

The OHS CLASS[®] Field Guide FY24



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1 CLASS® Field Guide Introduction

The Pre-K Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS®) 2008 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 various 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. CLASS® observations aim to capture an average day for the average student. Head Start CLASS® reviews are conducted to obtain a Grant Recipient-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 Grant Recipients.

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.

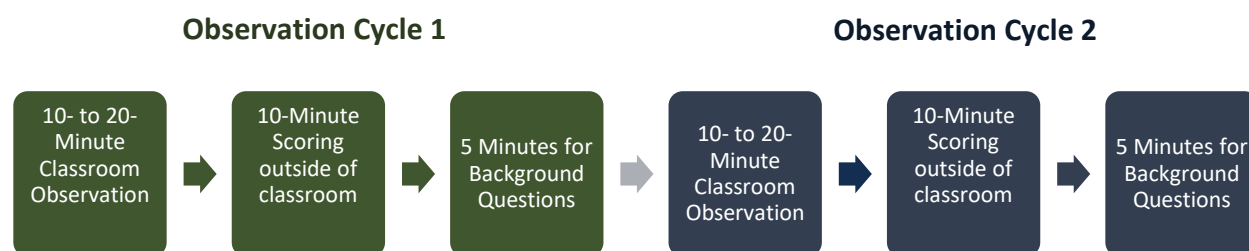
Each observation cycle should include a 20-minute observation followed immediately by 10 minutes of scoring and up to 5 minutes answering background questions. If an observation cycle is cut short, then the CLASS® Reviewer should score the observation if the cycle lasts 10 minutes or more. If the observation 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 (see **Exhibit 1**). 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.

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Reviewers should always 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 Grant Recipients. This section provides more detail about observable activities and presence of classroom staff and substitutes.

2.2.1 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 if they take place within the classroom.
- ✓ **When an activity takes place outside of the classroom:** For on-site reviews, it is acceptable to conduct an observation outside of the classroom if it is a structured, teacher-led activity.
- ✓ **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



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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 fewer 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.

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

- ✗ **Nap time**
- ✗ **When fewer than 50 percent of the currently enrolled children are present:** If fewer 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 (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 without teacher-led structured activities, then the Reviewer should not conduct an observation. Observations for outdoor activities should not take place.
- ✗ **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.
- ✗ **When class is not led by the 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.
- ✗ **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.

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2.2.2 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 and do not need to focus exclusively on the interactions of the lead teacher. **In order 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 in the class 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 in the position and completed more than 10 consecutive school days, the class may be observed.
- ✗ When a substitute teacher has been in the class fewer than 11 school days, the class should **not** be observed

Substitutes for Assistant Teacher

- ✓ If the lead teacher is present, either the permanent teacher or a substitute who has been in the position 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 11 consecutive school days, as long as the lead teacher is observable (see Substitutes for Lead Teacher (Long Term) bullet for more information).

