

## Q. What is the CLASS®?

**A:** The CLASS® (Classroom Assessment Scoring System®) is an observational instrument designed to assess the quality of classroom interactions. Research suggests that the interactions between children and classroom staff are directly tied to learning. The dimensions in the CLASS® tool are based on interactions between classroom staff and children and interactions between children. The CLASS® does not evaluate the physical environment, materials, safety, or curriculum. Parent Aware is using the Pre-K version of the CLASS® for classrooms where the majority of children are age 36 months up to kindergarten entry, but other versions of the CLASS® exist that are designed for other age groups from birth to 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

The Pre-K CLASS® is arranged into **three domains**: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Each domain is divided into three or four dimensions.

**Emotional Support:** We hear a lot about children’s social and emotional development. Both the way children connect to others and their motivation play a big part in their future success in school and life. Within the Emotional Support domain, observers look at “positive climate” – the respect and enjoyment classroom staff and students show; “negative climate” – the anger, hostility, or aggression expressed by classroom staff or students; “teacher sensitivity” – the level of awareness and responses that classroom staff show to students’ emotional and academic concerns; and “regard for students’ perspectives” – how much the children’s interests and points of view are emphasized by classroom staff in classroom activities.

**Classroom Organization:** Classrooms function best when children are busy, well-behaved, and engaged in interesting learning activities. To measure this, observers look for evidence of “behavior management” – how effectively classroom staff monitor, prevent, and re-direct behavior; “productivity” – how effectively activities are organized and how well directions are given so that maximum time is spent in learning activities; and “instructional learning formats” – how classroom staff facilitate activities and present materials so that students remain engaged in learning.

**Instructional Support:** To help children gain useable knowledge, classroom staff must present information in ways that further students’ understanding of how facts are related and connected to one another. Successful classroom staff do this by building upon children’s current knowledge and adding more complex skills as children are ready. Rather than looking at the content of learning activities, the Instructional Support domain looks at how classroom staff use learning activities to support cognitive and language development. Observers look at “concept development” – the extent to which classroom staff support children’s higher order thinking skills through discussion and activities; “quality of feedback” – the things classroom staff say and the questions they ask to expand children’s learning; and “language modeling” – how classroom staff introduce new words and encourage the use of language.

For more information on the CLASS®, please visit the Teachstone website: [teachstone.com/class/](https://teachstone.com/class/)  
Free learning modules are available from the Center for Early Education and Development website: [ceed.umn.edu/class-learning-modules/](https://ceed.umn.edu/class-learning-modules/)

## Q. Why is the CLASS® important for program quality?

**A.** Many studies have documented the importance of classroom staff in children’s learning and development, but not many tools have been found to accurately measure the quality of the interactions between classroom staff and children. The CLASS® has been found to be a very helpful tool for measuring classroom quality. Research studies have shown that children in classrooms with higher CLASS® scores make greater academic and social gains than children in classrooms with lower CLASS® scores. This is especially true for at-risk children.

**Q: Will my program have a CLASS® observation?**

**A:** Maybe. Not all programs participating in Parent Aware will be eligible for a CLASS® observation.

- If your program is in the Full-Rating Pathway, you are eligible for an observation if you meet all the following criteria:
  - Your program is center-based and serves preschoolers.
  - You have submitted your Parent Aware Quality Documentation Portfolio (QDP) and indicated that you are seeking a Three- or Four-Star Rating.
- If your program has a Rating in the Expedited Pathway, you are eligible for an observation within six months of your Rating Issuance date if you meet the following criteria:
  - Your program serves preschoolers at the time of application

**Q. Why don't family child care providers get observed?**

**A.** Many family child care programs serve a wide age range of children in the same setting and Parent Aware is currently not using the infant or toddler versions of the CLASS®.

**Q. What if my center-based program doesn't serve preschoolers?**

**A.** Currently, only preschool and preschool/toddler classrooms in child care centers are observed using the CLASS®. If a program does not have any preschool or preschool/toddler classrooms, the program will not be eligible to receive a CLASS® observation. **Center-based programs in the Full-Rating Pathway that have no classrooms eligible for a CLASS® observation must score at least two points in every Category and earn 25-34 points for a Three-Star Rating or 35-50 points for a Four-Star Rating.**

**Q: Which classrooms in my program will have a CLASS® observation?**

**A:** First, your program must be eligible for a CLASS® observation. Only preschool and preschool/toddler classrooms that are not included in a partnership agreement and hold a Rating with a school district or in a Head Start, or Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership are eligible for an observation. If your center-based program is eligible for an observation, a CLASS® observation may be done in any classroom that indicates that it serves “preschool” or “toddler and preschool” on the Classroom tab in Develop. You must update the Classroom tab in Develop with the names of the classrooms in your program along with the age group served.

**Q. How many classrooms will be observed?**

**A:** If your program has one to three classrooms eligible for a CLASS® observation, one will be randomly selected in Develop to be observed. If your program has four to six classrooms eligible for a CLASS® observation, two will be randomly selected in Develop to be observed. If your program has seven to nine classrooms eligible for a CLASS® observation, three will be randomly selected in Develop to be observed. For programs in the Full-Rating Pathway, the selection of classroom(s) for observation will be done after the QDP has been submitted and reviewed. For programs in the Expedited Pathway, the selection of classroom(s) occurs within six months of the Rating issuance date.

