

2021

CLASS[®] Improves Social-Emotional Learning

(Pre-K – 5th grade)

What is Social-emotional learning (SEL)? SEL encompasses a wide range of skills, and is broadly defined as a child's ability to understand and manage their emotions and behavior, feel empathy for others, develop healthy identities, build close relationships with peers, and practice cognitive flexibility.

Social emotional learning is a critical component of school readiness and later academic and social success. Studies show a strong correlation between children's SEL skills and better outcomes in school (Denham et al. 2012; O'Connor et al., 2014).

Effective interactions, as measured by CLASS, play an important role in supporting children's social-emotional learning. Below, you'll learn more about the association between teacher-child interactions and children's social-emotional well-being. Executive functioning skills, such as self-regulation, stress management, and focus are strongly associated with healthy social-emotional development. We'll also cover the connections between teacher-child interactions and executive functioning in this overview.





What is CLASS®?

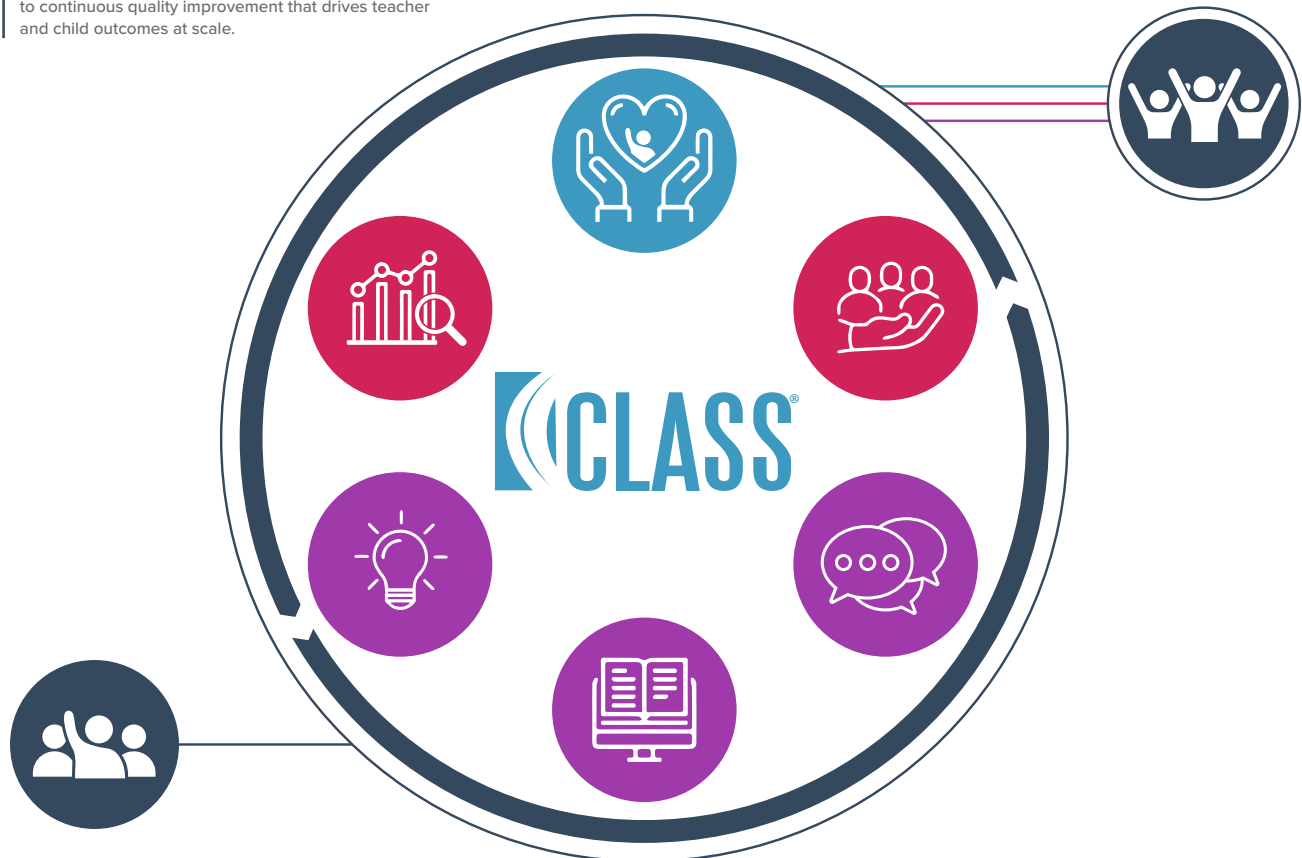
CLASS measures the effectiveness of interactions among teachers and children in the classroom and provides a framework for continuous improvement efforts. The Pre-K CLASS framework categorizes interactions into ten dimensions across three broad domains:

