



OHS CLASS[®]

Field Guide

FY 2018



OHS CLASS® Field Guide FY 2018

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1. Introduction

The Pre-K Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) is an observation tool used to analyze and assess the effectiveness of interactions between children and teachers in preschool classes. Data from CLASS® observations can be used for a variety of purposes, including professional development, program improvement, policy-making, and monitoring. The Office of Head Start (OHS) began using the CLASS® tool in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 to collect information about the experiences of children in Head Start programs. The OHS uses a research-based, standardized methodology for using the CLASS® tool to measure teacher-child interactions—one important measure of quality. This methodology is described in detail in this CLASS® Field Guide.

The FY 2018 CLASS® Field Guide is organized into several sections:

1. Introduction

2. CLASS® Observations

3. CLASS® Reviewer Reliability

4. On-site Activities—Executing a CLASS® Review

5. The CLASS® Sample and Scheduling

6. Appendix

2. CLASS® Observations

CLASS® observations should be conducted in Head Start classrooms serving preschool children. Observations should never be made using the Pre-K CLASS® tool in Family Child Care or home-based settings, including socializations.

2.1 CLASS® Observation Cycles

In each class selected for observation, CLASS® Reviewers conduct two observation cycles. Each observation cycle should include a 20-minute observation followed immediately by 10 minutes of scoring and up to 5 minutes answering background questions. If an observation cycle is cut short, then the CLASS® Reviewer should score the *observation if the cycle lasts 10 minutes or more*. If the observation lasted fewer than 10 minutes, then it should not be scored and does not count. Once a Reviewer begins an observation cycle, it should never be paused and continued later. Scoring must occur immediately after the 20-minute observation cycle and must be conducted outside the classroom.

The two observation cycles within each class must be consecutive. The CLASS® Reviewer must complete both observation cycles for a given class before moving to observe another class. The two observation cycles within the class ideally should occur on the same day and should be back-to-back, with a break only for an unobservable activity. For example, if a CLASS® Reviewer conducts one observation cycle in class A and the children in that class then go down for a nap, then the Reviewer may not observe another class while waiting for nap time to end. Instead, the Reviewer must wait until the children wake up and then complete the second observation cycle. Only after the second observation cycle has been conducted in class A may the Reviewer observe another class. However, it is acceptable for a Reviewer to conduct an observation in a class at the end of the school day and return to conduct the second observation in the same class the following morning, provided the Reviewer did not conduct any other observations in the interim.

Reviewers always should make sure it is feasible to conduct two consecutive observation cycles in a class prior to beginning the first observation. If a Reviewer has conducted one observation cycle in a class but unexpectedly cannot complete a second, then he or she should indicate in the software that the second observation could not be completed and enter a justification describing why. Reviewers must sync their software after each classroom observation is completed.

2.2 When to Conduct a CLASS® Observation Cycle

Reviewers must observe only at appropriate times to ensure that the CLASS® tool is used in a valid and consistent manner across all grantees.

Observable Activities

Observations can and should be conducted **during any of the following:**

- ▶ **Teacher-directed activities**
- ▶ **Child-initiated activities**
- ▶ **Large- and small-group times**
- ▶ **Morning or afternoon**—afternoon may include time after naps.

- ▶ **Meals/snacks**—mealtimes are acceptable observation times, regardless of location (e.g., classroom, cafeteria, or elsewhere). If a meal occurs in a cafeteria in which other classes that are not being observed are present, then CLASS® Reviewers **should still** observe.
- ▶ **Transitions**—observations should continue (or may begin) during and through transitions. If the children transition from participating in center activities to handwashing and then to receiving snacks during an observation cycle, then Reviewers should continue to observe throughout those activities and transitions. Other examples of transitions include children selecting center activities at the end of circle time and getting ready to go outside.
- ▶ **Arrival or departure times**—Reviewers may review arrival or departure times provided at least 50 percent of the children are present. If less than 50 percent of the children have arrived or more than 50 percent of the children have left for the day, then the class is no longer observable.
- ▶ **Structured gross-motor activities (indoor or outdoor)**—gross-motor activities that are part of the instructional day should be observed. Examples may include a nature walk or teacher-led activities/games played outside or in a gym area.
- ▶ **Outdoors or indoors**—if the activities are conducted outdoors and are comparable to activities that would be observed indoors, then the time is observable. For example, in warmer climates, the class may be conducted in an outdoor “classroom” or meals may be eaten outside.