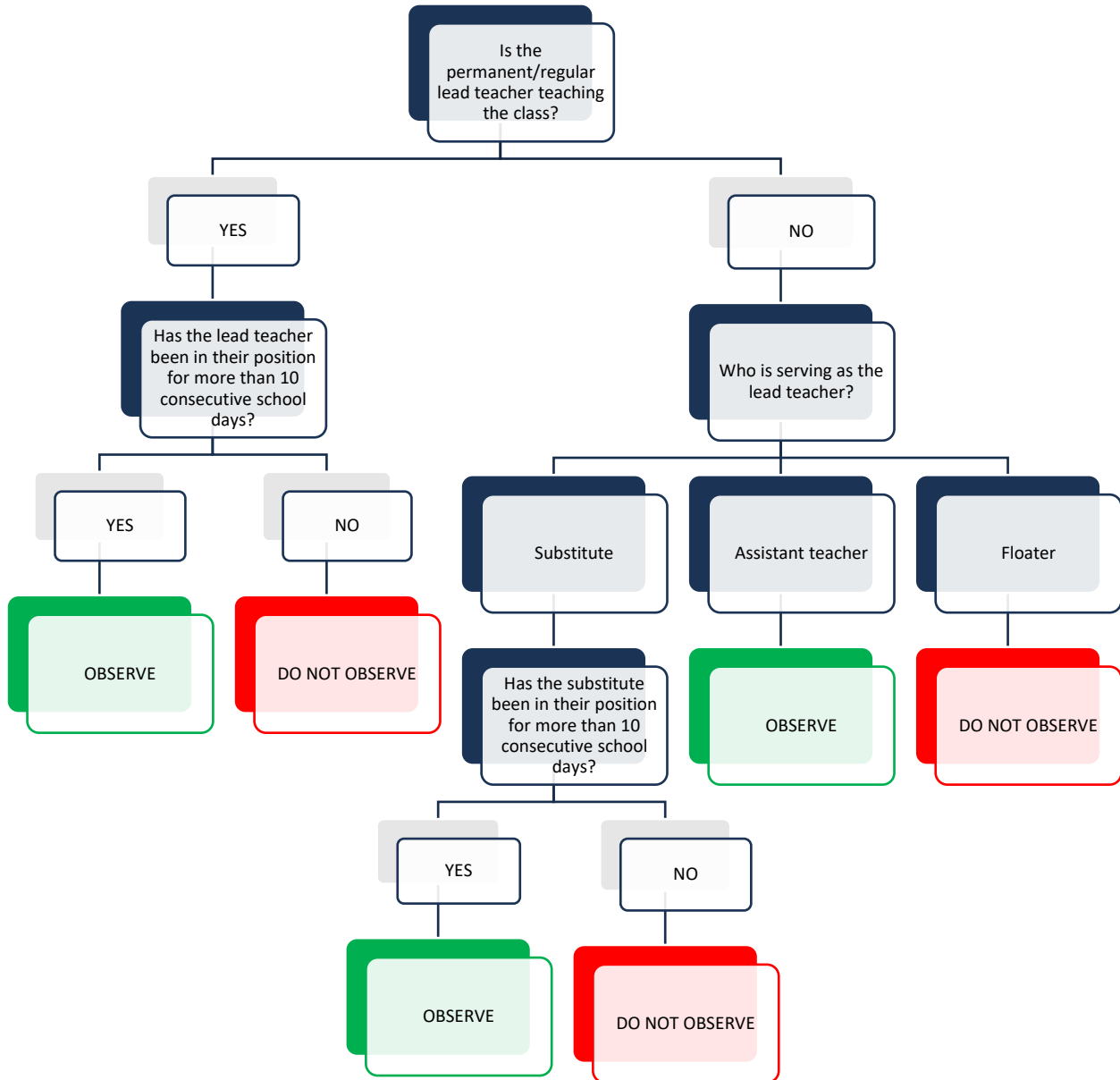
Assistant Taking Lead Teacher Role (Short Term)

- ✓ 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.

The decision tree in **Exhibit 2** is a resource for Reviewers that should be referenced during each review to ensure eligible teaching staff are observed.

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Exhibit 2. CLASS® Observation Decision Tree: 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.

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

Reviewers conducting CLASS[®] reviews onsite 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 HSES.

2.4 Interacting with Grant Recipient Staff, Children, and Teachers in the Classroom

Because CLASS[®] observations aim to capture an average day of enrolled children, reviewers and video recorders 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 which 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 Grant Recipient Staff or Teacher Questions

- ✓ Reviewers may respond to Grant Recipient questions about the CLASS[®] observation process (e.g., 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 Grant Recipient 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 Grant Recipients or staff.

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Grant Recipients should be aware that the OHS is required to use the CLASS® tool for monitoring all Grant Recipients 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 Grant Recipients 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 FY24, 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 On-site

The CLASS® Reviewer will provide the sample of classroom observations to the Grant Recipient's director and the Grant Recipient's CLASS® point person at the Introductory Meeting on the first day of the review. The Grant Recipient'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. The meeting facilitator will confirm the details of the CLASS® review at this Introductory Meeting.

