

Infant and Toddler CLASS® Training
Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant
Final Project Report

In order to continue to support the work that was begun related to expanding capacity for the use of the Infant and the Toddler CLASS® assessment tool, this project supported staff to become affiliate trainers on the two tools, and to provide support for technical assistance staff to be trained and become reliable on both Infant and Toddler CLASS®. This provided increased capacity to sustain the work that was begun through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant beyond the initial grant period.

Successes -

There was an overwhelming amount of interest for CLASS® Observer training, and applications were received from a wide range of early childhood professionals in Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) and Smart Start agencies. During both years, there were waiting lists from across the state for all course offerings.

Technical assistance professionals were enthusiastic about the CLASS® measure and how it allowed a shift in their lens from “structural to process” quality in infant and toddler classrooms. Many participants shared how the CLASS® measure allowed them to finally look and talk about the most important aspects of the classroom - how caregivers engage with infants and toddlers. The measure gives meaning and value to educational practices that bring about the most important academic differences to children.

Evaluations were consistently outstanding for all trainings and included written remarks such as: “My trainer was excellent and really expanded my understanding of the CLASS® tool. Great experience!”; “My trainer was thorough and I feel confident that I can pass my reliability test.”; “Great tips for coding!”; “I feel confident that I can successfully use CLASS® with Technical Assistance”; “I learned how to promote language and interactions on a consistent basis.”; and, “I learned how to observe and code human behavior!”

Lessons Learned –

Following their certification, technical assistance professionals from across the state requested support and guidance with their work in technical assistance. As a result, a new five hour CEU credit earning (.5) course was developed entitled, “Using CLASS® in Technical Assistance,” and was launched at the NC CCR&R Institute on March 9, 2016 in Pinehurst, NC.

The majority of the Infant Toddler Specialists in North Carolina successfully achieved their certification thanks to this funding opportunity. The Infant Toddler Statewide Project is now working to incorporate new coaching and consultation practices that will focus specifically on *teacher child interactions* in the classroom.

Challenges –

For most technical assistance professionals, this training opportunity was their first time using the CLASS® measure. Each CLASS® measure maintains a very unique concept for each dimension of rated interactions using a very specifically prescribed procedure that is unlike any other evaluation tool in early care and education. In addition, learning to use the CLASS® lens requires a very different shift in classroom focus and requires recognizing that a level of bias exists in all of us. These experiences are often very difficult for “newcomers” and require time for processing and practicing. Instructors for CLASS® Observer Training courses must be well prepared and experienced with adult learners to recognize and allow for this practice and processing time while managing the real emotional experiences of the students.

Achieving reliability takes dedication to the material, recognition of coding strengths and weakness and a true commitment and trust in the coding procedure. Often, participants do not achieve their certification successfully on their first and sometimes second attempt. Working through the emotional negativity of “test failure” can be very difficult and therefore seeking support and coaching during this sensitive time can also be difficult. However, in this project, we found that students who sought coaching support, available to all through the project, achieved higher results on their second and third testing attempts.

Recommendations –

Now that the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge project has come to an end, practitioners will be required to subsidize their own training costs to achieve and maintain certification. This is a tremendous challenge now that we have successfully supported CLASS® certification for so many Technical Assistance professionals in NC. The enthusiasm that has come from the newly created CLASS® community is thriving and we hope to keep the momentum moving and supporting teachers with effective practice in the future. We would recommend ongoing investigation into financial opportunities for covering the costs of training and recertification to ensure that the knowledge that has been gained is maintained, as we know that these tools have the potential to positively impact the quality of care for infants and toddlers.