Observations are **not** to be conducted during any of the following:

- ▶ **Naptime**
- ▶ **When less than 50 percent of the currently enrolled children are present**—if less than 50 percent of the enrolled children are present in a class, then it cannot be observed. The percentage of children present is based purely on the number of children *currently* enrolled on the day observations begin and present regardless of a child’s funding source (e.g., Head Start, Pre-K). The OHS needs to monitor the quality of classes in which Head Start-funded children are enrolled, regardless of which program’s children are present at any given time.
- ▶ **During unstructured gross-motor activity (indoor or outdoor)**—if the class is engaged in gross-motor activity with no teacher-led structured activities, then the Reviewer should not conduct an observation.
- ▶ **During special events**—if events take place that do not reflect a typical day, then no observation should be conducted. Examples include fire drills, Grandparents’ Day lunch, and other special events.
- ▶ **Times the class is being led by an individual other than the regular primary teaching staff**—support staff or volunteers may be present in the classroom as additional staff, but the class is not observable when the class is led by such individuals. Examples include the Nutrition Coordinator leading a lesson on healthy foods, visiting firefighters talking to the children about safety, or other non-regular classroom staff leading an activity.

- ▶ **When the CLASS® Reviewer is not fluent in the primary language(s) of instruction—** Reviewers must be able to understand the interactions between teachers and children and, therefore, cannot observe if they do not fully understand the primary language of instruction spoken in the classroom during any given observation cycle.