- Emotional Support assesses how teachers support children’s social and emotional functioning.
- Classroom Organization captures how teachers manage children’s time, attention, and behavior.
- Instructional Support. measures how teachers promote higher-order thinking skills and language.

A key to a successful continuous quality improvement journey is an intentional, systematic approach that drives a cyclical, ongoing process. CLASS offers a framework that helps programs focus, measure, and improve their teacher and child outcomes at scale.

CLASS: A PROVEN APPROACH

to continuous quality improvement that drives teacher and child outcomes at scale.



TEACHERS in your program may feel disconnected from improvement initiatives, impacting their ability to connect and support every child.

CHILDREN in your program may face inequity of classroom experiences that impact their ability to succeed.



FOCUS

Empower staff by focusing program quality on what they love to do, interact with children. **Build program alignment** with a shared language and culture of quality, equitable interactions.



MEASURE

Observe great teaching in action, gather insights on the quality of interactions, and **use formal and informal observation data** to identify opportunities for celebration and improvement.



IMPROVE

Move beyond a one-size-fits all approach and strengthen classroom practices with **individualized coaching, self-study opportunities, and data-driven learning experiences** that’s relevant to everyone.



EVERY TEACHER in your program feels supported with the knowledge and tools they need to make an impact. And, when teachers succeed, children succeed.

EVERY CHILD in your program has the opportunity to experience life-changing interactions and success.



Finding 1: In Classrooms with Higher Emotional Support, Children Show Increased Social Skills and Decreased Problem Behaviors

In classrooms where teachers demonstrated high-quality interactions that support emotional development, children were more likely to develop key social-emotional skills such as impulse control and social competence. Children are also less likely to engage in problem behaviors in these classrooms. These interactions can look like warm and sensitive responses to children, welcoming environments where children feel safe and secure, and ample opportunities for children to have appropriate levels of autonomy (Pianta et al., 2008).

Some studies were conducted specifically with preschool children. Preschoolers who experienced warm and responsive classroom interactions in the fall displayed more prosocial behaviors in the spring. (Pakarinen et al., 2020). Those with low impulse control showed gains in inhibitory control when they were in classrooms with higher levels of Emotional Support. (Choi et al., 2016; Weiland et al., 2012). And, those with low self-regulation skills were more likely to engage in positive social interactions with peers when the classroom was higher on Emotional Support and Classroom Organization (Broekhuizen et al., 2017).

For older children, one study of first-graders showed that higher levels of Emotional Support are associated with children's social and behavioral skills. (Burchinal et al., 2016). Children in early elementary school classrooms with higher Emotional Support performed better on tests of social skills and showed decreased problem behavior. (Broekhuizen et al., 2016). Finally, a study of fifth grade students showed that in emotionally supportive classrooms there were fewer conflicts with teachers and children were more engaged in classroom activities. The consistency of these interactions was important, as students in classrooms with varied Emotional Support across the day were reported to have more conflictual relationships and were less engaged (LoCasale Crouch et al., 2018).

The consistency of Emotional Support also contributes to social-emotional skills. Teachers who provided more consistent Emotional Support reported closer relationships with their children, increased social competence, and fewer problem behaviors. These same children were viewed as being more socially competent by their kindergarten teachers (Brock & Curby, 2014).

