

Descriptive Summary of the Impact of the Proposed Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) Thresholds in Head Start's Designation Renewal System (DRS)

Since the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) was adopted by the Office of Head Start (OHS) in 2011, Teachstone has been committed to ensuring the highest-quality implementation of the CLASS® in Head Start settings serving our nation's most vulnerable children. The CLASS measures the quality of early childhood programs at the "point of impact" for children's development: the quality of instruction and of interactions between the teachers and the children. Research has found that the best predictors of later child outcomes are the characteristics of teacher-child interactions as measured by the CLASS.

OHS has proposed an increase in the absolute thresholds for the three domains of the CLASS: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization and Instructional Support. In response to OHS's proposal and questions from the field, we are providing this guidance to show how different classrooms can look solely based on teacher-child interactions, as measured by CLASS.

Threshold for Emotional Support

The CLASS Emotional Support domain looks at how teachers help students develop

- Warm, supportive relationships with teachers and peers
- Enjoyment of and excitement about learning
- Motivation to engage in learning activities
- Feelings of comfort in the classroom
- Willingness to accept academic and social challenges
- Appropriate levels of autonomy

We support the Administration's proposal to raise the minimum thresholds for the Emotional Support domain from 4 to 5. Increasing the Emotional Support score to 5 would help ensure classrooms are providing a more uniform and higher level of Emotional Support, which has been related to academic outcomes and social competence in preschool.

A score of 4 in the Emotional Support domain indicates that either there is some evidence that children are experiencing the types of interactions that lead them to feel safe and secure in their environments – or that there are times when the Emotional Support in the classroom is strong, but there are also times when it is low.

In a classroom with mid-range Emotional Support, at 4, the current threshold:

- Teachers may spend some time in close proximity with the children, joining in their play, but at other times, may be preoccupied with other tasks
- Teachers may frequently notice and provide help when children have problems completing a task but may miss times when children are having social difficulties
- Given that young children thrive on consistency, a fluctuation in the amount of Emotional Support they experience can be problematic

In a classroom with higher Emotional Support, moving into the higher mid-range (the proposed threshold of a 5), the children will more consistently:

- Share in activities with their teachers participating alongside them, engaging in a relaxed, comfortable manner
- Hear their names spoken by their teachers when they are having conversations, along with polite phrases such as “please” and “thank you”
- Have a choice of activities and be given opportunities to lead in the classroom, including supporting other children

Threshold for Classroom Organization

The CLASS domain of Classroom Organization looks at how teachers help students

- Develop skills to regulate their own behavior
- Get the most out of each school day
- Maintain interest in learning activities

We also support the Administration’s proposal to increase the minimum threshold from 3 to 5 in the Classroom Organization domain. Setting a threshold in the higher mid-range would encourage programs to support teachers to improve the ways they help children develop skills to regulate their behavior, get the most out of each school day, and maintain interest in learning activities.

In a classroom with higher Classroom Organization moving into the higher mid-range, with a 5 (the proposed threshold), the children are more likely to:

- Understand and comply with classroom rules and teachers’ expectations
- Follow routines
- Display higher levels of interest in things that are happening in the classroom – things that benefit children’s social-emotional and academic outcomes
- Experience interactions with teachers who subtly redirect by moving in close physical proximity or saying something such as, “Let’s remember our classroom agreements”

In a classroom with lower Classroom Organization, such as a 3 (the current threshold):

- Behavioral expectations are neither entirely clear, nor consistently enforced
- Children often have nothing to do, and instruction, when provided, may not fully interest the children, thereby interfering with their ability to learn
- Many children may be running around and not paying attention to the teacher's instructions
- Teacher's reactions to children's lack of attention may consist of statements such as, "Stop that," or "You know better than to behave that way!"

Threshold for IS

The CLASS Instructional Support domain looks at how teachers help students

- Learn to solve problems, reason, and think
- Use feedback to expand and deepen skills and knowledge
- Develop more complex language skills

We support the Administration's proposal to increase the minimum threshold from 2 to 2.5 in the Instructional Support domain. To explain, this sets the threshold above the low range, sending a significant statement that classrooms with low range scores, below 2.5, in which children are rarely, if ever, exposed to the types of interactions that promote higher-order thinking and language development, are not sufficiently meeting the Head Start Program's goals for early childhood education.

In a classroom with low Instructional Support, at a 2 or below, the children are unlikely to be:

- Participating in discussions or questions that help them develop analysis and reasoning skills
- Receiving responsive teacher feedback; instead, feedback is probably rote in nature, such as, a teacher replying to a child's answer with, "That's exactly right"
- Engaging in interactions that allow them to practice using language



While a score of 2.5 by no means indicates children are in an environment where their cognitive development and language is supported in an optimal way, it does mean children may have minimal exposure to interactions that lead to growth in these areas. There is something detectable - it is not that the classroom is totally devoid of interactions in this domain.

In a classroom with higher Instructional Support, moving into the mid range with a 2.5 or higher, children may occasionally experience:

- A teacher sharing a picture walk of a book, asking the children to predict what the book will be about; however, she may not ask anything else as she reads it to them
- Their teacher asking them to explain their actions (“Why did you decide to put a mustache on your snowman?”) though mostly she will simply comment on what she sees (“I see you painted your fish in rainbow colors”) but not ask what led them to do that
- New vocabulary introduced by a teacher linking to more familiar concepts or words

More frequent interactions related to those above, such as opportunities for children to predict, respond to open-ended questions, and engage in self-reflection are important for children because they are pushed to think at a deeper level. They are also key for teachers because they confirm that children are capable of doing more than teachers may think and also help teachers see how to embed Instructional Support interactions and lead them to become more intentional in their provision of these key experiences. With support, teachers will be able to move from rarely or occasionally using thought-provoking, language-rich behaviors at the low to low-mid range to more consistently doing so as they strengthen their interactions with children.



Teachstone®, founded by co-authors of CLASS, is the world’s leading authority on measuring and improving the quality of teacher-child interactions in classrooms. We invite you to learn more about CLASS by visiting our website, giving us a call, or by reaching out to the team member who provided this brochure.

