

Division of Early Childhood Education,
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Guidance on the Use of Structured Classroom Observation Instruments

This guidance clarifies the multiple uses of structured classroom observation tools in Abbott preschool classrooms.

Structured classroom observation instruments provide a lens for the examination of the many components of classroom quality from the nature of teacher-child interaction to the availability of materials and activities that support early learning and development. Using a set of criteria and a rubric for scoring, structured observation instruments allow teachers and administrators to evaluate a range of classroom features. These observations inform individual and program-wide professional development and serve as a means of tracking program quality from year to year.

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)

The ECERS-R is a nationally recognized measure of preschool classroom quality. This instrument can be used to collect baseline data in the initial stages of classroom improvement and as a comparative index across statewide programs and over time.

Curriculum-based Instruments

High/Scope's PQA, Creative Curriculum's Implementation Checklist, Tools of the Mind Fidelity Checklist and Curiosity Corner's Implementation Checklist and Curiosity Implementation Self Assessment Guide are examples of curriculum-specific assessments that have a key role in maintaining curriculum fidelity.

Targeted Classroom Observation Instruments

If classrooms across the district have an average score of 5.0 or above on the ECERS-R and achieve a high level of curriculum implementation using the measures associated with the program's curriculum, the district may want to instead consider more targeted instruments such as the Supports for Early Literacy Assessment, the Preschool Classroom Mathematics Inventory, or the Supports for English Language Learners Classroom Assessment, depending on need.

Reliability

Regardless of the instrument (s) chosen, a system of reliability must be in place. Reliability focuses on the quality of the use of a measure; specifically its "consistency" and "repeatability". It is the process that will help the observer to use the measure in a manner consistent with the way in which it is intended to be used. It is important that master teachers and administrators use classroom observation instruments with consistency, so that they can appropriately inform program improvement. To ensure that staff are interpreting each item correctly, they should be trained in the scoring rubric and practice what they have learned with a "reliable" observer to make sure that they are interpreting each item correctly. Most structured classroom observation tools come with

a recommended system of reliability to help observers use them in an accurate and consistent manner. If the instrument does not come with materials to guide the reliability process, the developer should be contacted.

Choosing a classroom observation tool

Districts should be wary of using more than one formal observation tool at a time, as the process can be time consuming. They should understand the purpose of each instrument and how the results will be interpreted and used. Thorough knowledge of these tools can inform supervisors' and master teachers' classrooms visit on a regular basis throughout the year.

- ✓ For classrooms that score consistently over a 5.0 for at least 2 consecutive years on the ECERS-R, curriculum-based classroom assessments should be used instead (e.g. PQA, Implementation Checklist, ISAG) on an annual basis to ensure high quality implementation of the program's curriculum. ECERS-R should be administered in these classrooms every two to three years to insure that quality is maintained.
- ✓ For classrooms that score consistently over a 5.0, also consider using more focused instruments depending on need such as the Support for Early Literacy Assessment, Preschool Classroom Mathematics Inventory or Supports for English Language Learners Classroom Assessment.
- ✓ For new classrooms, and classrooms scoring under a 5.0, the ECERS-R should be used on an annual basis to facilitate the quality improvement process.

Using a structured observation tool for coaching

The purpose of administering these tools is to present individual teachers with a template for effective practice.

- ✓ Structured observations should be used as formative evaluation tools for professional development purposes.
- ✓ Master teachers should ask teachers to use the instrument for self-evaluation with time for discussion prior to the evaluation.
- ✓ Master teachers should visit their assigned rooms individually early in the year.
- ✓ The results of the classroom observations serve as the basis for the coaching model known as the reflective cycle, which involves a discussion between the master teacher and each classroom teacher shortly following the observation.
- ✓ Master teacher and classroom teacher determine areas of improvement and use relevant sections from the classroom observation instrument for follow up.

Using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised for accountability in preschool provider settings

According to NJAC 6A:10A-2.3(j)3(i), "The district board of education in consultation with the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) and with approval from the Department shall establish a minimum acceptable score for all preschool classrooms in operation in the district". If any classroom falls below the minimum acceptable score, an improvement plan needs to be established. The minimum acceptable score should be close to the average for the district; not too high or too low. The steps to using the ECERS-R for accountability purposes are described below.

- ✓ The master teacher conducts an ECERS-R in a classroom as part of her individualized professional development responsibilities (as indicated above).
- ✓ After extensive assistance, if follow-up observations reveal serious concerns, these are discussed with the supervisor, principal or child care center director and teacher to establish goals and a timeframe for making the required changes.
- ✓ If improvements are not evident at the end of the timeframe, then “a reliable independent observer approved by the NJ Department of Education – Office of Early Childhood Education evaluates the classroom or program”. Observations by master teachers may not be used to determine whether to contract with a classroom or provider.
- ✓ If it is verified that the classroom/program quality is below the minimum acceptable score in the contract, steps are taken by the district to remove the teacher from the classroom or terminate the Abbott Preschool Contract between the preschool provider and the district.

Using structured observation instruments for professional development planning

In addition to using structured observation instruments for individual classroom teacher support, the district should also analyze the results of the observations to determine the staff development needs of the district. Differentiated professional development should be part of this plan.

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