Presence of Teaching Staff/Substitutes

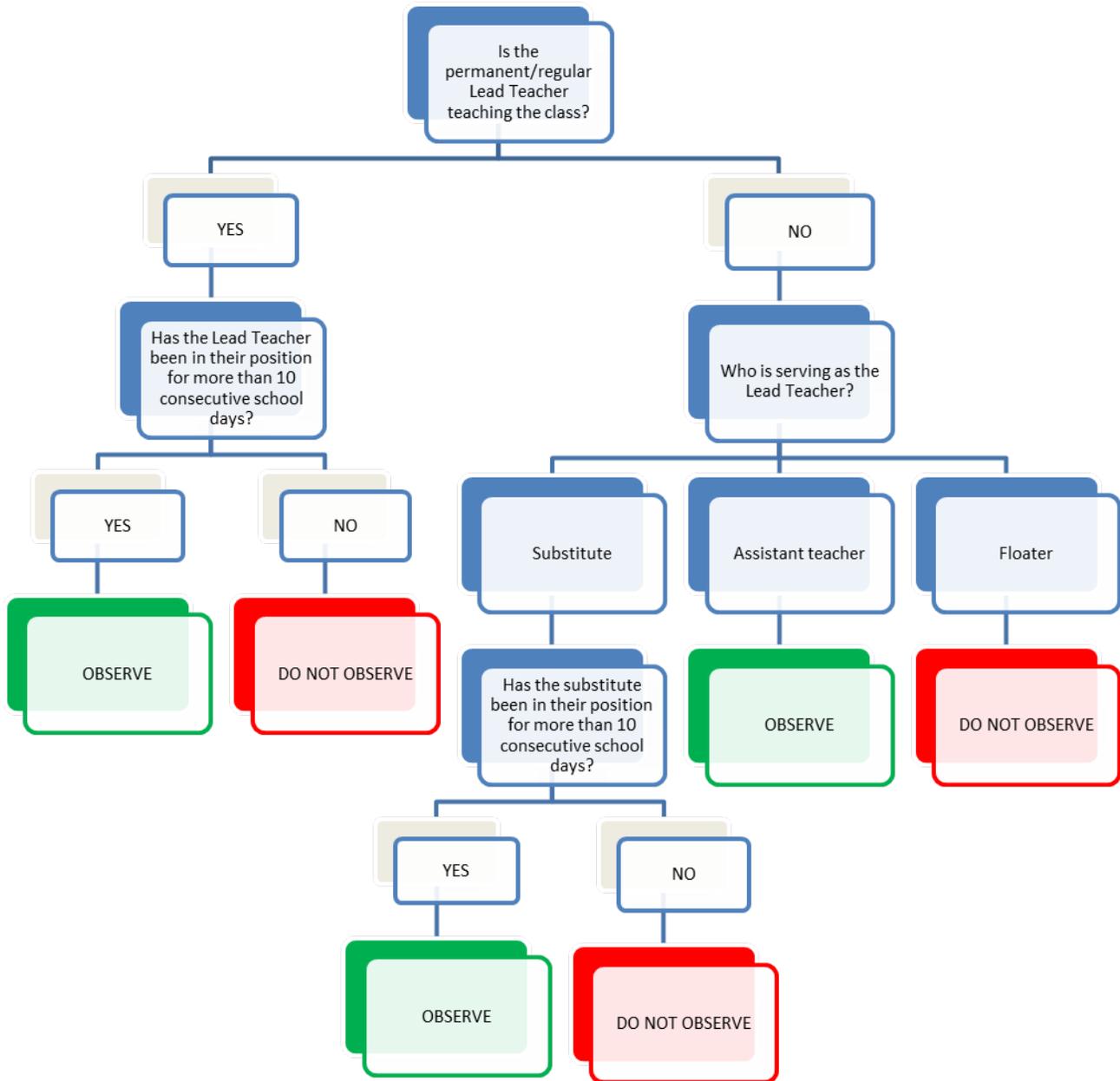
CLASS® observations should be conducted when the lead teacher is present and engaging with the class, although Reviewers may observe the entire classroom environment and any teacher-student interactions and do not need to focus exclusively on the interactions of the lead teacher. The following are clarifications to this rule:

- ▶ **New teacher**—a new teacher who will be a permanent teacher in a class may be observed after being in the position and completing 10 or more consecutive school days. A new teacher who has been in the class fewer than 10 school days should **not** be observed.
- ▶ **Substitutes for lead teacher (long term)**—a substitute lead teacher who has been in the class fewer than 10 school days may not be observed. When the lead teacher is out and the *same* substitute has been in the position and completed 10 or more consecutive school days, the class may be observed.
- ▶ **Substitutes for assistant teacher**—so long as the lead teacher—either the permanent teacher or a substitute who has been in the position and completed 10 or more consecutive school days—is observable, the presence of a substitute assistant teacher *should not affect* an observation. A substitute assistant teacher may be observed even if he or she has been in the classroom fewer than 10 days, as long as the lead teacher is observable.
- ▶ **Assistant taking lead teacher role (short term)**—if the regular assistant teacher is acting as the substitute lead teacher due to the lead teacher’s absence or involvement elsewhere, then an observation can be conducted.
- ▶ **Floater as lead teacher**—if a school-wide floater is acting as a substitute lead teacher, then the observation *may not* be conducted.

Determining Whether a Class Can Be Observed with the Presence of Teaching Staff/Substitutes

To determine whether a class can be observed with the presence of teaching staff or substitutes, CLASS® Reviewers should go through the questions presented in **Exhibit 1**. The flow chart helps determine if the staff leading a classroom meet the necessary conditions to conduct an observation. Use Exhibit 1 as a reference when you are deciding whether or not a class can be observed. You can observe the classroom if, after answering the flow chart questions, you end up on a green “OBSERVE” box. If you end up on a red “DO NOT OBSERVE” box in the flow chart, then you should not observe the class. Make sure you contact your CLASS® Lead for guidance if you experience any unusual circumstances.

