> <li>• Evaluate accuracy of local observers</li> <li>• No consequences; for improvement purposes only</li> </ul>
<i>Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and Title 1 Local</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood Special Education classrooms, or preschool classrooms funded by Title 1</li> <li>• Encouraged local observations (2x a year, fall and spring) starting in 2020-2021</li> </ul>	Locally determined	TBD, local observation encouraged but not required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLASS reliable</li> <li>• Flexible on relationship of observers to classrooms</li> <li>• See <a href="#">Teachstone Guidance for Inclusive settings</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback and support to classrooms</li> <li>• Evaluate accuracy of local observers</li> <li>• No consequences; for improvement purposes only</li> </ul>



### **Interchanging Observations**

As detailed above, these CLASS observations have different purposes. For instance, VA Quality observations are used to determine quality levels and school-based external observations are required by the Virginia Legislature. As a result, some observations are interchangeable while others are not.

Please note that having multiple observations can be useful and is not necessarily redundant. Teachers benefit from multiple instances of specific, actionable feedback, especially when intended to support improvement, and local observers benefit from feedback on the accuracy of their observations.

Which external observations are interchangeable?

- VA Quality observations may be used for VPI External purposes.
- School-based Preschool External observations may be used for VA Quality purposes.
- These observations are conducted using the same protocol and expectations for observers.

Note that as part of PDG B5, communities provide local observations 2x a year (fall and spring) to each classroom. These PDG B5 local observations can be used to meet the VPI Local observation requirement.

Which observations are NOT interchangeable?

- Head Start Federal
- Local observations may NOT be used for VA Quality or school-based preschool legislative requirement.

Why are these observations NOT interchangeable?

- The Head Start Federal observations follow a different protocol.
- The VPI Local, ESCE and PDG Local observations will follow similar protocols to the external observations BUT the observer may have a relationship with the classrooms (e.g., elementary school principal, child care director, VPI coordinator, Head Start instructional coordinator, etc.).
- There are NO consequences for VPI Local and PDG Local observers or observations, noting that communities are building capacity. These observations will not determine quality levels nor subject to state thresholds required by legislature.

Which trainings are interchangeable?

- All trainings are interchangeable. All external and local observers must complete CLASS reliability training.

### **Observation Protocols**

- External observations conducted for VA Quality and School-Based Preschool follow similar protocols. Details are available for the [VA Quality Protocols](#).
- Local observations must use a certified CLASS observer. Local observations are encouraged to follow the best practices outlined in the [Local CLASS Observations Best Practices Guidebook](#).

### **Additional Information and Questions**

- Questions related to VA Quality should be sent to [gris@vecf.org](mailto:gris@vecf.org).
- Questions related to VPI, ECSE or other school-based programs should be sent to Erin Carroll at [erin.carroll@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:erin.carroll@doe.virginia.gov).
- Questions related to PDG B-5 should be sent to Lucy Mitzner at [lucy@vecf.org](mailto:lucy@vecf.org).



## Maximizing CLASS Observations in Virginia in 2019

### **Addendum 1: Family Day Home CLASS Observations for PDG B-5 Communities**

CLASS observations conducted in family day homes for purposes of the PDG B-5 Grant should follow the guidance included in Maximizing CLASS Observations in Virginia the greatest extent feasible. Additional guidance follows for scheduling observations in mixed age classrooms in family day homes.

Selecting the CLASS observation tool for Family Day Homes:

1. Select the version of CLASS that matches the majority of children in the classroom.
  - *Example:* A family day home has 3 toddlers, 1 infant, and 1 preschool age child. The observer uses Toddler CLASS.
  - *Example:* A family day home has 1 infant and 3 preschool aged children. The observer uses Pre-K CLASS.
2. If there are an equal number of any age group of children, select the Toddler tool.
  - *Example:* A family day home has 2 toddlers and 2 infants. The observer uses the Toddler CLASS tool.
  - *Example:* A family day home has 1 infant, 2 toddlers and 2 preschool age children. The observer uses the Toddler CLASS tool.
  - *Example:* A family day home has 4 infants and 4 preschoolers. The observer uses the Toddler CLASS tool.

Teachstone has [provided guidance](#) on which category children fall into based on month of age. Individuals scheduling CLASS observations should use the most recent report of classroom enrollment to determine the CLASS tool to use on the selected observation date. CLASS observers should not change the selected tool version based on day-of attendance of children.