



**OHS CLASS<sup>®</sup>**



**Field Guide**

**FY 2020**



# OHS CLASS® Field Guide FY 2020

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## 1. CLASS® Field Guide 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 center-based preschool classes. Data from CLASS® observations can be used for a variety of purposes, including professional development, program improvement, policymaking, 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. CLASS® observations aim to capture an average day for the average student. Head Start CLASS® reviews are conducted to obtain a grantee-level score rather than a classroom-level score. The OHS uses a research-based, standardized methodology for implementing the CLASS® tool to measure teacher-child interactions—one important measure of quality. This methodology is described in detail in this CLASS® Field Guide. This Field Guide was developed as a resource for CLASS® reviewers and grantees.

## 2. CLASS® Observations

CLASS® observations are 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.

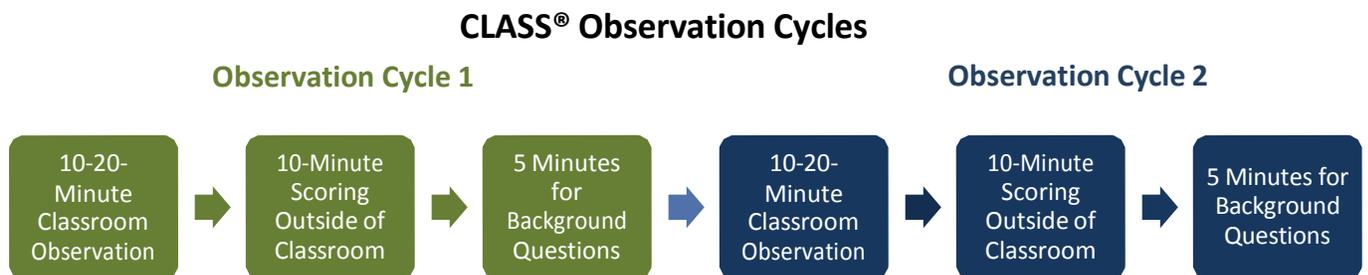
### 2.1. CLASS® Observation Cycles

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, 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 each 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, 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. It is acceptable, however, 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 refresh their software after each classroom observation is completed.

Exhibit 1: Head Start CLASS® Observation Cycles Diagram.



## 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. This section provides more detail about observable activities and presence of classroom staff and substitutes.

### **Observable Activities**

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

- ✓ **Teacher-directed activities**
- ✓ **Child-initiated activities**
- ✓ **Large-group, small-group, and individual settings**
- ✓ **Morning or afternoon** – Afternoon may include time after naps.
- ✓ **Meals or snacks** – Mealtimes are acceptable observation times, regardless of location (i.e., classroom, cafeteria, or elsewhere). If a meal occurs in a cafeteria in which other classes 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, 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 observe 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 scenarios:

- X Naptime**
- X 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 on the number of children *currently* enrolled on the day observations begin and present regardless of a child’s funding source (i.e., 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.
- X During unstructured gross-motor activity (indoor or outdoor)** – If the class is engaged in gross-motor activity without teacher-led structured activities, then the Reviewer should not conduct an observation.
- X Special Events** – Observations should not be conducted during special, atypical events. Examples of atypical events include fire drills, Grandparents’ Day lunch, and other special events. If the special event (e.g., fire drill) is finished and classroom activities resume as usual, the observation can be made. Please consult the CLASS® Lead in these situations.
- X When class is not led by regular primary teaching staff** – Classrooms should not be observed when the class is led by additional staff such as support staff or volunteers. Examples of unobservable activities include the Nutritional Coordinator leading a lesson on healthy eating, firefighters teaching a safety lesson, or other non-regular classroom staff leading a lesson.
- X 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. The lead teacher must be present for at least one complete observation cycle. Reviewers may observe the entire classroom environment and any teacher-student interactions. They do not need to focus exclusively on the interactions of the lead teacher. **To be observed, teachers must be in the position for more than 10 consecutive school days.** The following are clarifications to this rule:

#### **New teachers:**

- ✓ A new teacher who will be a permanent teacher in a class may be observed after being in the position and completing more than 10 consecutive school days.
- ✗ A new teacher who has been with this classroom group fewer than 11 school days should **not** be observed.

#### **Substitutes for lead teacher (long term):**

- ✓ When the lead teacher is out and the *same* substitute has been with this classroom group and completed more than 10 consecutive school days, the class may be observed.
- ✗ When a substitute teacher has been with this classroom group fewer than 11 school days, the class should **not** be observed.