High Emotional Support also factored into other skills, such as buffering the effects of problem behaviors and approaches to learning (Dominguez et al., 2011). And, children's approaches to learning (which include several social, emotional, and behavioral skills) were positively related to higher Emotional Support (Hu et al., 2017).





Finding 2: In Classrooms with Higher Classroom Organization, Children Develop Better Social-Emotional Skills

Classroom Organization also helps set the stage for children's development of social-emotional skills. When children understand and follow classroom rules and routines and are engaged in interesting learning activities, they have more opportunities to develop social-emotional skills.

In a large-scale study of Head Start classrooms, children who experienced more effective support for behavior and more engaging activities demonstrated increased social skills and inhibitory control (Moiduddin et al., 2012). Another study showed that children engaged in less disruptive play at the end of the school year when Classroom Organization was high (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2020).

Children in classrooms with higher Classroom Organization showed increased social adaptation and fewer internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety, withdrawal) (Besnard & Letarte, 2017, Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2020). In contrast, when children were in classrooms with lower Classroom Organization scores, they exhibited fewer social skills and higher externalizing behaviors such as aggression or yelling, for example (Aguiar et al., 2019).

These findings hold across age groups and settings. Kindergarten children who experienced effective Classroom Organization were more likely to exhibit behavioral self-control. Furthermore, high quality Classroom Organization skills are strong predictors of children's social and behavioral skills in first grade (Burchinal et al., 2016). Furthermore, Classroom Organization amplifies the impact of social network equity in urban elementary schools (Cappella et al., 2013).



Finding 3: Classrooms with Higher Instructional Support Promote Children's Social and Emotional Skills

Effective teacher-child interactions in Instructional Support include promoting higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and reasoning, providing specific feedback in response to children, and supporting receptive and expressive language development. Children in classrooms with more effective Instructional Support showed greater ability to successfully regulate their behavior and manage their impulses. Children who began the year with lower levels of self-regulation demonstrated increased skills by the end of the school year in classrooms with higher Instructional Support scores (Cadima et al., 2016).

Preschool children who experienced classrooms with higher levels of Instructional Support demonstrated fewer problem behaviors, had closer relationships with teachers (Burchinal et al., 2014; Hamre et al., 2014), and performed better on executive function skills (Alamos et al., 2020; Araujo et al., 2016; Pianta et al., 2020; Weiland et al., 2012).





Finding 4: Dual-Language Learners' and Children with Disabilities Appear To Benefit from More Effective Interactions Across CLASS Domains

A number of recent studies find CLASS to be a valid tool for predicting development and learning among multilingual learners. Two studies find that CLASS has similar predictive validity for dual language-learners (DLL) as it does for monolingual children (Burchinal et al., 2012; Downer, et al., 2011). In addition, Downer and colleagues (2011) found that average CLASS scores across domains did not vary as a function of the percentage of DLLs in the classroom.

All three domains of CLASS are positively associated with social emotional skills for DLLs (Downer et al., 2011). And, DLL students in Head Start classrooms displayed better approaches to learning where teachers were more emotionally supportive and used more Spanish for instruction (Limlingan et al., 2019).



For preschool children with disabilities, one study shows that higher levels of Instructional Support were associated with increased social competence. (Aguiar et al., 2019). But, for both DLLs and children with disabilities, more research is recommended to better understand the direct outcomes from high-quality interactions as defined by the CLASS tool.



Finding 5: High Quality Interactions Are Associated with Benefits Over Time

There are also long-term outcomes associated with more effective support for engagement and behavior.

When children experienced higher levels of quality interactions in pre-K, they demonstrated better social skills and fewer behavior problems in kindergarten and first grade. Children in classrooms with higher Classroom Organization in kindergarten also showed higher levels of behavioral engagement in both kindergarten and first grade (Broekhuizen et al., 2016). While children who attended kindergarten classrooms with higher levels of Classroom Organization were rated by their first grade teachers as being more engaged (Cadima et al., 2016).



Citations

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