Exhibit 1. Flow Chart to Determine Whether a Class is Observable with the Presence of Teaching Staff/Substitutes



2.3 Reviewer Presence in the Classroom

It is important that Reviewers minimize the effect of their presence in the classroom and do not interfere with either the activities or dynamics of the class. Observation cycles may be conducted from more than one vantage point depending on classroom activity. The Reviewer should find a place to observe from which all or most of the activities can be seen and where teacher-child and child-child interactions can be heard.

When entering the classroom, the Reviewer should acknowledge the teacher and quickly introduce him- or herself, provided it does not disrupt the flow of activities (e.g., a simple nod, wave, smile, or “hello” is sufficient).

Reviewers are required to take notes on paper for reference during scoring. Reviewers are required to use timers during their observations. They are to use these timers to record the exact start and end times of their observations.

2.4 Interacting With Grantee Staff, Children, and Teachers in the Classroom

Reviewers should avoid any interactions with teachers and children while they are observing. If children approach the CLASS® Reviewer to inquire about his or her presence, then the Reviewer should be honest and direct, saying something like, “I am here to see your class” while avoiding extended conversations that would interfere with the children’s ability to engage in activities and the Reviewer’s ability to observe.

Reviewers may respond to grantee staff’s and teachers’ questions about the process (e.g., regarding the length of the observation), but CLASS® Reviewers may not provide any information about scores or observations. If CLASS® Reviewers are asked about the scores, then they must respectfully decline to answer.

CLASS® Reviewers are not responsible for explaining the CLASS® tool or the rationale of the CLASS® methodology to grantees or staff. Grantees should be aware that the OHS is required to use the CLASS® tool for monitoring all grantees that provide Head Start center-based preschool services. CLASS® Reviewers may refer questions to the CLASS® Lead or the Head Start Director. The CLASS® Lead may refer grantees to the [2008 Information Memorandum](#) for more information.

3. CLASS® Reviewer Reliability

The OHS maintains a reliability system to ensure all CLASS® Reviewers implement the tool and the methodology correctly. In FY 2018, each CLASS® Reviewer must pass reliability testing.

One test is the recertification process administered by Teachstone. All CLASS® Reviewers must recertify annually.

Dual coding, which is another reliability test, is the process the OHS maintains to ensure Reviewers are coding accurately. During dual coding, each CLASS® Reviewer will code alongside a qualified CLASS® Dual Coder to ensure that the CLASS® Reviewer is reliable.

All CLASS® Reviewers receive training and support from both Touchstone and the OHS Monitoring System contract team throughout the year.

4. On-site Activities – Executing a CLASS® Review

4.1 CLASS Reviewers’ First Day On site

The CLASS® Reviewer will provide the sample of classroom observations to the grantee’s director and the grantee’s CLASS® point person at the introductory meeting on the first day of the review. The grantee’s director or CLASS® point person should review the sample and check for any unanticipated conflicts (e.g., a sick teacher or a closed center) before the Reviewer begins conducting observations.¹ The grantee’s meeting facilitator will confirm the details of the CLASS® review at this introductory meeting.

The grantee’s point person or director will contact the CLASS® Lead should there be an unexpected occurrence that will affect the schedule of observations. For example, if a teacher is sick or a center is closed due to inclement weather, then the CLASS® Lead should be notified by the grantee’s point person or director as soon as possible.

4.2 Communicating with the CLASS® Lead

CLASS® Reviewers must check in daily with the CLASS® Lead (and other CLASS® Reviewers, when applicable) to report any schedule changes, sampling issues encountered, and anything of note that they observed in the classroom (e.g., health and safety issues).

4.3 Syncing Software

Reviewers must sync their software after each classroom observation is completed.

