

GUIDANCE

FOR CONDUCTING REMOTE LIVE CLASS® OBSERVATIONS DURING COVID-19

Due to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools and programs are limiting the number of people who can enter classrooms during the 2020–2021 school year. In many cases, only essential workers are allowed in classrooms, which may prevent in-person CLASS® observations from taking place. For this reason, some programs may choose to conduct CLASS observations through a video conferencing platform.

There are a number of considerations that observers should take into account when observing through a video conferencing platform. This document spells out some of the essential guidance for observing these “remote live” classrooms with the CLASS measure.

DEFINING “REMOTE LIVE”

Teachstone® is using the term “remote live” to describe observations in which the teacher and children are physically together in a classroom, but the observer is joining via Zoom or another video conferencing platform that allows the observer to watch the classroom in real time. Because observing a remote live classroom is very different from in-person observation, Teachstone recommends that observers practice coding a remote live classroom prior to conducting a formal observation. Teachstone recommends that data obtained in this manner be used to provide teachers with feedback and support as they work to maintain quality interactions with the children in their care during this unprecedented time.

TECHNOLOGY SET-UP FOR AN OPTIMAL OBSERVATION

- It is imperative that both observers and programs have a strong wifi or internet connection that will support streaming a virtual conferencing platform.
- If possible, teachers should wear lapel microphones. Note that while microphones can cause an audio lag, the overall audio quality will be markedly better than if no mics are in use.
- Use a tablet or phone as the video camera. Laptops are more cumbersome, and it can be harder to obtain a good angle for viewing with a laptop.
- Use a tripod to hold the tablet or phone steady.
- Whenever possible, someone other than the teacher who has access to the classroom should handle the camera. This may be a coach or administrator. Having a dedicated person helps the observer coordinate start and stop times and allows the observer to communicate when they are unable to hear or would like for the camera to be moved closer to the teacher and children.
- Observers should use headphones to improve sound quality.

PRIOR TO THE OBSERVATION

Just as with a typical CLASS observation, the observer should get in touch with the program in advance to learn about the daily schedule. In addition, they should obtain the following information.

TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION

- Verify that the program has a strong internet connection that will allow streaming.
- Ask what type of equipment they will use to capture video and facilitate the observation.
- Verify that they have downloaded the selected video conferencing platform onto the device they will use to capture the classroom activities.
- Ask if the teachers will use lapel mics.
- Discuss optimal placement of the camera. Learn if the individual handling the camera has to maintain a distance of six feet from the teacher.
- Discuss the number of cycles to observe based on the schedule. This may differ from the typical number due to altered schedules or data-collection goals during COVID-19.*
- Determine whether one teacher or all adults will be the focus of the observation.
- Agree upon a time to get online prior to the observation to make sure that the technology is working correctly. Teachstone recommends allotting 30 minutes.
- Remind the program to make sure that their device is fully charged and will maintain the charge for the duration of the observation.
- Request that background music be kept at a minimum to improve your ability to hear the teachers and children.
- Decide on a method for signaling the individual who is handling the camera so they know when observation cycles start and end.
- Determine a preferred communication method for troubleshooting if internet or video connection is lost.

CLASSROOM INFORMATION

The protocols in schools and child-care programs will vary from state to state and district to district. Observers will need to be aware of current guidelines for the classrooms they are observing. Questions might include, but are not limited to

- How many people—adults and children—are allowed in the classroom?
- Are there any COVID-19 protocols that children and/or adults have to follow?
 - Do the children need to wear masks?
 - What physical distancing measures are in place?
 - Are children able to select where they play?
- What is the daily schedule of the classroom? When do teachers take breaks?

*For specific guidance on how social distancing measures may impact in-person teaching we suggest downloading the detailed guidance from Teachstone's related [blog post](#).

- Do teachers have specific children within the classroom assigned to them or are they responsible for the care of all children equally?
- When is the best time to start an observation?

