

Improving the Quality of Teacher Interactions Across Dallas County Classrooms through CLASS

“We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was never normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.”

*~Sonya Renee Taylor
Author, Poet, and Activist*

Best In Class (BIC), a joint venture of [The Commit Partnership](#) and [Educate Texas](#), performs a strategically aligned set of work streams that apply very specific inputs across the education continuum to increase access to and the quality of the teaching (and leading) workforce in Dallas County and the North Texas region.

Best In Class is taking a targeted approach for addressing academic outcomes over the course of five years, with the initial year being centered around stabilizing early grades to support student success along the continuum with a focus on accelerating academic outcomes, especially for Black and Latin X students. High quality, effective teachers are the single most impactful resource to enable improvement in student academic outcomes, the closing of equity (opportunity) gaps, credential attainment, and students inevitably earning a living wage.

In an effort to increase and sustain high quality effective teachers, Best In Class, is working to expand the use of the **CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System)** tool to measure the quality of instruction in Pre-K-8th grade classrooms across Dallas County.

Why CLASS?

Over the past year, Covid has had a major impact on our students, educators, and families. Not only has the pandemic impacted our students academically, but it has also affected them emotionally. As a result, students have suffered significant learning loss as well as unprecedented levels of stress and trauma. Considering this, social-emotional support and trauma-informed practices will play a critical factor in helping students recover both socially and academically. This is why the quality of teachers' interactions with students matter more now than ever!

To help support the effectiveness of teacher interactions, CLASS is one of the most evidence-based and widely used assessments of teaching quality. Over 200 research studies have shown that students in classrooms with more effective teacher-student interactions as measured by

CLASS, make cognitive and social-emotional gains. Here are some [key findings](#) from these studies:

- CLASS is Effective Across Ages from Birth Through Twelfth Grade
- CLASS Improves Outcomes in Literacy, Math and Social-Emotional Learning
- CLASS is Proven to Work Across Diverse Settings
- CLASS Helps Teachers Be More Effective
- CLASS Has the Power to Close Gaps in Early Learning Outcomes

Based on these key findings from the research studies, CLASS has proven to be an effective tool for improving the quality of instruction and social and academic outcomes for students across the United States as well as other countries. This body of research provides strong and compelling evidence that the teacher-child interactions as measured by CLASS, support learning and development for children from a range of cultural and language backgrounds.

What is CLASS?

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is a research-based tool that assesses the quality of interactions among teachers and students that support their social, cognitive, and academic development. This observation tool was developed to assess these interactions from infant care through 12th grade. It is based on research which shows that teacher-child interactions drive learning and heavily impact student outcomes.

At the broadest level, CLASS describes three domains of teacher-child interactions that support children's learning and development: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.

- **Emotional Support** captures how teachers help children develop positive relationships, enjoyment in learning, comfort in the classroom, and appropriate levels of independence.
- **Classroom Organization** focuses on how teachers manage the classroom to maximize learning and keep children engaged.
- **Instructional Support** involves how teachers promote children's thinking and problem solving, use feedback to deepen understanding, and help children develop more complex language skills.

What is the impact of CLASS?

Equity Imperative for CLASS Implementation- Nationwide

Studies have shown that children of color, children with disabilities, and children in underserved communities are oftentimes not afforded the same opportunities as their peers in other ethnic groups to grow and succeed. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and in some cases, widened the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic gaps.

The implementation of CLASS can help to close these equity gaps. A growing body of research conducted in programs serving children from diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds describe the relationship between classroom quality as measured by CLASS and student outcomes. Here are some studies that show how the CLASS tool has closed these equity gaps:

In 2017, about 40 middle and high school teachers volunteered to receive two years of coaching through [MTP-S \(My Teaching Partner-Secondary\)](#), a CLASS-based coaching program. **Within one year, the discipline referral gap between Black students and their peers was eliminated.** Teachers who showed improvement in the Analysis and Inquiry dimension of CLASS were less likely to use disciplinary referrals which correlates with prior research that shows when students are cognitively challenged and are asked to use meaningful problem-solving skills, they are more engaged and perceived as more cooperative. Similar work is taking place at Dallas ISD where there is a [plan to eliminate suspensions](#) in the 2021–2022 school year, while still having any serious infraction go through the disciplinary alternative education program.

One research study from the National Center for Early Development and Learning looked in nearly 700 Pre-K classrooms and 700 kindergarten classrooms, **including linguistically diverse classrooms.** That study found that CLASS was effective as an assessment of the quality of teacher-child interactions in classrooms with **language diversity**, and that CLASS predicted gains in the school readiness skills of children who are **dual language learners** (Downer, et al., 2012).

In 2012, a study was conducted using the CLASS in a national sample of Head Start programs composed of mainly **Latin X and African-American children.** The key findings of the study showed that among **at-risk preschoolers**, all 3 domains of CLASS were significantly associated with improved letter-word knowledge, while the dimension of Language Modeling was positively associated with math skills, and the dimension of Positive Climate was associated with fewer teacher reports of problem behavior.