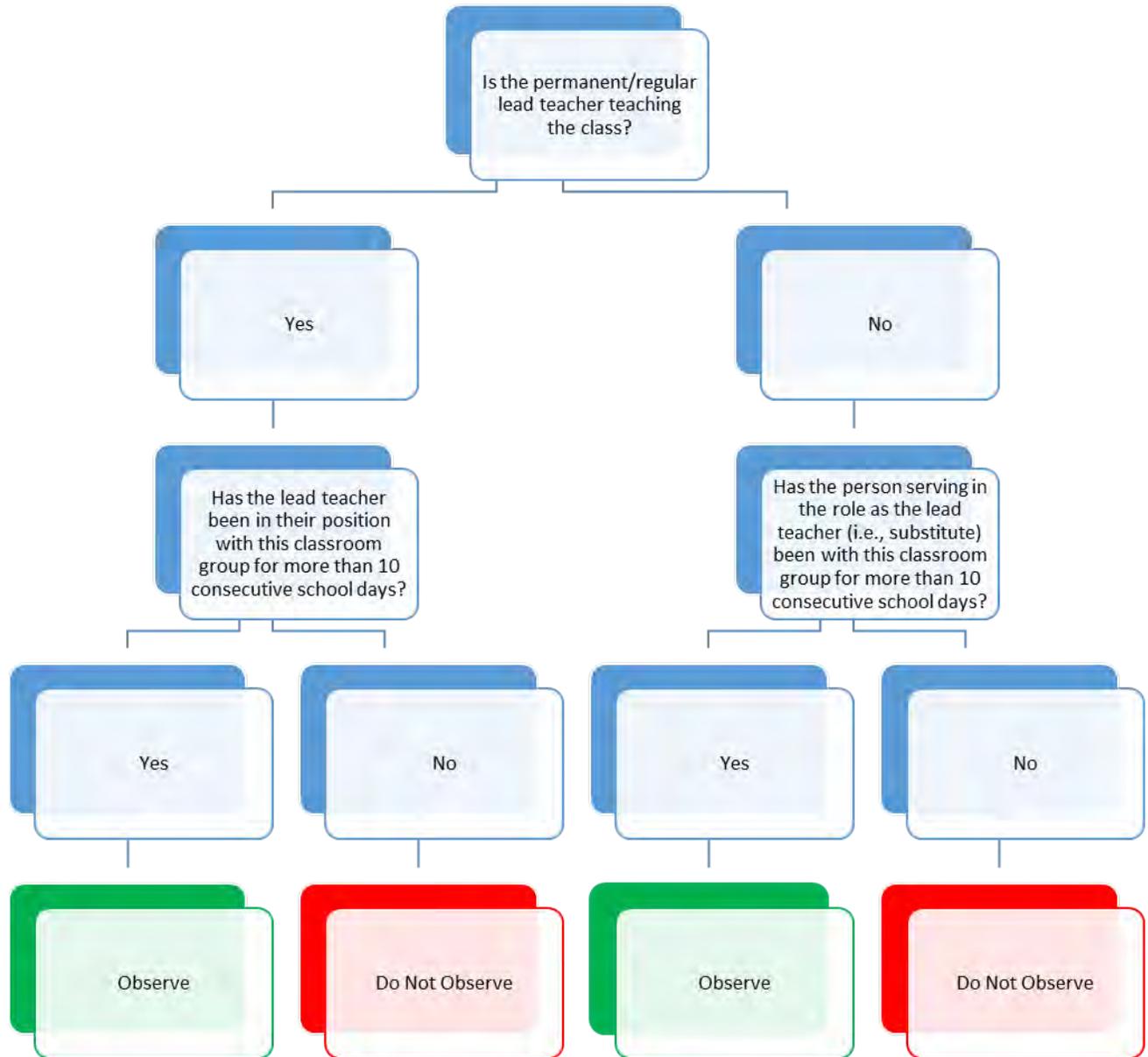
#### **Substitutes for assistant teacher:**

- ✓ If the lead teacher, either the permanent teacher or a substitute who has been with this classroom group and completed more than 10 consecutive school days, 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 consecutive school days, as long as the lead teacher is observable (See *Substitutes for Lead Teacher (long term)* bullet for more information).

#### **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, an observation can be conducted as long as the assistant teacher has been with this classroom group and completed more than 10 consecutive school days.
- ✗ An assistant teacher taking the role of the lead teacher (short term) who has been with the classroom group fewer than 11 school days should **not** be observed.