¹ For American Indian and Alaska Native reviews, the CLASS® Reviewer must stay for the entire introductory meeting. In these instances, the FTL and CLASS® Reviewer will begin the monitoring review by meeting with grantee staff to learn about the Tribe. The Reviewer will use this time to learn from the Tribe and collect information regarding the Tribe’s conducting of meals, the language spoken, communication practices between children and adults, norms related to eye contact and body language, how stories are told, etc.

5. The CLASS® Sample and Scheduling

5.1 How Classes are Selected for Observation

The OHS has implemented a random-sampling procedure to ensure that an adequate representative sample of classes is observed and forms the basis of the CLASS® score. The sample of classes to be observed by the CLASS® Reviewer will be prepopulated in the software 7 days prior to the review. This list is not to be shared with the grantee until the team arrives on site.

The sample size, or number of classes, to be observed is a statistically driven calculation based on the grantee's total number of eligible classes; it is not a percentage. Samples range in size. The sample size may be as large as 74 classes. CLASS® Reviewers should do everything possible to adhere to the sample—both in terms of the number of classes identified and the precise classes selected to be observed.

The list of classes in the sample (the sample list) will identify the exact classes that must be observed, background information about the classes (e.g., schedule, type of program), and the center in which each classroom is located.^{2,3} The sample is based on HSES data. Inaccurate HSES data increase costs and require additional resources to adjust the sample.

5.2 Scheduling Observations from the Sample List

Reviewers must do everything possible to visit all classes in the sample list and preserve the original sample. The CLASS® Lead will create an initial schedule for the CLASS® Reviewer's observations. As the CLASS® Reviewer meets with the grantee and learns more about the locations of the selected classrooms and other circumstances that may affect the observations, the CLASS® Reviewer, with input from the CLASS® Lead, may and should make adjustments to the schedule to maximize the likelihood of observing all classes in the sample. The CLASS® Lead should be notified of any changes to the schedule.

² When the sample includes a double session, the CLASS® Reviewer should make sure he or she goes to the correct session by looking at the program variation for the class on the sample list. It is possible for both the morning and afternoon sessions of a double-session class to be included in the sample. In this case, both should be observed.

³ When the sample includes combination-option classes, CLASS® Reviewers should observe during the center-based segment. The class schedule on the sample list should indicate the days on which the center-based segment is held; however, the CLASS® Reviewer should confirm this with the grantee during the scheduling process.

5.3 When to Rearrange the Schedule or Select Replacement Classes

During a monitoring review, CLASS® Reviewers are likely to encounter situations in which they must make quick decisions around whether to observe a class or rearrange the observation schedule. CLASS® Reviewers should be prepared to make their best judgment about whether to continue observations or change plans if the CLASS® Lead cannot be contacted. The CLASS® observation should occur when the class is experiencing its typical scheduled activities. Reviewers must not ask grantees to alter their planned activities, and grantees should adhere to their planned daily classroom schedule.

CLASS® Reviewers should keep the following guiding principles in mind when making these decisions:

