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# CLASS<sup>®</sup> in the time of COVID-19

April 7, 2021

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# Agenda

1. Background on CLASS® in Louisiana
2. Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic
3. Questions & Discussion



A watercolor illustration of a tree on the left side of the frame. The tree has a thick, light green trunk and several branches with green leaves. The ground is depicted with a textured, dark green watercolor wash. A small, purple, pointed shape is visible near the base of the tree. The background is a light gray gradient.

## Background on CLASS<sup>®</sup> in Louisiana

# Louisiana's Goals and Priorities

## SIX CRITICAL GOALS

Students enter kindergarten ready.

Students will achieve mastery on third-grade assessments and enter fourth grade prepared for grade-level content.

Students will achieve mastery on eighth-grade assessments and enter ninth grade prepared for grade-level content.

Students will graduate on time.

Students will graduate with a college and/or career credential.

Students will graduate eligible for a TOPS award.

## EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

Ensure every student is on track to a professional career, college degree, or service.

Remove barriers and create equitable, inclusive learning experiences for all children.

Provide the highest quality teaching and learning environment.

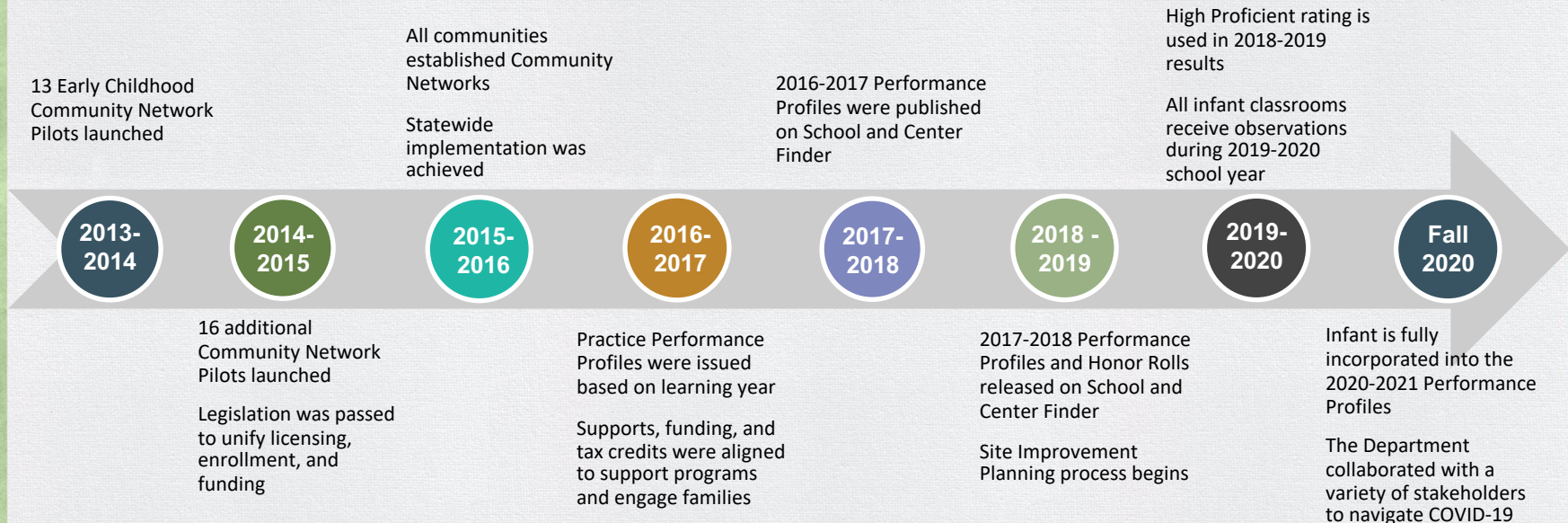
Develop and retain a diverse, highly effective educator workforce.

Cultivate high-impact systems, structures, and partnerships



# Unification of Early Childhood in Louisiana: Timeline

*Louisiana's early childhood system relies on locally-driven efforts; communities have been leading the implementation of Act 3 since 2012.*



# CLASS® Observations in Louisiana

*Observations in Louisiana are conducted by community network lead agencies as well as third party observers from the Cecil Picard center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.*

**Each classroom receives a Fall and Spring observation each year conducted by the local community network.**

- Louisiana policy stipulates that all publicly-funded early childhood classrooms open October 1 must receive a Fall CLASS® observation and classrooms open February 1 must receive a Spring CLASS® observation.
- Policy requires that community networks conduct inter-rater reliability checks (double-scoring) of 10% of observed classrooms including at least one inter-rater reliability check for each observer.