**Exhibit 2. CLASS® Observation Decision Tree: Teaching Staff/Substitutes.** This decision tree is a resource for reviewers that should be referenced during each review to ensure eligible teaching staff are observed.<sup>1</sup>



### 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.

<sup>1</sup> CLASS® team members who have concerns or questions about observing a classroom should contact their CLASS® Lead.

When entering the classroom, the Reviewer should acknowledge the teacher, provided it does not disrupt the flow of activities (i.e., a simple nod, wave, smile, or “hello” is sufficient). Reviewers may also confirm the identity of teaching staff/volunteers in the classroom.

Reviewers are required to use timers during their observations and take notes on paper for reference during scoring. Reviewers must use these timers to record the exact start and end times of their observations. To determine the feasibility of being able to conduct two 20-minute observation cycles, the CLASS® Reviewer should ask if the staff will be following the schedule posted in the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES).

## 2.4. Interacting with Grantee Staff, Children, and Teachers in the Classroom

Since CLASS® observations aim to capture an average day of enrolled children, Reviewers should avoid any significant interactions with teachers and children while observing, as this may impact scores. The following are clarifications to this rule:

### Interactions with Teachers

- ✓ Reviewers should acknowledge the teacher with a simple nod, wave, or smile.
- ✗ Reviewers should avoid interactions with teachers while they are observing aside from acknowledging them upon entering.

### Interactions with Children during Observations

- ✓ 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 could interfere with the child’s ability to engage in classroom activities.
- ✗ Reviewers should avoid extended conversations with children that can interfere with their ability to engage in activities and the Reviewer’s ability to observe the class.

### Responding to Grantee Staff or Teacher Questions

- ✓ Reviewers may respond to grantee questions about the CLASS® observation process (i.e., regarding the length of the observation).
- ✗ Reviewers may not provide any information about scores or observations. If CLASS® Reviewers are asked about the scores, they should refer the grantee to the CLASS® Lead.

### CLASS® Reviewer Responsibility

- ✓ CLASS® Reviewers should refer questions to the CLASS® Lead or the Head Start Director.
- ✗ 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 2020, 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 Teachstone and the OHS Monitoring System contract team throughout the year.

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

### **4.1. CLASS Reviewers’ First Day Onsite**

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 (i.e., a sick teacher or a closed center) before the Reviewer begins conducting observations. The meeting facilitator will confirm the details of the CLASS® review at this Introductory Meeting.

#### ***American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) Programs***

For AIAN reviews, the CLASS® Reviewers must stay for the entire Introductory Meeting. In these instances, the CLASS® team 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 languages spoken, communication practices between children and adults, norms related to eye contact and body language, how stories are told, etc.

### **4.2. Subsequent Days Onsite**

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.

### **4.3. 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, safety, incidents of negative interaction).

### **4.4. Refreshing Software**

Reviewers must refresh their software after each classroom observation is submitted.

## 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 onsite.

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 (i.e., schedule, type of program), and the center in which each classroom is located.<sup>2,3</sup> 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.

### 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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 sessions should be observed.

<sup>3</sup> 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® Lead should confirm this with the grantee during the scheduling process.