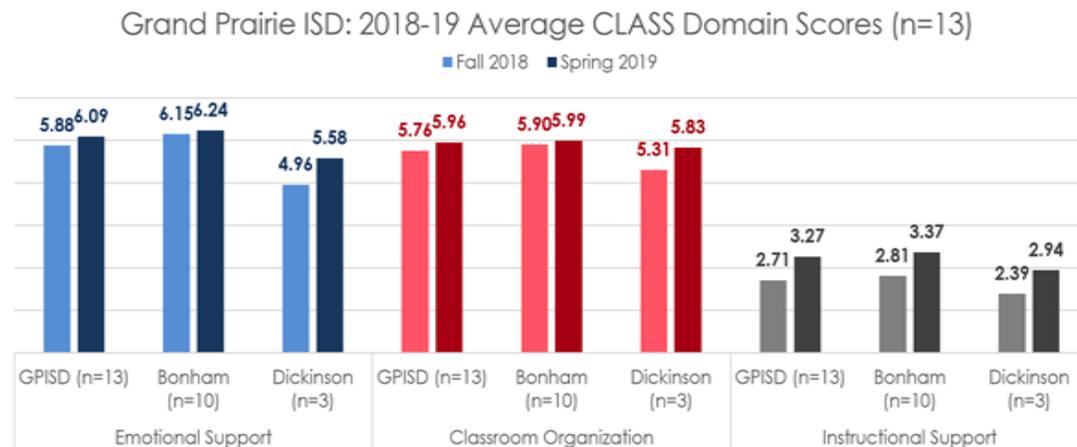
In a study conducted in 2017 in a publicly funded Pre-K program in **2 rural communities** in Appalachia, it was discovered that the higher CLASS scores in preschool classrooms of **low-income children** were significantly related to higher levels of kindergarten readiness; classrooms

with the lowest CLASS scores were associated with the highest academic, behavioral, and other risk factors for entering kindergartners.

Local Impact

Dallas ISD has been using CLASS since 2015. When Dallas ISD started the work in 2015, only 40% of their Pre-K teachers provided effective instructional support to children (scoring at least a 3.25 on the Instructional Support dimension of CLASS). As of fall 2017, that number was up to 60%. A study conducted by SMU’s Center on Research and Evaluation shows that Dallas ISD students in high quality Pre-K, Kindergarten and 1st grade classrooms outperform their peers in lower quality classrooms.

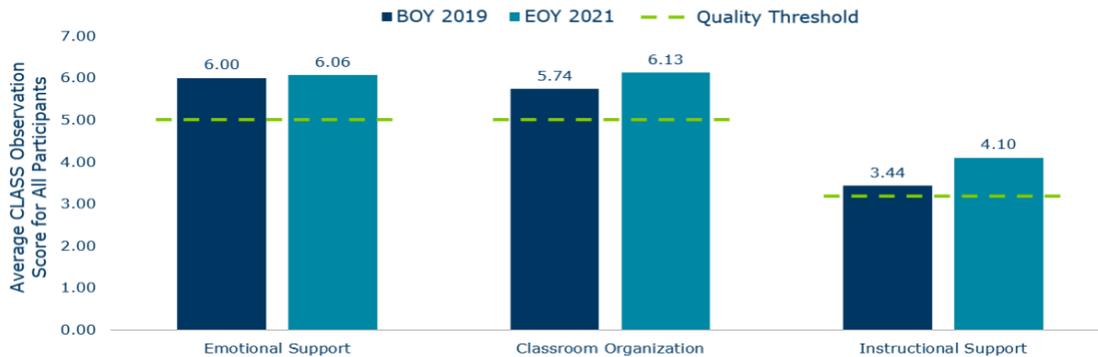
Additionally, in 2018-19, Commit supported CLASS expansion pilots across 5 school districts (Garland, Grand Prairie, Richardson, Mesquite, and DeSoto) to determine a baseline for best practices in implementation (see CLASS results for Grand Prairie ISD in the table below).



Due to the success of the pilot, in February 2019, TEA awarded Commit the RECESS Initiative 2 grant running from February 2019 to January 2022 to provide professional development, coaching supports, and CLASS observations for districts across Dallas County. Currently, there are 3 districts (Carrollton Farmers Branch, Cedar Hill, and Duncanville), 1 charter school (Uplift), and 2 childcare organizations (Child Care Group and Educational First Steps) supporting 45 teachers across Dallas County who are participating in the RECESS Grant CLASS Pilot. Throughout the pilot, teachers have continued to exceed quality thresholds in all three CLASS domains (see most current pilot data below).

Across 45 Dallas County classrooms, teachers continued to exceed quality thresholds across in-person and virtual instructional settings while demonstrating meaningful growth in Classroom Organization and Instructional Support.

Average CLASS Observation Score, **All** Dallas County RECESS Pilot Participants



Source: SMU CLASS Observation Data- RECESS 2019-21 (myTeachstone Platform)

Continuous Improvement

Best In Class suggests a strategic use and expansion of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) for assessing and improving quality in all Pre-K-8th grade classrooms across Dallas County. We continue to use national research and successes from past and current CLASS pilots to build proof points for scaling CLASS on a larger scale throughout Dallas County using the repeatable model approach which entails **piloting (testing best practices), continuously improving (progress monitoring), scaling (expanding impact), and sustaining (building capacity).**

In addition, many Dallas County districts have established systems for coaching teachers to help improve their instruction. As we work to expand CLASS on a wider scale, we plan to leverage these existing coaching systems by encouraging districts to embed the CLASS strategies and language into their coaching models.

As the pandemic has exposed and presented new challenges in our communities around equity disparities, learning loss, trauma, health, safety insecurities, and more; we also have an amazing opportunity to help rebuild an equitable educational system in which our most vulnerable students have the opportunity to thrive. Based on national research and favorable results from local implementation, we are confident that the CLASS is one of the best tools to help improve the quality of instruction in this critical recovery process.



References:

[CLASS and Social Emotional Learning](#)

[Bridging the Racial Discipline Gap with Effective Teacher Coaching](#)

[Research Validating CLASS® with Child Outcomes across Diverse Populations of Children](#)

[Proving CLASS® Effectiveness - A Research Summary](#)

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