**The Cecil J. Picard Center conducts third party checks of observations in classrooms across the state.**

- LDOE contracts with the Cecil J. Picard Center at the University of Louisiana Lafayette to conduct third party checks of local observations. Typically, Picard conducts observations in a minimum of 50% of all classrooms each semester and one classroom at each site by age configuration within the year.
- Policy stipulates that local observations may be replaced at the domain level by third party checks, however this occurs in less than 25% of domain scores captured in observations.

# CLASS® Data in Louisiana

*In a typical year, a variety of decision-makers use the data collected through around 15,000 observations of approximately 6,000 publicly funded early childhood classrooms across about 1,500 sites in Louisiana.*

- **Teachers and site-level administrators** use CLASS® data to set goals for instruction and target interventions to improve the quality of teacher-student interactions.
- **Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies & Community Network Lead Agencies** use CLASS® data to monitor trends and target coaching to maintain and improve the quality of teacher-student interactions.
- **The Louisiana Department of Education** uses CLASS® data for the Early Childhood Accountability System as well as to inform policies that support state and local leaders in providing each infant, toddler, and pre-kindergarten student a high quality early childhood experience.
- **National Researchers** use CLASS® data to review and evaluate the impact of Louisiana's Early Childhood Policies.

# Performance Profile Overview: Performance Scores

*Louisiana uses the CLASS® rating tool to measure quality and support improvement in every classroom at every publicly-funded early childhood site in the state.*

As a research-based, nationally regarded early childhood quality measure for all young children, CLASS® assesses how well teachers interact with children, including expectations for classrooms organized into domains:

Expectations for the Classroom:	Pre-K Domains	Toddler Domains	Infant Domains*
<i>Warm, positive environment with trusting relationships</i>	Emotional Support	Emotional & Behavioral Support	Responsive Caregiving
<i>Daily routines are organized and disruptions are minimal</i>	Classroom Organization		
<i>Children are supported to learn concepts, develop language, and connect ideas through dialogue and play</i>	Instructional Support	Engaged Support for Learning	

\*Infant CLASS® was implemented in every infant classroom during 2019-2020 for a practice year. Its full incorporation in 2020-2021 was impacted by COVID-19.

# Performance Profile Overview: Components

*Performance Profiles provide information about the quality of publicly-funded sites to families to inform choice as well as to communities to guide improvement.*

Results in a Performance Profile for each site published on [www.LouisianaSchools.com](http://www.LouisianaSchools.com) contain two components:

1. **Performance Rating:** Each site receives a rating based on CLASS® observations that measure the quality of adult-child interactions.
2. **Informational Metrics:** Each site's profile also reports on the use of best practices, such as using curriculum, assessing children for learning, and credentialing of teachers.

## Louisiana's Unified Rating System:

- Measures core elements needed for positive child outcomes;
- Provides a clear and focused path to improvement;
- Gives families an easy way to compare choices in their community;

*Researchers at the University of Virginia found that Louisiana observers are accurate, that children learn more in Louisiana classrooms with higher ratings, and that adding other quality measures does not help identify quality classrooms.*

# Performance Profile Overview: Incentives & Supports

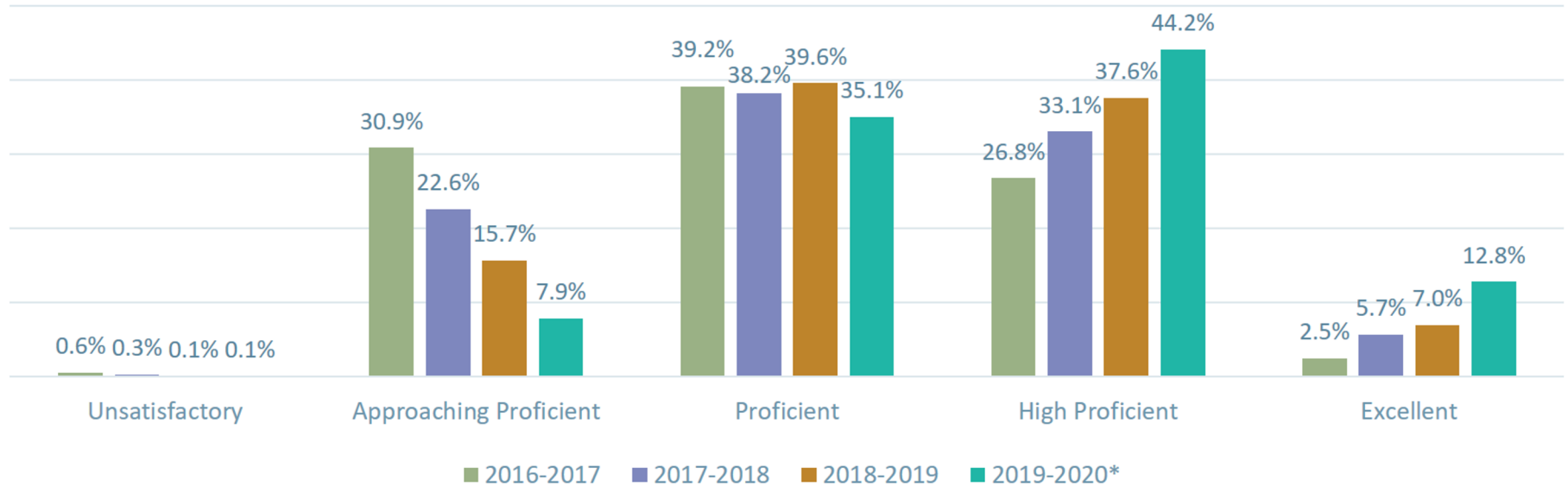
*Louisiana has tied incentives, quality supports, and consequences to Performance Ratings for early childhood sites.*