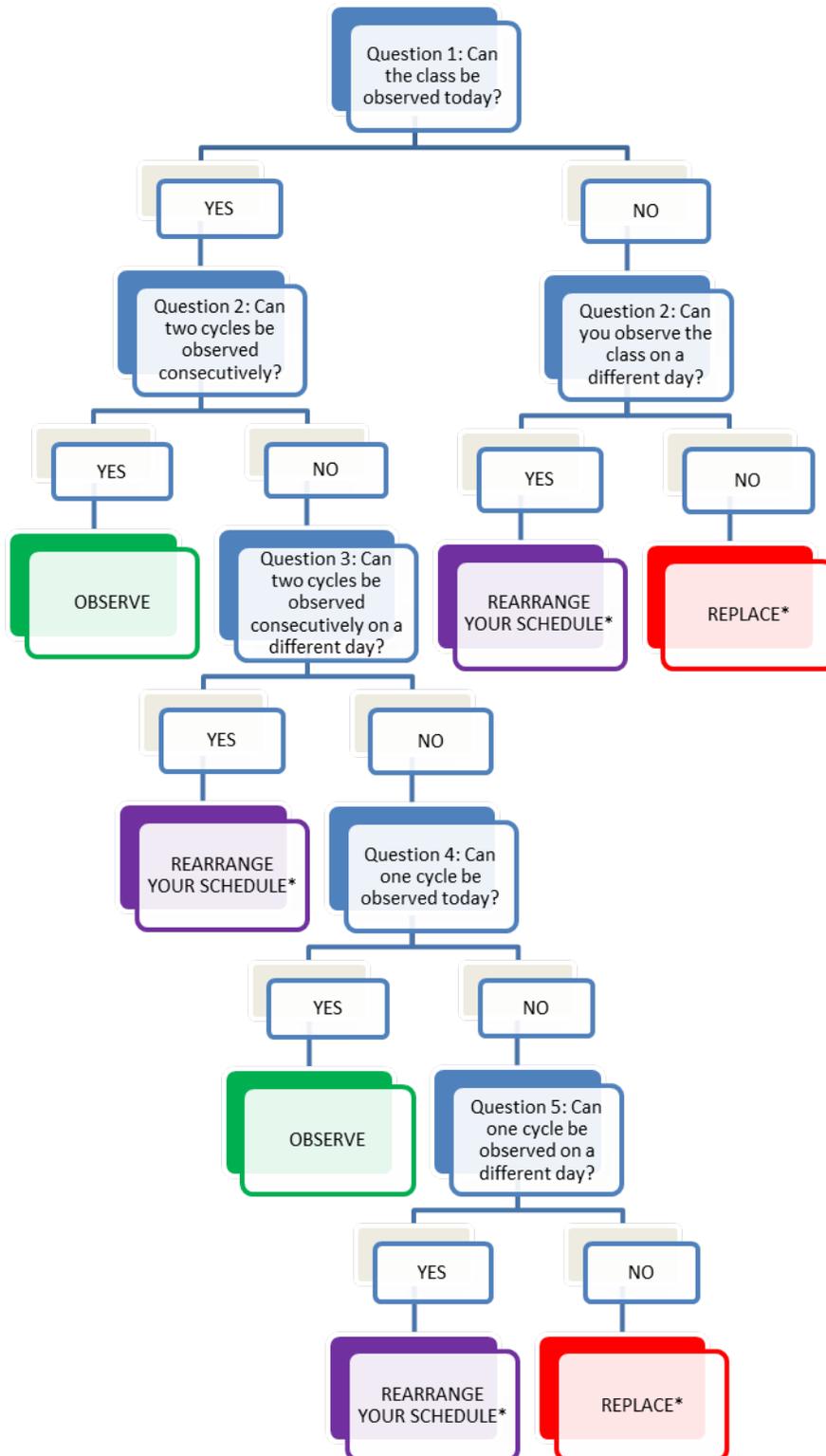
- 1. Preservation of the original classes sampled**—it is better to observe classes listed in the original sample list than to select replacement classes, even if this sometimes means observing only one cycle in a classroom listed in the original list. It is occasionally acceptable to observe only one cycle in a class.
- 2. Preservation of the original sample size**—it is better to observe a replacement class than to skip a class altogether and not achieve the original sample size.

Determining Whether a Class Can Be Observed on its Scheduled Day

To determine whether a class can be observed on its scheduled day, CLASS® Reviewers should go through the questions presented in **Exhibit 2**. The flow chart helps identify how many cycles can be observed on that day versus a different day. Use Exhibit 2 as a reference when you are scheduling your CLASS® observations if you are unsure about whether to rearrange your CLASS® observation schedule. You can observe the classroom on that day if, after answering the flow chart questions, you end up on a green “OBSERVE” box. If you end up on a purple “REARRANGE YOUR SCHEDULE” box in the flow chart, then you should select another day to observe that classroom. If you end up on a red “REPLACE” box in the flow chart, then you should select a replacement classroom.