4.1.1 American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN) Programs

For American Indian and Alaska Native 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 Grant Recipient 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 On-site

The Grant Recipient'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 Grant Recipient's point person or director as soon as possible.

4.3 Communicating with the CLASS® Lead

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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 (i.e., health, safety, incidents of negative interaction, etc.).

4.4 Refreshing Software

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

5 CLASS[®] Sample and Scheduling

5.1 How Classes Are Selected for Observation

The OHS has implemented a random-sampling procedure to ensure 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 seven days prior to the review. This list is not to be shared with the Grant Recipient until the team arrives on-site.

The sample size, or number of classes, to be observed is a statistically driven calculation based on the Grant Recipient'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. The sample is based on HSES data.

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 Grant Recipient 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 adjust 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 use 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 Grant Recipients to alter their planned activities and Grant Recipients should adhere to their planned daily classroom schedule.

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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.

5.3.1 Determining Whether a Class Can Be Observed on Its Scheduled Day

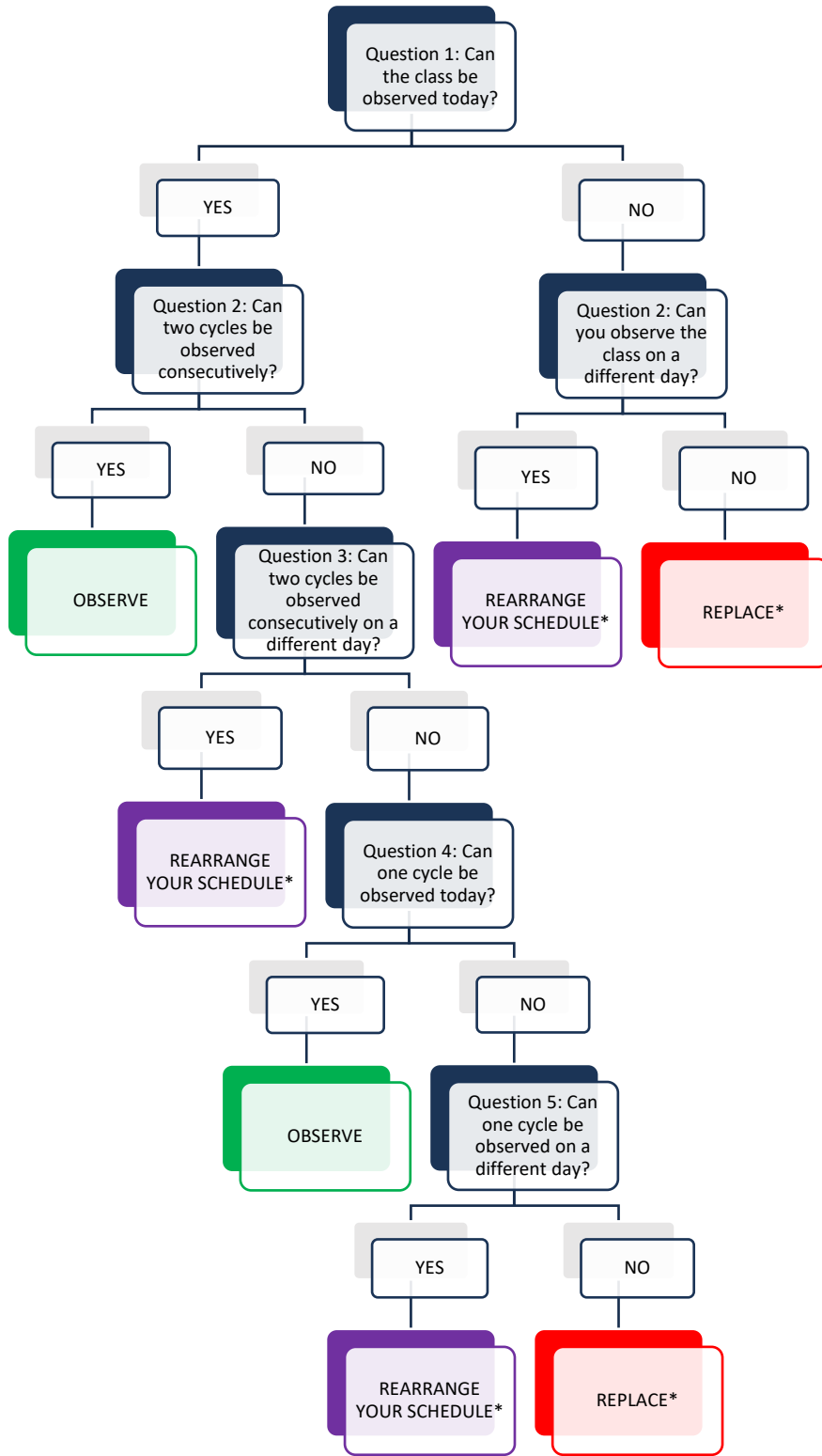
To determine whether a class can be observed on its scheduled day, CLASS[®] Reviewers should go through the questions presented in **Exhibit 3**. Exhibit 3 is a decision tree that should be referenced when scheduling CLASS[®] observations if Reviewers are unsure about whether to rearrange the CLASS[®]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