CLASS® Score Range	Performance Rating	Star Rating for Tax Credit and Bonus Payments
6.00 - 7.00	Excellent	5 Stars
5.25 - 5.99	High Proficient	4 Stars
4.50 - 5.24	Proficient	3 Stars
3.75 - 4.49	Approaching Proficient	2 Stars
3.00 - 3.74	Approaching Proficient	1 Star
1.00 - 2.99	Unsatisfactory	0 Stars

- Tax credits and bonuses for child care centers are aligned to Performance Ratings to reward and incentivize performance and improvement
- Programs that score below 3.75 are required to participate in a year-long Site Improvement Planning process
- Programs that score Unsatisfactory for two years in any three year period may lose Type III license or funding

# Performance Ratings Over Time

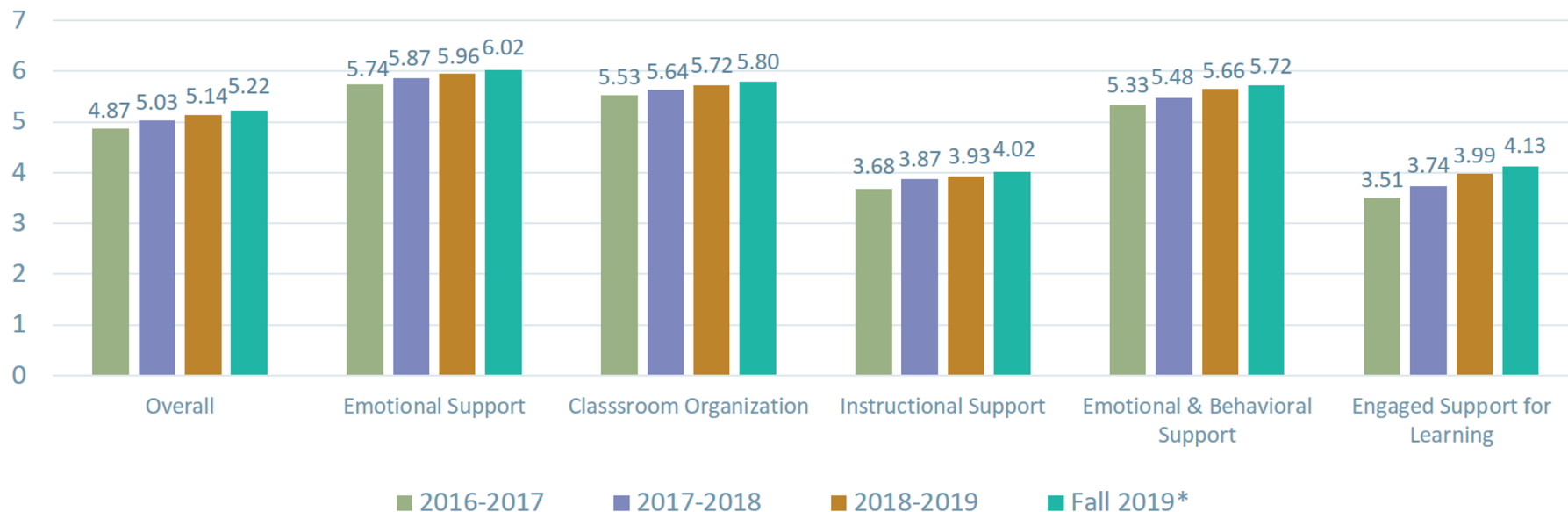
*Since the 2016-2017 school year, there has been a decrease in the sites rated “Unsatisfactory” or “Approaching Proficient” and an increase in the sites rated “High Proficient” or “Excellent” across Louisiana.*



\* These results reflect the Department’s ‘hold harmless’ approach, which allowed sites to opt into the higher score across the past two years.

