



Dallas ISD's thoughtful, thorough, and data-informed implementation of CLASS® creates benefits that reverberate from pre-K through early elementary and beyond.

PK PRE-K **K3** K-3

Challenge

Comparing itself with other large metropolitan districts across the state of Texas, Dallas ISD recognized a need and made an early move into accessible full-day pre-K for all students. In spite of funding challenges across the state, that commitment has only grown over the past few years, as the district turned its focus to the quality of teaching in those early childhood classrooms.

When Dallas ISD began focusing heavily on teacher quality using CLASS, they found that only 40% of their pre-K teachers were providing effective instruction to children. Like many other districts, Dallas ISD lacked a cohesive approach to supporting quality alignment across the early years and saw an opportunity in CLASS to focus their quality efforts and improve the learning experience for students in pre-K and beyond. To have students on track for success by third grade, Dallas ISD recognized two critical needs: investment in full-day pre-K for all students, and consistent, high-quality, aligned instruction from preschool through second grade.

PRODUCTS USED

myTeachstone, Coaching with myTeachstone, CLASS Observation Training, CLASS Group Coaching (MMCI), CLASS Affiliate Training Program, Introduction to the CLASS Tool, CLASS Feedback Strategies, CLASS Instructional Support Strategies, CLASS Calibration

CONTRACT START DATE

August 2015

Focus

Once Dallas ISD decided on CLASS as a core to their improvement efforts in early childhood, leadership across the district was clear about the commitment and took deliberate action to increase alignment and cohesion.

Ensure equitable environments for supporting interactions.

Bringing early childhood environments up to par across the district posed an initial challenge. "I think one of the better decisions we made along the way was ... to focus first on the classroom setup and environment," said Assistant Superintendent of Early Learning, Derek Little. "So, does your classroom have all of the physical fixtures and manipulatives or materials that it

needs and are they in the right places to support the type of learning we want?”

Align to teacher evaluation tools.

In the early phase, the district also focused on demonstrating for teachers how closely CLASS aligns with more familiar quality measures with which they were familiar. Dallas ISD worked to further align CLASS to the Teacher Excellence Initiative (TEI), their teacher evaluation rubric. Alongside the use of existing observation data to demonstrate for teachers how their existing strong scores on the evaluation rubric would produce similarly strong scores in a CLASS-based system, Dallas ISD’s crosswalk between the CLASS indicators and the teacher-evaluation criteria preempted many anxieties about a new observation system.

Measure


A uniquely valuable element of Dallas ISD’s CLASS work was the decision to establish a partnership with the Center on Research and Evaluation (CORE) at Southern Methodist University to collect CLASS data for the district. This partnership provided a number of benefits,— key among them the regular, actionable data that helped leaders know where they were making progress and where they needed to invest more attention. The partnership also allowed for the separation of the evaluation and coaching roles.

CORE manages the collection of data in every classroom twice a year, and that actionable data is immediately given back to teachers, coaches, and leaders to ensure they can use it for improvement efforts.

Dallas ISD put a lot of thought into the decision to have an external partner collect their CLASS data. “We needed to build trust and credibility early on, and we didn’t want our coaches to lose the relationship that they were building with teachers; we didn’t want to put them in the space of evaluator,” Derek Little said. “Having an objective third party come in helps keep our coach in the space of ‘I’m just here to help

you.’ And it helps us ... share that data with principals, the board, — whomever, — and say, We’re not just making this up. There’s a trusted university partner coming in here and doing it,”

The district also made a strategic decision to start with a focus on just one CLASS domain, Emotional Support. “As a system we focus sequentially on Emotional Support, then Classroom Organization, then Instructional Support,” Little said. “I think that helps both our coaches and our teachers. They make progress early on, which helps keep them invested in the work. Now we are at the really hard work of all of the things that are built into Instructional Support.”



“We talked about it publicly, — like really publicly. So we weren’t just sitting down with teachers and principals. We’re talking to the superintendent and to the board and to the newspaper and to community leaders, saying, ‘Hey, CLASS is the best way for us to understand what’s going on in a classroom.’”

DEREK LITTLE

Assistant Superintendent for Early Learning

Improve

Dallas ISD is making progress towards the ambitious goal of ensuring every student has access to great teaching. 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 domain of CLASS). By fall 2017, that number was up to 60 percent.

Along the way, the district has made changes based on a couple of key learnings. They noted that there was not enough systematic training of school leaders on CLASS, which proved important.

After coaches worked fairly independently for the first year and a half, the district also recognized that more structure would better support coaching work. “We had to really standardize what it meant to be an early learning coach in this district,” Little said, referring to the need for consistency of day-to-day work. His team has now built at least three versions of a plan to help coaches “think about their work in a structured way, capture data about their work, and have conversations about their work in a consistent way with teachers.”

Dallas ISD’s larger ambition to improve quality teaching throughout early elementary is also being realized, rewarding the district’s decision to work within the relatively contained pre-K environment and expand the work upward. In 2016, CLASS-based work expanded to many kindergarten, and first- and 2nd grade teachers. Now, across these grade levels, the district is seeing notable improvement in CLASS scores, which means more children are experiencing strong instruction in their early years of schooling.

Dallas ISD has also noted that CLASS is very effective as a structured tool for helping leaders, coaches, and teachers get on the same page about what good teaching looks like. As the work has progressed, Dallas ISD has produced more rigorous evidence that CLASS and TEI are correlated — which is giving teachers and school leaders even more confidence in the value of the work.

“There’s some appetite from people for us to think about — a few schools doing third-grade CLASS. Next year, we will expand CLASS to all third-grade classrooms in one third of our schools. So in terms of throwing the rock out into the pond, our ripple effects are getting really wide and thick at this point, which is great.”

DEREK LITTLE

Assistant Superintendent for Early Learning

WORDS OF WISDOM

- **Focus on what matters most:** Dallas ISD focused their entire early childhood system on teacher-child interactions, using CLASS and adopting and implementing new curricula that help ensure children are being taught critical early skills in literacy, math, science, and social and emotional learning.
- **Engage educators in evidence-based PD and coaching:** Dallas ISD has offered most pre-K teachers and many K-3 teachers the evidence-based PD program called CLASS Group Coaching. They have developed a large cadre of amazing coaches — helping to ensure that every teacher takes the learning back into their classroom and makes meaningful and lasting changes to their daily practice.
- **Assess Impact:** Dallas ISD found that, where possible, separating the role of coach from the role of evaluator made teachers much more comfortable with the process. The true research-practice partnership between Dallas ISD and CORE at Southern Methodist University is critical to the success of this program: The actionable data allows the district and individual schools to make smart decisions about their investments of time and money throughout each organization.



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