

How to Conduct an Informal Internal Assessment using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®)

NOTES: Although the CLASS can be used for the purpose of internal assessment, it can also be conducted as an external assessment by a CLASS trained and reliable Pennsylvania Key (PA Key) Program Quality Assessor (hereinafter referred to as “Assessor”).

When using CLASS for an internal assessment to meet the expectations for one of the Keystone STARS Standards, please consult the [Keystone STARS Standards](#) and the [Keystone STARS Program Manual](#) for additional information.

How to conduct an objective, authentic classroom assessment:

The Keystone Stars Standards expect programs to conduct internal assessments annually and, once every three years, engage their internal assessment team in discussion of their internal assessment results with a Program Quality Assessor from the PA Key.

- The internal assessment should be an observation; therefore, someone who has knowledge of the selected Program Observation Instrument (POI) and its expectations should plan to observe for the recommended amount of time (for the specific POI), in the classroom.
- Keep in mind, the internal assessment is not something to be given to the classroom teacher to complete as a checklist of things that the teacher feels occur in the classroom. Teachers cannot observe themselves in action and may not provide an objective picture of their classroom. The observer should be able to commit to observing and taking notes and should not have any classroom responsibilities during the observation.
- The observation should occur when most of the children are present and actively engaged in the classroom so interactions with peers, teachers, and materials can be observed.
- The internal assessment should be viewed as an integral part of a program’s commitment to continuous quality improvement rather than just another piece of paperwork to be completed to meet an expectation. Information from an objective internal assessment can yield much information about the program’s practices, providing a foundation for the program to celebrate their successes and build upon existing practices.

Program Observation Instrument (POI) at-a-glance

- CLASS is a suite of instruments appropriate for use in center-based program settings:
 - Infant CLASS for observing infant classrooms in a child care center (birth – 12 months)
 - Toddler CLASS for observing toddler classrooms in a child care center (12 – 36 months)
 - Pre-K CLASS 2008 Edition **OR** Pre-K-3rd CLASS 2nd Edition for observing preschool and Pre-K in a child care setting (36 months – Kindergarten)
 - K-3 CLASS 2008 Edition **OR** Pre-K-3rd CLASS 2nd Edition for observing out-of-school time programs

Assessment at-a-glance

- Complete a minimum of four observation cycles, each followed by up to a 10-minute period to review and reflect on observation notes.
- 15-minute observation cycles for Infant and out-of-school time programs.
- 20-minute observation cycles for Toddler and Pre-K.

- Create four copies of the Informal Observation Form, one for each observation cycle.
- Select a different focus area (domain, dimension, indicator, or behavioral marker) for each cycle.
- Use the age-appropriate Dimensions Guide to guide your observation.
- Observe and take notes during each cycle using a copy of the Informal Observation Form for each observation cycle.
- In preschool, Pre-K, and out-of-school time programs, CLASS observers should not observe during indoor and outdoor gross motor free play time; structured gross motor activities can be observed.
- Consider each observation cycle a clean slate.
- Once all four observation cycles are completed, use the age-appropriate CLASS Internal Self-Reflection Tool to reflect on data from the four observation cycles.
- Create Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) goals based on the information collected on the Informal Observation Forms and the CLASS Internal Self-Reflection Tools.

Required materials

- CLASS Informal Observation Form
- Dimensions Guide(s)
- Infant CLASS Internal Self-Reflection Tool
- Toddler CLASS Internal Self-Reflection Tool
- Pre-K CLASS Internal Self-Reflection Tool (use with Pre-K CLASS 2008 Edition)
- K-3 CLASS Internal Self-Reflection Tool (use with K-3 CLASS 2008 Edition)
- Pre-K-3rd CLASS Internal Self-Reflection Tool (use with Pre-K-3rd CLASS 2nd Edition)

Supplemental resources and materials

- [Let's Talk Quality](#): Program Quality Assessment in PA Blog
- [Teachstone Home - Teachstone](#)
- Infant CLASS Manual
- Toddler CLASS Manual
- Pre-K CLASS 2008 Manual
- K-3 CLASS 2008 Manual
- Pre-K-3rd CLASS 2nd Edition Manual

Purchase or access the POI required and supplemental materials

- Dimensions Guide(s) – will receive a copy when attending age-specific CLASS Professional Development (PD) offered by the PQA Team
- CLASS 2008 resources and editions (Pre-K CLASS, K-3 CLASS) are compatible with the Pre-K-3rd 2nd Edition, and a crosswalk of the 2008 and 2nd editions is provided in the Pre-K-3rd Dimensions Guide to support alignment.