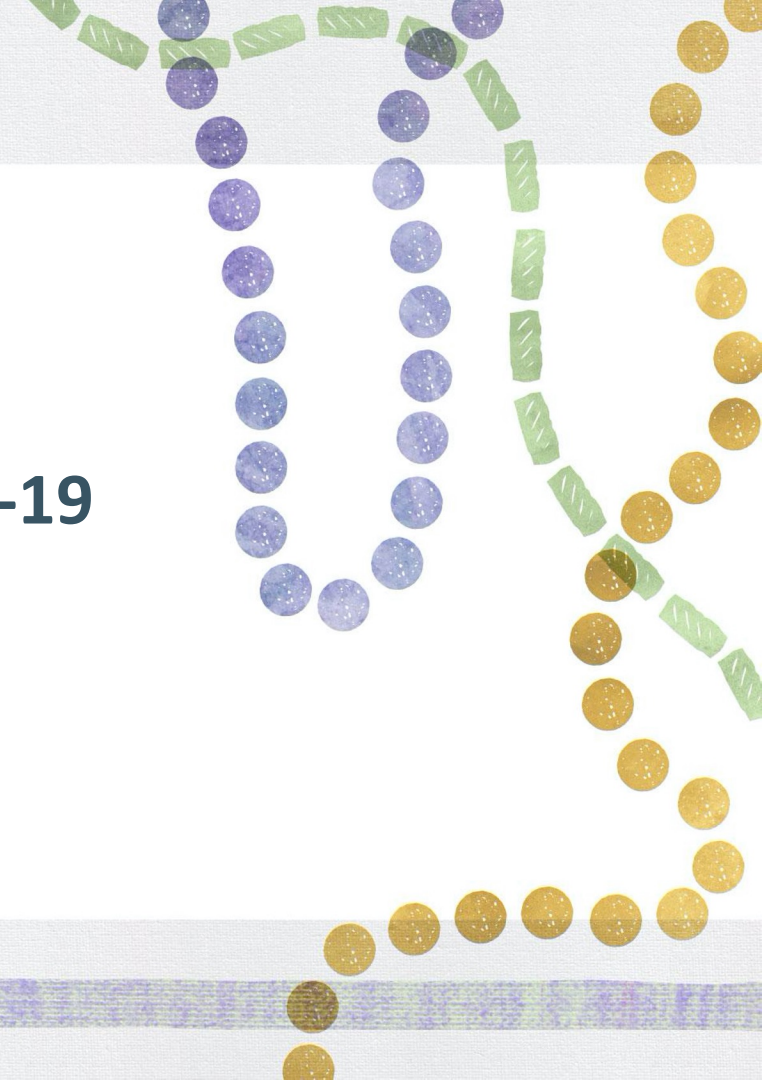
# Performance Scores Over Time

*Since Performance Profiles were first published for the 2016-2017 school year, sites across Louisiana have shown steady, incremental growth in domain scores, as well as overall averages.*



