

VQB5 External CLASS® Observations FAQs

General External CLASS® Observation Questions:

1. What is a CLASS® observation?
 - The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) is a validated, reliable observation tool that measures the quality of interactions between teachers and children. Research indicates that children in classrooms with higher CLASS® scores show more learning and development. Virginia is using the CLASS® to measure and strengthen interactions in thousands of early childhood classrooms.

2. How will CLASS® be used in [VQB5](#)?
 - There are two types of CLASS® observations conducted in VQB5; local and external observations. These observations have different purposes and frequencies during the annual measurement and improvement cycle as described below.
 - i. Local CLASS® Observations - Primary method for gathering classroom level information about the quality of teacher child interactions and providing feedback in VQB5. In VQB5, all birth-to-five classrooms will get two local observations each year. One in the fall and one in the spring.
 - ii. External CLASS® Observations - Secondary method to gather information about the accuracy and consistency of local observations and to provide additional feedback in VQB5. In VQB5, only some birth-to-five classrooms will get an external observation during the year.
 - For more information about local observations, refer to the [Local Observation Guidebook](#).

3. What is an **external** CLASS® observation?
 - External observations are coordinated, scheduled, and recorded by an external organization to gather information about the accuracy and consistency of local CLASS® observations.
 - External observations are conducted by a certified CLASS® observer who is not employed by the program and has no relationship to the school or classroom.
 - In 2021-2022, external observations will be coordinated by AEII (in partnership with Teachstone).

4. How will external observation results be used in [VQB5 Practice Year 1](#) (2021-2022)?
 - The information from external CLASS® observations during Practice Year 1 will help ensure local observation accuracy and will be used to guide the development of future guidelines and protocols for CLASS® observation quality in VQB5. Scores from external CLASS® observations will be gathered for informational purposes only, and will not count towards Practice Year 1 ratings.

5. Why are external observations needed during Practice Year 1, in addition to the local observations?
 - In line with its guiding principles regarding equity, the VDOE has and will continue to consider the equity implications of using the CLASS[®] tool in the VQB5.
 - Practice Year 1 information gathered from both local and external observations from infant, toddler and preschool classrooms, including family day homes in Virginia, will provide critical information to help ensure that the CLASS[®] tool is being used fairly across the state and any concerns about disparate treatment or inequities are addressed.

6. Who will be selected for an external CLASS[®] observation?
 - During Practice Year 1 of VQB5, participating birth-to-five classrooms in [PDG communities](#) may be selected for external observations.
 - This includes infant, toddler, and PreK classrooms across different site types (e.g., school-based settings, childcare centers, and family day homes).
 - AEII will randomly select classrooms across age groups and site types to be externally observed.

7. How will I know if my classroom has been selected for an external CLASS[®] observation?
 - In 2021-2022, AEII is working with PDG community leaders to coordinate external CLASS[®] observations. If your classroom has been selected, your site administrator will be notified, and asked to gather scheduling information to conduct the external CLASS[®] observation.
 - When the external CLASS[®] observation is scheduled, the PDG community leader and the site administrator will receive an email from Teachstone one week ahead of time notifying them of the scheduled external CLASS[®] observation dates.

8. Why was my classroom selected for an external CLASS[®] observation?
 - If your classroom is participating in VQB5, there is a chance your classroom may be randomly selected for an external CLASS[®] observation. Classrooms are selected through a randomization process based on the children's ages and the classroom site type.

9. Can I opt out of the external CLASS[®] observation process?
 - Since external observations are a critical part of the overall VQB5 Practice Year 1 process, there is not an option to opt out of the external observation process at this time.
 - Scores from external CLASS[®] observations during Practice Year 1 will be gathered for informational purposes only, and will not count towards program practice year 1 ratings. As stated above, the primary purpose is to understand and build supports for the accuracy and consistency of local CLASS[®] observations across all birth to five classrooms.

10. I had an external CLASS[®] observation last year. Will I be observed again this year?
- Due to the randomization process, there is a chance your classroom may be selected for an external CLASS[®] observation. Keep in mind that the external CLASS[®] observations for VQB5 have a different purpose than external observations completed last year, and are being used to gather information about the accuracy and consistency of local CLASS[®] observations to inform future protocols and procedures for using CLASS[®] in VQB5.
11. If my classroom is selected for an external CLASS[®] observation, how much time will take place between the external and local observations?
- External and local CLASS[®] observations will have varying times between them, but both will take place during the same observation window. For example, local CLASS[®] observations in Spring 2022 take place between January 17 and June 10. If your classroom is selected for an external CLASS[®] observation in Spring 2022, it will also occur within this window.
12. Which teachers must be present for the external CLASS[®] observation to take place?
- The lead teacher (not a short-term substitute) must be present. Any new lead teacher or substitute lead teacher that has been in the classroom for 10 consecutive school days may be observed.
 - Substitute teaching assistants may be observed.
 - If a teacher goes on parental leave, an external observation will occur with the long-term substitute.
 - This is still the case if the local observation was completed with the main teacher before they left for parental leave.