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Exhibit 3. Decision Tree to Determine Whether a Class Can Be Observed on the Day It Is Scheduled



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** Contact your CLASS® Lead and discuss the decision tree question process (starting with Question 1) for the newly scheduled observation day or for the new replacement classroom.*

5.3.2 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.

5.3.3 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 CLASS® Video Review

With this method of monitoring, all CLASS® observations will occur through pre-recorded video. Grant Recipients will be provided with support, including training, to conduct their own video observations. Once a video observation is captured and selected by the Grant Recipient, it will be uploaded into a secure platform and a DLH CLASS® Reviewer Consultant (Coder) will code the video. All scores will be entered into IT-AMS and a program-level report will be generated and shared with the Grant Recipient following the review.

To facilitate video observations, Grant Recipients will be responsible for identifying an individual (or individuals) to serve as their video recorder(s). These individuals will be responsible for setting up the video technology to support the recording, confirming classroom background information, and uploading the video into the designated platform. The program director will review and approve all submitted videos. Coders will not have contact with the program staff; all communication between the program and DLH will occur between the CLASS® Lead and the Director or his/her designee.

Coders will locate their classroom videos within the OHS-designated software. The videos will be 60 minutes in length. Coders will be provided with access credentials to review assigned classroom videos. Once Coders are in the system, they will locate and watch the two 20-minute segments (cycles) identified by the CLASS® Leads. Coders will spend about 10 minutes coding

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(per cycle) and then enter their scores into IT-AMS. Finally, Coders will properly identify and upload their scoresheets into IT-AMS and then send their scoresheets to DLH.

There will be a CLASS[®] Lead assigned to each video review, who will offer support and guidance to each Coder. The CLASS[®] Lead will monitor the work of the Coder and ensure that expected work completion standards are achieved. A Coder can complete a maximum of four classroom videos in one day. Coders are encouraged to enter scores immediately after doing an observation to reduce the chance of error and to enable the CLASS[®] Lead to manage progress in a timely manner.

There will be at least two CLASS[®] Reviewer Consultants (Coders) assigned to each review. The classrooms will be split between these two individuals; if a sample is more than 40, a third person will likely be assigned.

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Appendix: Glossary

Class: A unique group of children and a teacher

Classroom: The physical space used by a class

CLASS[®] Lead: The Grant Recipient'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 using 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 daily, 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 11 consecutive school days and therefore should **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

Replacement Classroom: A classroom that is generated by the monitoring software to replace a classroom from the original sample

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

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