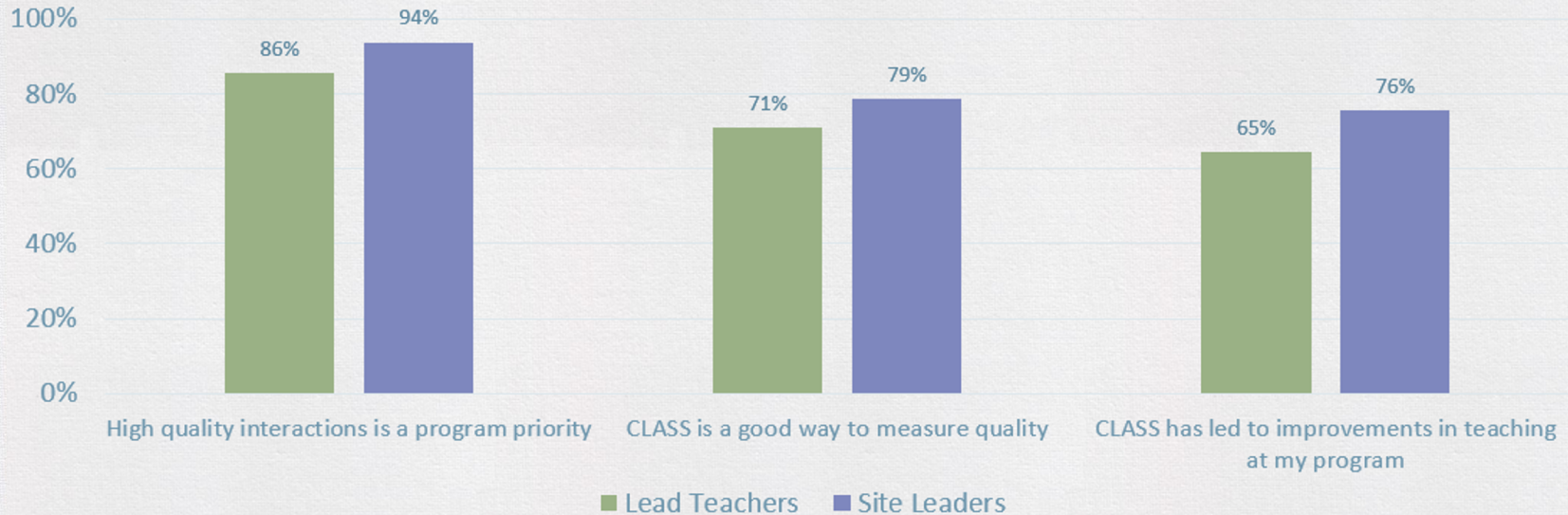
\* Because the Governor's Stay at Home order prevented all CLASS observations from being conducted in Spring 2020, the domain level averages from Fall 2019 are used to show year-to-year comparisons.

# Decision Points During the COVID-19 Pandemic



# Importance of CLASS® in Louisiana

*Surveys conducted by the University of Virginia in Jefferson and Rapides parishes in 2018 show the majority of both teachers and leaders value CLASS® as a tool to improve outcomes.*



# Core Beliefs

1. **Health and safety** for children, teachers, directors, and observers (as well as their families) is paramount.
2. Even (maybe especially) during a pandemic, the experiences and **interactions that children have in classrooms matter**.
3. Unique situations call for **creative solutions** and require:
  - Data-driven decision-making, and
  - Engagement with stakeholders.



# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

If/how do we **collect** CLASS® data to support our critical goals?



If/how do we **use** CLASS® data collected to support our critical goals?

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Louisiana experienced a stay-at-home order and the Department paused observations in Spring 2020.

Spring  
2020

The Department provided **flexibilities for 2019-2020 Performance Scores.**

If/how do we **use** CLASS® data collected to support our critical goals?

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Spring 2020

*As a result of the Stay at Home order issued for Louisiana in the Spring of 2020, LDOE began navigating CLASS® observations in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

- In Spring 2020, the Governor issued a stay-at-home order and the Department paused all CLASS® observations that had been scheduled for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.
- Due to COVID-19, the Department implemented a “hold harmless” approach for 2019-2020 Performance Profiles that honored improvement made by sites in 2019-2020 and allowed sites to access much-needed tax credits and bonus payments:
  - Sites with a higher 2019-2020 Performance Score were given the opportunity to opt-in to receiving an updated Performance Profile based on 2019-2020 results.
  - For all other sites, the Department did not release an updated 2019-2020 Performance Profile, and extended the 2018-2019 performance results for an additional year.

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

If/how do we **collect** CLASS® data to support our critical goals?

Louisiana experienced a stay-at-home order and the Department paused observations in Spring 2020.

The Department updated the **typical local observation protocol guidance** and **expanded support for sites & lead agencies**.

Spring  
2020

Fall  
2020

The Department provided **flexibilities for 2019-2020 Performance Scores**.

The Department launched a **pilot of virtual observations** with the Picard Center.

If/how do we **use** CLASS® data collected to support our critical goals?

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Fall 2020: Preparing for the 2020-2021 school year

*Throughout the summer, engagement with a variety of stakeholders across Louisiana raised a number of questions about CLASS® and accountability in 2020-2021, these questions typically fell into two categories.*

### How do we conduct the observations necessary for the Early Childhood Accountability System?

- How do we ensure the health & safety of children, teachers, site staff, observers, and their families?
- How do we navigate observations in classrooms that are shifting through a variety of formats based on center-specific conditions (online, virtual, hybrid)?
- How do we ensure that third party observations conducted by the Picard Center at ULL are responsive to community risk?

### How do we use the data collected from observations during COVID-19?

- What do we do with data-- is it appropriate to publish data from this year?
- How do we honor the growth and hard work that educators are doing that are reflected in CLASS® scores?
- How do we avoid penalizing sites that have lower scores during the 2020-2021 school year?