Conducting Internal Assessment (IA) with the CLASS

1. Learn about the CLASS instrument or instruments you will use

- The more you learn about the quality practices described in the CLASS, the more accurate and useful your IA will be.

- Determine which CLASS instrument or instruments to use. What age groups are enrolled?
 - Your Quality Coach can support your selection process and connect you to an Assessor for a detailed conversation about the options.
- It is recommended that the teaching team from each classroom being assessed, and the internal assessment team, become familiar with the expectations of the CLASS instrument or instruments being used and the relevant supplemental materials.
- Consider registering for CLASS PD.
- Request a [Facilitated Program Observation Instrument Orientation \(FPO\)](#). This one-hour session with an Assessor provides time to learn basic information about the CLASS and an opportunity to ask specific questions. The FPO is structured to meet each individual's or program's specific needs, and each person attending receives one hour of PQAS credit.
 - **NOTE:** the FPO is not a substitute for the online self-paced CLASS courses, but rather provides a basic overview.
- Review the Dimensions Guides from cover to cover.
- Contact an Assessor to receive clarification on questions you have regarding the CLASS.

2. Prepare to conduct the internal assessment

- If time has elapsed since your initial review of the CLASS instrument, re-familiarize yourself with its organization and quality expectations.
- Gather all materials needed to conduct the observation, including the age-appropriate Dimensions Guide(s). Use the CLASS Informal Observation Form to capture your notes, a blank document on your laptop, or handwrite your notes. Remember that you will be standing, sitting on the floor, moving around the classroom, and might go outside.
- Set aside at least two hours of time for the observation.
 - It may be helpful to let the children know that you will be visiting their classroom for a special project. You will watch them play and do their work, but you will not be able to play with them while doing your work.
 - Review the classroom schedule; for Pre-K and School Age, you will not observe indoor and outdoor gross motor free play.

3. Schedule the internal assessment

- The CLASS observation takes place while children are present.
- The CLASS instruments focus on the effectiveness of classroom interactions among educators and children.
- Schedule CLASS observations when most enrolled children are present and are in their assigned classroom/space.

4. Conduct the internal assessment

- Your role is to observe the typical program day objectively. Through your CLASS Assessor lens, you are looking at the effectiveness of educator-child interactions during routines and activities.
- Watch and record the who, what, and how of everything that is occurring in the classroom.
- Pay particular attention to the educators' interactions and behaviors.
- Use the age-appropriate Dimensions Guide to support notetaking during the observation. When reflecting on the observation, only consider what was observed; do not consider planned changes or what might have been done in the past.

5. Determine the areas of strength and areas for growth

- A completed CLASS observation will include the completion of the CLASS Informal Observation Form.
- Observation notes will likely include effective interactions as well as missed opportunities.
- Take the strengths-based approach when discussing observation notes, reflective questions, and next steps.
- Use the age-appropriate Dimensions Guide and Self-Reflection Tool to reflect on what was observed and use the reflective questions to help encourage self-awareness and practice specific behaviors.

6. Review your findings

- Review your assessment findings with your internal assessment team. Contact your Quality Coach and Assessor if you have any questions. Together, celebrate the observed strengths and identify how they can inform your improvement planning.
- Discuss areas where your team feels growth could occur and decide which areas are a priority. Be sure to create opportunities for everyone to contribute ideas and ensure everyone knows the next steps toward improvement.

Next steps

- Define your goals for growth and include them in your Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Plan.
- When planning your CQI goals, start small and ensure the planned change can be measured.
- Plan the timeline for your next IA cycle. Reassessing is a key piece of the CQI process and allows you to see if the action steps in your CQI plan are supporting your goals.
- Be patient. Growth takes time, and some things might be beyond your program's ability to improve. Share your CQI plan with all staff members on your program's IA team and your plan for ongoing communication with the IA team. Your CQI plan is a working document, not a final publication. It should be flexible, changeable, and evolving.
- Remember, you can continue consulting with your Assessor even after completing your internal assessments. The Assessor has a wealth of knowledge of the scale and implementation practices to support your program's CQI journey.