External CLASS[®] Observation Protocol Questions

1. Which CLASS[®] tool will be used?
- The CLASS[®] tool (Infant, Toddler, or PreK) will be based on the age of the children in the classroom. In mixed-age classrooms, such as family day homes, observers will use the CLASS[®] tool based on the age of the majority of the children in the classroom.
2. What activities may be observed?
- Activities, transitions, and routines in the morning or afternoon may be observed.
3. What kinds of activities will NOT be observed?
- “Specials” outside of the classroom
 - Physical Education class
 - Music class
 - Computer class

- Library visit
 - Art class
 - Cafeteria-based meals
 - Toileting in classrooms where the whole group visits the restroom
 - Recess/outside play (based on the CLASS[®] manual guidelines)
4. How long will my CLASS[®] observer be present on the observation day?
- Around 2 hours.
 - 2 hours is needed to collect CLASS[®] data. CLASS[®] data is collected in four 20-minute observations followed by 10-minute coding sessions. (4 x 30-minute cycles = 2 hours)
 - An observer may be present longer than 2 hours if an activity occurs that may not be observed (see #3 above) or additional breaks are needed for the observer.
5. What will my CLASS[®] observer do and where will they go on the day of the observation?
- After checking in at the site or greeting the family day home provider, observers will enter the classroom and briefly check in with the teacher. They will then find a place in the classroom to sit where they are able to see and hear without being disruptive.
 - Observers will then move discretely as needed to see and hear teacher-child interactions.
 - Observers will take notes on interactions during their observations. Between observations, they may leave the classroom to review notes and assign codes.
 - After the observation, the observer will let teachers know they are done and will sign out.
6. In what ways will my CLASS[®] observer interact with me and my children?
- Observers will try to **minimize their interactions** with teachers and children so as to remain focused and objective and minimize any disruptions to the classroom.
 - For instance, if children come up to interact, observers will acknowledge their presence nonverbally (e.g., with a smile or a nod) and if approached further will say something to redirect the child (e.g., “I’m busy writing now, and need to observe,” or “I am here to work and I need to do my job now,” or “You can go ask your teacher”).
 - After the observation, observers will briefly check out with the teacher but will not have conversations with or provide feedback to the teacher on the observation.
7. Which teachers within a classroom will be CLASS[®] observed?
- CLASS[®] observations provide a classroom-level score that includes overall teacher-child interactions including the lead teacher and any other adults (e.g., assistant teacher, paraprofessional). Observers follow the CLASS[®] manuals which states that observers watch children’s interactions with **all teachers/adults**

in the room/area. Focus on each teacher's interactions are weighed based on the number of students with whom they are working, the amount of time they spend with the students, and their responsibility for the activities.

8. What will happen after the external CLASS[®] observation?
 - After the observation, the observer will let teachers know they are done and will sign out. The observer will **not give feedback** to the teacher for the external CLASS[®] observation.
 - The AEII team will send community-level data to the PDG community leads to compare trends in local and external CLASS[®] observation scores.
9. Who are the external CLASS[®] observers and what steps will be taken to ensure objective and reliable data is collected?
 - All observers must hold a **current CLASS[®] certification** (having taken a CLASS[®] Observer training and passing a reliability test) and receive additional training in the protocol for Virginia's external observations.
 - To ensure reliable coding and fidelity to the protocol, all external observers will complete a **calibration test/review session weekly** and will receive weekly audits and support from a quality assurance team.
 - External CLASS[®] observers are not employed by local programs and have no relationship to the classroom or teacher.

COVID-Related Questions:

1. Our site is fully virtual. Will our teachers be observed?
 - External CLASS[®] observations will only be conducted in classrooms providing in-person instruction. If your classroom is using a hybrid model (i.e., virtual instruction two days a week and in-person instruction three days a week), teachers will only be observed on a day they are in the classroom.
 - If your site moves from virtual to in-person instruction, we will observe teachers a few weeks after they've settled into the classroom.
2. Our site does not allow visitors. Will our teachers still be CLASS[®] observed?
 - Possibly. Our observation team will work with community leads and site administrators to consider other observation modalities, including remote-live (Zoom) observations and video-recorded observations.
3. What sorts of precautions will CLASS[®] observers take when they enter classrooms?
 - The external observers will adhere to all safety guidelines as outlined by your site or school division. These precautions include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Temperature checks
 - Hand washing/sanitizing
 - Wearing a mask
 - Social distancing

- Our partners at Teachstone have written out health and safety protocols, which can be found [here](#).
4. My classroom is scheduled for an external observation, but we have to quarantine for a period of time. Will we still be CLASS[®] observed?
- Yes. If your external CLASS[®] observation is scheduled while your classroom is in quarantine, we will reschedule the observation once the quarantine period is over. Please contact the [Teachstone scheduling team](#) (scheduling@teachstone.com) as soon as possible to reschedule the observation.

Other questions? Contact the AEII team at aeii@virginia.edu.