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Fall 2020: Local Observation Protocols

*LDOE collaborated with stakeholders including local lead agencies, site directors, the Department of Health, and a variety of internal teams to publish the Fall 2020 local observation protocol [guidance](#).*

**Public Health Considerations for In-Person Observations:** The Department recognizes that the ability for early childhood lead agencies to conduct in-person observations will be affected by COVID-19 related factors within each community network. In partnership with the Office of Public Health, the Department has established the following criteria that should be used when determining whether in-person observations can safely be conducted by external observers:

Consideration Types	When to Stop In-Person Observations	When to Resume In-Person Observations
Community-wide considerations	<p>Based on data from <a href="https://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/">https://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/</a>, if the "Community Risk" reported by the Louisiana Department of Health is in the "higher" or "highest" risk categories, in person observations conducted by external observers should stop.</p> <p>Lead agencies are encouraged to coordinate with their <a href="#">local public health unit</a> on decision making as appropriate.</p>	<p>Based on data from <a href="https://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/">https://ldh.la.gov/Coronavirus/</a>, if the "Community Risk" reported by the Louisiana Department of Health is in the "lower" or "moderate" categories, in person observations conducted by external observers may resume.</p> <p>Lead agencies are encouraged to coordinate with their <a href="#">local public health unit</a> on decision making as appropriate.</p>
Site-level considerations	<p>If there are any <b>documented cases of COVID-19 at the site (inclusive of staff, children and parents)</b> or any evidence of community spread within the site, <b>in-person observations at that site should stop immediately.</b></p>	<p>In-person observations at that site may resume <b>14 days after the individual(s) with a documented case of COVID-19 has been isolated.</b></p> <p>(Guidance on how sites should isolate children and staff who become sick is found in the <a href="#">OPH Guidelines for Child Care</a> and the <a href="#">OPH School Isolation/Quarantine Recommendations</a>).</p>

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Fall 2020: Virtual Observations

*LDOE's [guidance](#) included best practices for virtual observations that informed a virtual observation pilot led by the Department's third party contractors at the University of Louisiana Lafayette.*

### Conducting 2020-2021 Observations Before the Observation Begins

	Column 1 Local Protocol Requirements	Column 2 Additional COVID-19 Protocol Requirements	Column 3 Additional Live Video Conference & Recorded Video Protocol Requirements
<b>Minimum Observer Qualifications</b>	<p>Local observers must meet the following minimum qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be certified by Teachstone as a reliable observer (certificate on file with lead agency);</li> <li>• Participate in on-going calibration exercises at least once per observation period; and</li> <li>• Have a valid Child Care Criminal Background Check (CCCBC) that is on file with the lead agency.</li> </ul>	<p>Community networks should develop protocols to ensure that observers are aware of and follow COVID-19 health and safety protocols and procedures, inclusive of the following minimum requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observers should request and comply with, the health and safety procedures required by each site, inclusive of participating in any required health screenings that the site conducts upon entry to the facility prior to each observation visit;</li> <li>• Observers should have access to and utilize required personal protective equipment needed for each observation visit; and</li> </ul>	<p>Community networks should develop protocols to ensure that live video conference or recorded video observations are conducted in a manner that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligns with Louisiana children's privacy laws and best practices ensuring that schools and centers provide parental notification and obtain parental consent or the opportunity to opt-out if school board policy allows before capturing footage from classrooms that may include children's images or audio (Lead agencies can refer to this guidance and <a href="#">sample</a> notification/consent);</li> <li>• Considers individual sites' live video</li> </ul>



# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Fall 2020: Support for the field