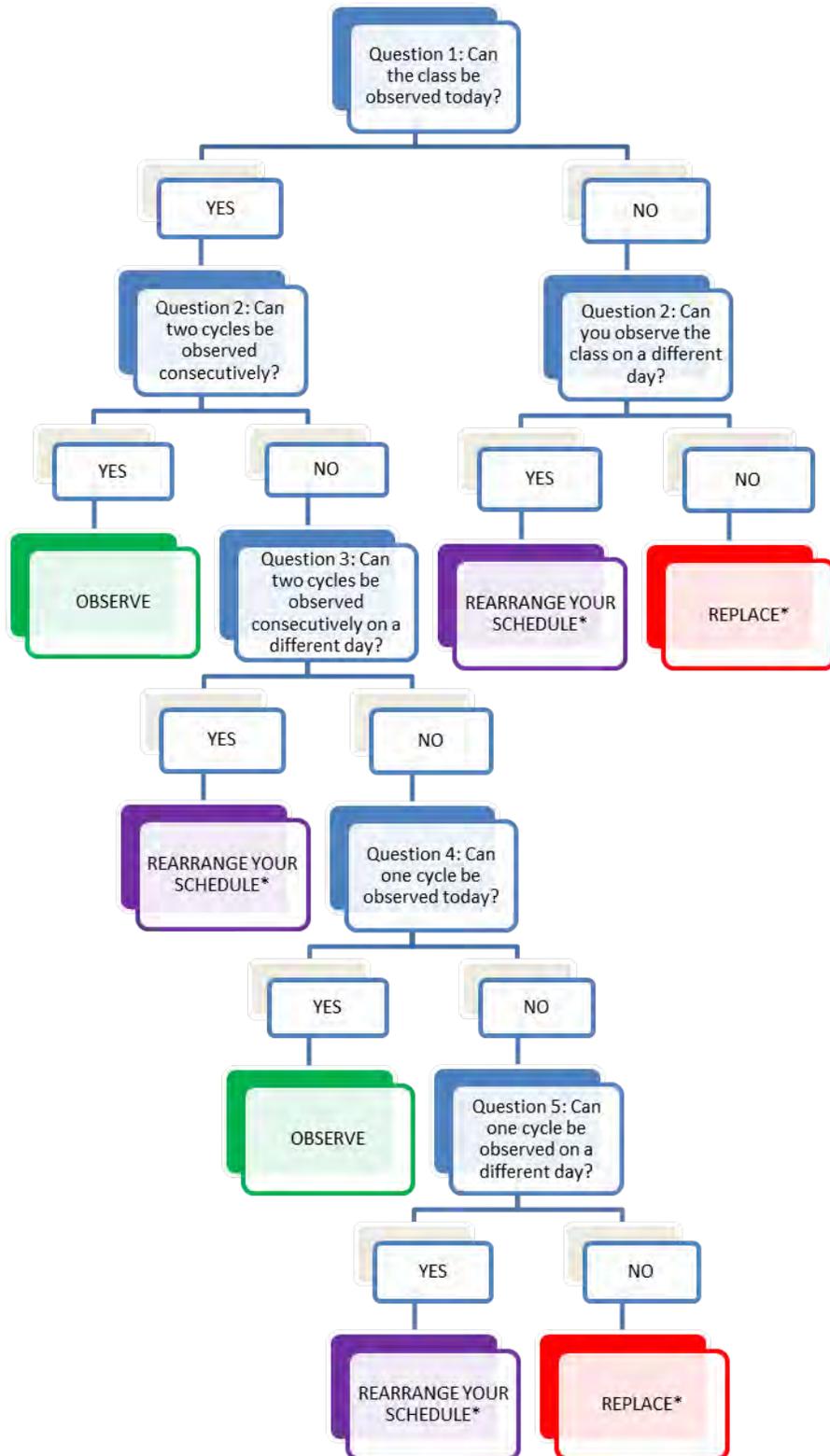
### ***Determining Whether a Class Can Be Observed on its Scheduled Day***

To determine whether a class can be observed on its scheduled day, CLASS® Reviewers should go through the questions presented in **Exhibit 3**. Exhibit 3 is a decision tree that should be referenced when scheduling CLASS® observations if Reviewers are unsure about whether to rearrange the CLASS® observation schedule.

A classroom should be observed on that day if the decision tree directs a Reviewer to a green “OBSERVE” box. If Exhibit 3 directs a Reviewer to a purple “REARRANGE YOUR SCHEDULE” box in the flow chart, then Reviewers should select another day to observe that classroom. If a Reviewer ends on a red “REPLACE” box in the flow chart, then Reviewers must select a replacement classroom.

**Note:** If a Reviewer needs to rearrange the schedule for a given classroom, Reviewers must contact their CLASS® Leads. The decision tree question process (starting with Question 1) should be completed for each review, including newly scheduled observation days. Similarly, if a Reviewer needs to replace a classroom, Reviewers must contact their CLASS® Lead and go through the flow chart question process (starting with Question 1) for the replacement classroom. In both cases, it is important that Reviewers ensure the observation meets the criteria for a valid observation (i.e., when the decision tree questions for the replacement classroom are completed, the Reviewer is directed to a green “OBSERVE” box).

**Exhibit 3. 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, the Reviewer 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 cannot be reached, call the CLASS® Manager. If the CLASS® Lead and the CLASS® Reviewers are not able to communicate as soon as the need for rescheduling arises and the CLASS® Manager is unavailable, then CLASS® Reviewers must use their best judgment to proceed efficiently with a rearranged observation schedule.

### ***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 will also 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.

## 6. 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: DLH Corp

**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 staff member who is not typically in the classroom on a daily basis, but fills in for the regular classroom teachers on an as-needed basis

**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 generated by the monitoring software 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 generated for the sample cannot be observed, and no other class can be observed in its place due to logistics or timing

**Teachstone CLASS® Pre-K Observation Manual:** Official CLASS® manual published by Brookes Publishing