ON THE DAY OF THE OBSERVATION

Observers should

- Get online early to test the technology
- Do a sound check
- Request a virtual tour of the classroom for context
- Ask about the number of children enrolled and the number of children expected that day
- Ask for the names and roles of all of the adults in the classroom and for each individual to be identified—for example, “The woman in the purple shirt is the lead teacher. Her name is Jalie McCormick.”
- Remind the person handling the camera that in toddler and pre-K classrooms where children use the restroom independently, observers do not follow teachers and children into the bathroom
- Remind the person handling the camera that in infant and toddler rooms, diaper changing is a part of the routine and can be observed
- Minimize the video and turn off the sound during the 10-minute coding period to reduce distraction
- Provide a 1-minute warning to the person handling the camera prior to the start of each new cycle

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Upon entering a live classroom remotely, observers should have their camera on. This will allow observers to introduce themselves to the teacher and/or the person handling the camera. Once introductions have been made, all essential information has been gathered, and set-up is complete, observers should turn their camera and microphone off. This will reduce distraction for the teachers and children. Additionally, observers should mute the classroom while they are coding to reduce distraction for themselves.

The observer should communicate with the person handling the camera if they need to restart the current cycle. If there are significant technology issues, such as a severe audio lag, that lead to terminating a cycle, the observer should also communicate this to the person handling the camera.

If the program or observer loses their connection to the meeting, the observer should end the cycle and reconnect as soon as possible. If either party is unable to reconnect to the conferencing platform, they should use the predetermined communication method to determine next steps.

OBSERVER FOCUS

It may be difficult to clearly see and hear all areas of the classroom through the video conferencing platform. Depending on the camera set-up, it may be challenging to capture the experience of the entire classroom. If observers can only clearly see and hear a subset of children, they should note this on the score sheet.

If the focus of the observation is on multiple adults, the person handling the camera should get close to the adult who is being observed at that moment, as it can be challenging to know who is talking if teachers and children are wearing masks.

CODING CONSIDERATIONS

While some schools and programs may have social distancing measures in place, other schools and programs may be operating without restrictions. When social distancing is in place, a typical day looks different than in previous years.*

GENERAL POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Teachers may work with smaller numbers of children or have a single group of children that they are responsible for throughout the day.
- Teachers and some children may be wearing masks.
- Masks may impact the audibility of speech. This may be confounded when the camera is six feet away or there are other groups of children nearby. Observers should not make assumptions about verbal interactions that they cannot hear.
- Masks may make it hard to determine who is making a statement. Observers should not attribute statements to specific teachers if they are not sure.
- Observers should remember that behavioral markers are an incomplete list of examples for an indicator, and they do not need to see evidence of all behavioral markers. For example, lack of physical affection would not affect the range for positive communication if evidence for verbal affection and/or positive expectations was ample. In addition, they might observe a teacher giving an air high-five or an air hug.
- While some behavioral markers may be difficult to assess while social distancing practices are in place, all indicators and dimensions should still be codeable.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES TO CONSIDER

- It may be harder to observe smiling as evidence of positive affect if teachers are wearing masks. While it is possible to see “smiling eyes” from a close vantage point, the placement of the camera may limit this. When this happens, observers should listen and look for evidence of laughter, enthusiasm, or other signs that teachers and children are enjoying themselves.
- Physical distancing may prevent teachers from accepting children’s hugs. Rather than engage in physical touch, teachers can return the positive communication by making comments such as “I wish I could hug you, but we need to stay safe. I am giving you a big air hug instead!”

*For specific guidance on how social distancing measures may impact in-person teaching we suggest downloading the detailed guidance from Teachstone’s related [blog post](#).

- Observers may not see children doing typical classroom jobs, such as setting the table or passing out materials, but they may see that children are responsible for getting their own personal materials (lunch boxes, nap mats, coats) or taking toys to be sanitized.
- Sanitizing materials and washing hands is necessary, but may take time away from instruction or activities. Observers should look to see if teachers continue to engage with children during these times by having conversations, asking questions, etc. If children are not engaged, observers should use time codes to accurately gauge the length of time safety procedures take away from instruction.
- Transitions may take longer if teachers and children are maintaining physical distance. Once again, observers should look to see if teachers are making productive use of this time and use time codes to track any down time if they are not.
- There may be fewer materials available for children to use. Observers should look to see whether or not the materials effectively gain childrens' interest and participation in activities and lessons.
- The decrease in available materials may lead to children engaging in more extended and deeper play with the materials that are available. This can set the stage for enhanced interactions in the domain of Instructional Support, but the observer should not make assumptions about this level of depth. If the verbal interactions cannot be clearly heard, they should not be considered.

We hope this guidance is helpful in answering some of your most important questions, but we recognize that circumstances differ across the education landscape. Please use the CLASS Learning Community as a way to get feedback and dialogue with others about their approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have thoughts you'd like to share or would like to consult directly with us, we'd love to hear from you. Email us at interactions@teachstone.com.