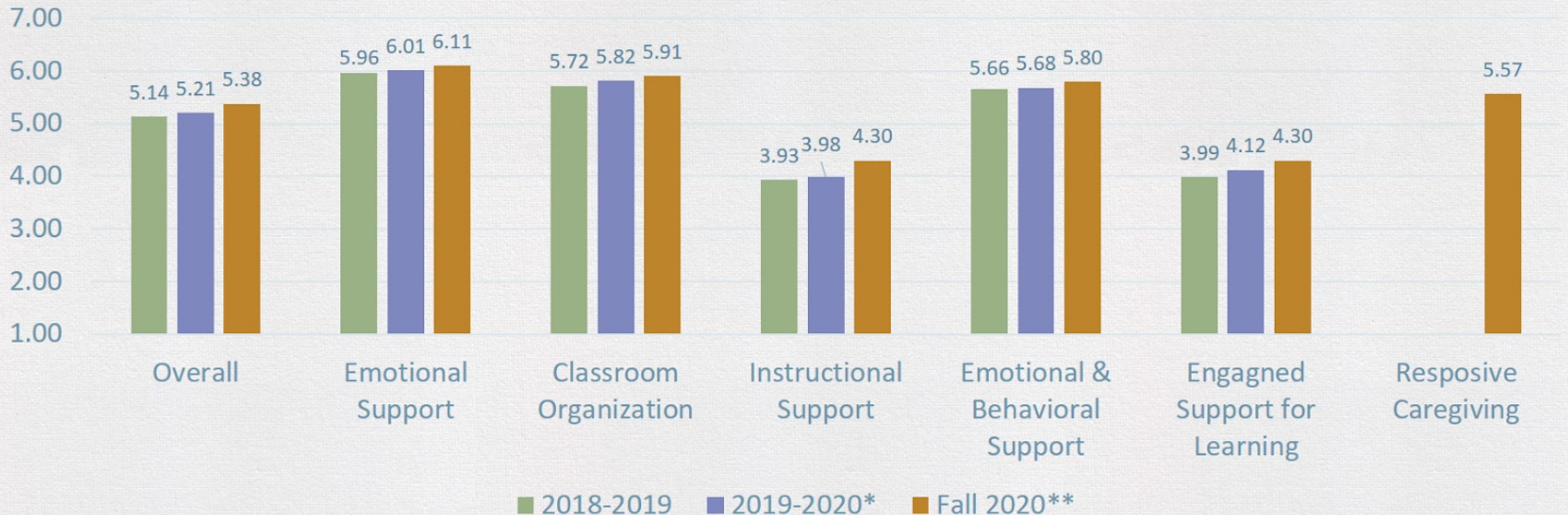
*In response to feedback from the field, LDOE provided a variety of supports and guidance to community network lead agencies, as well as directly to sites, to support a focus on quality during COVID-19.*

- **Increased lead agency allocations.** LDOE increased funding to lead agencies to acquire the resources needed to conduct observations during COVID-19.
- **Provided financial support and stabilization grants to child care providers.** LDOE provided community-level grants to lead agencies to support child care recovery and multiple rounds of direct child care stabilization grants to cover the additional costs associated with operations (including observations) during COVID-19.
- **Expanded partnership with Tulane Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program.** LDOE expanded a partnership to provide individual supports for teachers and students, as well as coaching on trauma-informed education practices, to further support for teachers and children.
- **Provided guidance for observations.** Local lead agencies, LDOE, and Teachstone collaborated to provide guidance on how to score classrooms where COVID-19 mitigation strategies (masks, physical distancing, etc.) are employed, including on weekly webinars for lead agencies.

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Preliminary Results from Fall 2020

*The trends in CLASS® scores of steady, incremental growth since the 2016-2017 school year have continued, and in some cases accelerated during, the Fall 2020 Observation period.*



\* 2019-2020 Estimates are unpublished calculations based on observations conducted during the 2019-2020 academic year.

\*\* Fall 2020 Estimates are unpublished estimates based on observations conducted during the Fall 2020 observation period. This will be the first time Infant CLASS® are used to calculate Performance Scores and Ratings.

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

If/how do we **collect** CLASS® data to support our critical goals?

Louisiana experienced a stay-at-home order and the Department paused observations in Spring 2020.

The Department updated the **typical local observation protocol guidance** and **expanded support for sites & lead agencies**.

The Department **paused in-person observations** by external observers.

Spring  
2020

Fall  
2020

Winter  
2020

The Department provided **flexibilities for 2019-2020 Performance Scores**.

The Department launched a **pilot of virtual observations** with the Picard Center.

The Department processed 600+ requests for **classroom-level waivers**, and recommended a one-time emergency rule to **expand lead agencies' capacity**.

If/how do we **use** CLASS® data collected to support our critical goals?

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Winter 2020

*LDOE worked with lead agencies, site directors, and the Department of Health to respond to the challenges that emerged to achieving the typical observation coverage in the Fall of 2020.*