**Q. When will the observation(s) take place?**

**A. For programs in the Full-Rating Pathway:** After you submit your Quality Documentation Portfolio, a Rater with the Minnesota Department of Human Services will review your documentation and determine whether your program is eligible for a CLASS® observation. Trained and certified CLASS® observers from the University of Minnesota's Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) will then contact you to schedule the CLASS® observation(s). **For Programs in the Expedited Pathway:** Observations are scheduled within six months of the Rating issuance date.

**Q. Who will do the observation?**

**A.** If your classroom is selected for an observation, one or more CLASS® observers will be assigned to come to your classroom. The CLASS® observers are employees of the Center for Early Education and Development (CEED) at the University of Minnesota. They are highly trained and hold current certifications on the CLASS® tool from Teachstone and have demonstrated the ability to conduct the tool responsibly and reliably through ongoing reliability checks and professional development.

**Q. How does the observation work? How long does it take?**

**A.** The observation will last for approximately two hours. During this time, the CLASS® observer(s) will follow classroom staff and children through their day, observing interactions between classroom staff and children as well as between children. A CLASS® observation consists of four cycles. These cycles are divided into two parts. The first part of a cycle is a structured observation period, during which the CLASS® observer watches the interactions in the classroom and takes detailed, objective notes. The second part of a cycle is a scoring period, during which the observer assigns scores to all the CLASS® dimensions based on the structured observation period. It is important to note that during the scoring period the CLASS® observer’s focus is on scoring and not what is happening in the classroom. Once one cycle has been completed the next cycle begins until four complete cycles have been observed and scored. Please note that if during the observation period, the whole class engages in unstructured gross motor play the observer(s) will not perform the structured observation period during this time. If you have questions about this, please talk with the CLASS® observation scheduler when contacted to schedule the CLASS® observation(s). Thus, while we are not asking you to alter your typical schedule in any way, please note that the overall time the observer spends at the program may need to be extended to ensure that four appropriate cycles are completed. CEED CLASS® observers follow the “Live Observation Procedure” outlined in chapter 2 of the *Pre-K CLASS® Manual (Pianta, R.C., LaParo, K.M., & Hamre, B.K., 2008)*.

**Q. What do CLASS® scores mean for program quality?**

**A:** The CLASS® considers a score of 1 or 2 as low quality; a score of 3, 4, or 5 as moderate quality; and a score of 6 or 7 as high quality.

**Q. How do Minnesota centers score on the CLASS®?**

**A.** During the period when the Parent Aware Validation Study was being conducted (2012 – 2015), all child care centers were scored using the Pre-K version of the CLASS® tool. Like the findings in other states, most Minnesota centers did best in Emotional Support, fairly well in Classroom Organization, and needed the most improvement in Instructional Support.

Mean Score by CLASS® Domain	One- and Two-Star Rated Programs	Three- and Four-Star Rated Programs
Emotional Support	6.23	6.34
Classroom Organization	6.08	6.17
Instructional Support	2.43	2.73

For more details on how child care centers scored on the CLASS® during the Validation Study, you can read the Validation Report, written by researchers from Child Trends:

[closegapsby5.org/files/pdf/Parent%20Aware%20Validation%20Report\\_Final.pdf](https://closegapsby5.org/files/pdf/Parent%20Aware%20Validation%20Report_Final.pdf)

**Q. Why does Parent Aware care so much about the Instructional Support domain?**

**A.** The authors of the CLASS® have demonstrated with research that scores on the Instructional Support scale are significantly associated with gains in children’s development during the Pre-K years in receptive language, expressive language, rhyming, letter naming, and math skills (Mashburn et al., 2008). So, although this is the domain in which programs usually score lowest, it is very important to work toward higher scores because this is the kind of support that seems to most benefit children’s learning.

For a summary of the literature on the CLASS® tool and for Teachstone’s CLASS® resources, visit [teachstone.com/class/](https://teachstone.com/class/).

**Q. How is the CLASS® observation different than CLASS® coaching?**

**A.** The CLASS® observation is a part of the Parent Aware Rating process. If you are seeking a Three- or Four-Star Rating, your classroom(s) scores on the CLASS® will be one of the factors that determines your Star Rating. CLASS® coaching is intended to help you improve the quality of interactions in your classroom through relationship-based professional development (RBPD).

**Q. How are CLASS® Coaches assigned?**

**A.** CLASS® Coaches are assigned to programs who are eligible for CLASS® coaching. Prior to the start of each Full-Rating Cohort, and other times as needed, coach assignments are collected from Child Care Aware of Minnesota regional coordinators and entered in Develop. Each region has at least one CLASS® coach that can support programs. CLASS Coaches are assigned to Expedited Pathway programs at the time of application.

**Q. What Indicators require CLASS® scores, and how are points awarded with multiple classrooms?**

**A.** CLASS® scores are used to determine the program’s scoring for Indicators T2.3, T2.4, and T1.3b. If more than one classroom is observed, points will be awarded for Indicators based on the average of scores awarded.

Individual CLASS® scores for each classroom observed must also meet the following criteria: Each classroom must receive a minimum of 2.0 in the Instructional Support domain to achieve a Three-Star Rating; each classroom must receive a minimum of 2.5 in the Instructional Support domain to achieve a Four-Star Rating.