Note that if you do need to rearrange your schedule for a given classroom, then you should contact your CLASS® Lead and then go through the flow chart question process (starting with Question 1) for the newly scheduled observation day. Similarly, if you need to replace a classroom, then you should contact your CLASS® Lead and go through the flow chart question process (starting with Question 1) for the replacement classroom. In both cases, make sure the observation meets the criteria for a valid observation (i.e., when you go through the flow chart questions for the replacement classroom, you end up on a green “OBSERVE” box).

Exhibit 2. Flow Chart of Determining Whether a Class can be Observed on the Day it is Scheduled



*Contact your CLASS® Lead and go through the flow chart question process (starting with Question 1) for the newly scheduled observation day or for the new replacement classroom.

When a Class Must Be Replaced

If a situation arises in which a CLASS® Reviewer cannot observe a class and must select a replacement, then he or she should use the software to do so and should never simply pick a replacement class based on convenience. In addition, they must communicate immediately with the CLASS® Lead via telephone or email to provide the CLASS® Lead the opportunity to help rearrange the schedule in a way that minimizes scheduling conflicts or overlapping observations with the other Reviewers. If the CLASS® Lead and the CLASS® Reviewers are not able to communicate as soon as the need for rescheduling arises, then CLASS® Reviewers must use their best judgment to proceed efficiently with a rearranged observation schedule.

Reviewers are able to select a replacement in the software without connecting to the Internet. However, if two CLASS® Reviewers select replacements without syncing, then it is possible more than one Reviewer will be presented with the same replacement class in the software. If this occurs, then one of the CLASS® Reviewers should observe the class selected as a replacement and the other Reviewer(s) should select a replacement. The CLASS® Lead should be contacted immediately whenever a replacement classroom is selected.

When a Class Must Be Skipped

At the end of the review, when CLASS® Reviewers close out, if any classes on the sample list were skipped, then the CLASS® Reviewers should open each unfinished observation cycle and mark that they were unable to observe the class, provide a justification, and indicate that they do not want a replacement class. The CLASS® Lead also will need to comment as to why any sampled classes were not observed when closing out the review. At the conclusion of each day, the CLASS® Reviewer is required to check in with the CLASS® Lead.

Appendix: Glossary

Class: A unique group of children and a teacher

Classroom: The physical space used by a class

CLASS® Lead: The grantee’s point of contact during the CLASS® review

CLASS® Reviewer: An individual who is a CLASS® certified observer and has been assigned to conduct the CLASS® portion of a Head Start Monitoring Review by the OHS’s contractor: Danya International, LLC

Cycle or Observation Cycle: One 20-minute observation followed by a 10-minute scoring period, and then a 5-minute background completion period

Double Session: A center-based option employing a single teacher to work with one group of children in the morning and a different group in the afternoon

Floater: A teacher who is not typically in the classroom on a daily basis, but substitutes for the regular classroom teachers on an as-needed basis, and should therefore **not** be observed

New Teacher: A teacher who has been in the class for fewer than 10 consecutive school days and should therefore **not** be observed

Observation: See “Cycle or Observation Cycle”

Preserving the Sample: There are two ways in which it is important to preserve, keep, or maintain the sample: (1) Observations are conducted in all the classes specified in the sample list; and (2) The quantity or number of CLASS® observation cycles conducted is equal to the original sample, but replacements were made to achieve the exact quantity defined by the original sample

Primary Teaching Staff: The teachers assigned to a group of children

Replacing a Class: When a class selected for the sample cannot be observed, but another class can be observed in its place

Replacement Classroom: A classroom that is chosen to replace a classroom from the original sample

Sample List: The list of classes to be observed, which is generated by the software and based on a statistical sampling algorithm

Scoring: The process of scoring each dimension of the CLASS® instrument, which must occur in the 10 minutes immediately following a 20-minute period of observation

Skipping a Class: When a class selected for the sample cannot be observed, and no other class can be observed in its place due to logistics or timing

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