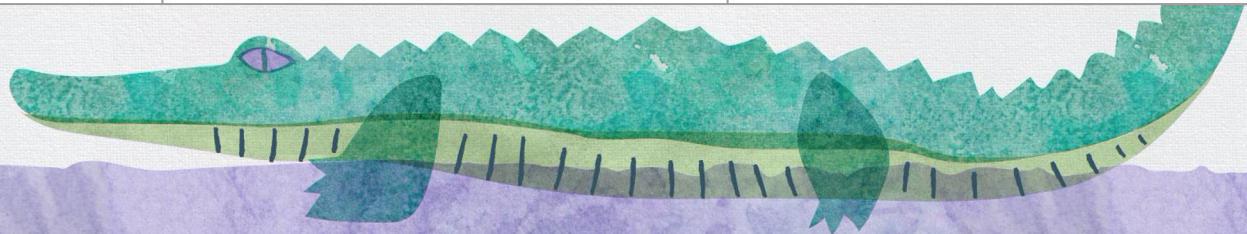
- **Approval of classroom-level waivers:** As a result of classrooms meeting virtually, closing temporarily to quarantine, and increased challenges associated with the necessary technology and PPE, lead agencies submitted 600+ classroom-level waiver requests for Fall 2020 representing nearly 12% of classrooms. In a typical year, the Department approves waivers for <10 classrooms.
- **Shift to virtual format:** As a result of COVID-19 incidence and spread, the Department suspended in-person observations by external observers beginning December 7 to align with guidance from the Louisiana Department of Health and the CDC and shifted exclusively to virtual third party observations for the first time.
- **Expansion of Lead Agency capacity:** To align with flexibilities offered to K-12 educators, BESE approved a one-time emergency rule allowing classrooms that scored a 4.50 or higher in the fall to be eligible to receive only one local observation during the 2020-2021 school year.

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Impacts of COVID-19 on Fall Observation Coverage

*Compared to Fall 2019, both local lead agencies as well as the LDOE's third party contractors conducted fewer observations as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

	Fall 2019	Fall 2020
Classrooms	6,167	5,880
Local observations	6,146 (99.7% of classrooms)	4,922 (84% of classrooms)
Local observations shadow scored	1,213 (20% of local observations)	248 (5% of local observations)
Third party observations	1,884 (31% of classrooms)	884 (15% of classrooms)



# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The Department **paused in-person observations** by external observers.

The Department **revised guidance for vaccinated observers** and **published guidance for resuming in-person observations**

Spring  
2020

Fall  
2020

Winter  
2020

Spring  
2021

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The Department processed 600+ requests for **classroom-level waivers**, and recommended a one-time emergency rule to **expand lead agencies' capacity**.

The Department **recommended flexibilities for 2020-2021 performance profiles** and provided an opportunity for centers to apply for **grants to offset costs associated with participating in accountability**

If/how do we **use** CLASS® data collected to support our critical goals?

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Spring 2021

*The Early Childhood Care & Education Advisory Council has endorsed flexibilities designed to ensure sites do not experience a penalty as a result of the pandemic but are able to receive the supports typical for any year.*

- Recognizing growth by updating Performance Profiles for sites that have higher observation scores from 2020-2021 and extending Performance Ratings for all other sites would ensure that sites do not feel penalized as a result of COVID-19.
- Targeting low performing sites for supports based on their 2020-2021 performance score, regardless of whether or not this data is published, would ensure that the Department is using the most up-to-date data for improvement efforts.
- Providing financial support to Type III, Head Start and Child Care sites to offset the additional costs associated with observations during the 2020-2021 school year would provide additional recognition for the extra work needed to support Early Childhood Quality through the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-2021 school year.

# Decision Points during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The Department is coordinating with the Office of Public Health to publish updates.

Spring  
2020

Fall  
2020

Winter  
2020

Spring  
2021

Moving  
Forward

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The Department **recommended flexibilities for 2020-2021 performance profiles** and provided an opportunity for centers to apply for **grants to offset costs associated with participating in accountability**

The Department is analyzing data from the 2020-2021 school year and preparing for 2021-2022.

If/how do we **use** CLASS® data collected to support our critical goals?

# Moving Forward

*Between now and the end of the school year, LDOE has several initiatives to investigate the effects of the pandemic on interactions in Early Childhood classrooms and inform decisions going forward.*

- **Better understanding virtual observations.** As the 2020-2021 school year ends, the Department is planning to further study observations scored virtually as well as teachers' and directors' experiences with virtual observations.
- **Preparing for early childhood transitions in 2021-2022.** Recent trends indicate that there has been a decrease of more than 15% in early childhood enrollment between 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Further examination will best position supports for children and teachers moving forward.
- **Expanding access to high quality early learning experiences.** Access to high quality child care was a challenge, particularly for birth to 3-year-old children, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring that all children have access to high quality early childhood care and education experiences will continue to be a priority for Louisiana in the 2021-2022 school year and beyond.

# Core Beliefs

1. **Health and safety** for children, teachers, directors, and observers (as well as their families) is paramount.
2. Even (maybe especially) during a pandemic, the experiences and **interactions that children have in classrooms matter**.
3. Unique situations call for **creative solutions** and require:
  - Data-driven decision-making and
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# Questions & Discussion

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