Welcome to our session.
We hope that in listening to our network’s story, you will gain an understanding of how CLASS can impact the educational experiences of the children in your community.
I would like to briefly introduce myself and my colleagues. I am Leslie Hodges, the Early Childhood Coordinator. This is Mrs. Rita Mulina, our Federal Programs coordinator. These are our classroom prekindergarten teachers, Ms. Christian Henn, Ms. Marsha Moran and Ms. Amanda Piacun.
Agenda

• We will briefly describe our network.
• We will discuss our efforts to improve educational outcomes through the use of targeted professional development.
• We will share what we have learned through this process.
Objectives

• To greater understand the integral connections between CLASS dimensions.
• To see the importance of targeted professional development.
• To build from teachers’ strengths- not weaknesses.
We need to get to know each other.
Let’s take a minute and share how we use CLASS.
On the white paper at your table please write your name and where you are from, then answer these questions.
* What do you like about CLASS?
* Do you use its principles in your daily life?
* Roll the paper into a ball
* Start throwing snowballs at those sitting at your table for 60 seconds.

Times up! Unfold the ball in your hand and share with your table.
Let’s Talk About Washington Parish

- The Louisiana Department of Education classifies Washington Parish as a small rural school district.
- The majority of our children live in households that are below the poverty level.
- Many students have special needs:
  - *significant developmental delays, or
  - *are classified as “at risk” for academic difficulties.
- More than 40% of the parish residents, 25 years or older, do not hold a high school diploma.

This is some important background on our parish.
The need continues to be critical, but our community network serves more children from infancy to age four than ever before.
2002

• We began offering universal prekindergarten, free of charge, to all four-year-old children in August 2002 with the implementation of the LA 4 Prekindergarten Program.

• We currently serve 318 children through our prekindergarten program funded by LA4, Title I, 8(g), Special Education, and district supplements.

• We have full inclusion of children with special needs in our prekindergarten classrooms.
We were very excited about partnering with the other entities that serve young children in our parish and have enjoyed working with them over the past three years. We have made substantial progress in providing a unified network that supports families with infants, toddlers, three year olds, and four year olds, as well as children with special needs.

The Washington Parish Early Childhood Community Network

• Four childcare centers
• Early Head Start and Head Start
• Universal pre-kindergarten at five public school sites.
Since we were in the third cohort, we had to come together as a network in a very short period of time.

We had to schedule trainings in late May and throughout the summer.
Change can be difficult, particularly when the timing for the implementation runs short.
We needed to understand how we would evaluate our students and how we would be evaluated as teachers.
Despite being trained, teachers and paraprofessionals were feeling confused and overwhelmed.

Professional development was challenging. TS GOLD training was held in May. Introduction to CLASS was presented in August.
Although our district is small, we have:
* twelve prekindergarten observer
* four toddler observers

Because we are participating in two pilots this year, we also have four observers who are reliable for kindergarten through grade three, and one observer observing infant classrooms.

Targeted professional development was essential.

- **All** teachers and paraprofessionals in both **school settings and childcare** were trained in the GOLD by *Teaching Strategies* assessment and received certificates for inter-rater reliability. All childcare owner/directors and the principal of the largest school site participated as well.

- **All** teachers and paraprofessionals in both **school settings and childcare** were trained in **CLASS**.

- **Principals, assistant principals, and childcare owner/directors** became reliable observers.
However CLASS and its domains can be overwhelming.

Words need to be defined.
We needed to define and simplify the language of CLASS so that we could connect what we were already doing in our classrooms and childcare centers. We also needed to support teachers in their use of CLASS language.

Domains, dimensions, and behavioral markers - what does it all mean? These terms mean more than just words on a page or a proficient score on an observation. They are the essential ingredients for a successful classroom.
CLASS domains had to be defined in a concrete meaningful manner.

We had to simplify things.
The teacher and the child should genuinely enjoy each other's company.
Classroom Organization

• means I’m prepared for you.

The classroom should be organized and the materials prepared for the activities of the day.
The teacher should not be searching for materials or distracted by managerial tasks.
The teacher needs to be involved with what the child is doing. She needs to share in the learning experience.

**Instructional Support**

- *means I’m ready to learn with you.*
We discovered that the language of CLASS is important. It validates us as professionals. We know we are much more than babysitters and CLASS gives us the words to express ourselves in a professional manner.

- We studied exemplar videos and discussed the structure of domains, dimensions and behavioral markers.
- We shadow-scored every observation.
- The coordinator coached teachers using practice observations.

The language of CLASS is important and should be used in coaching.
In our first practice year, professional development didn’t focus on the negative and what needed to be changed.

We started thinking about what we loved about teaching and how those feelings were connected to and validated by,
We started thinking about what we loved about teaching and how those feelings were connected to and validated by CLASS.
We reflected on why we choose teaching as a profession.

We enjoy spending time with our students.
We are kind, caring and sensitive to their needs.
We respect them. We use polite language.
We encourage independence.
We have behavior plans in place so that they know what is expected of them.
We are prepared.
We started to examine our role in the classroom
What we do as teachers really matters.

Sometimes we forget how important our role is in the classroom.
The essential ingredient is the teacher!

- The teacher builds a positive relationship with the child.
- The teacher controls the classroom environment.
- The teacher plans and prepares lessons.
- The teacher arranges learning centers and selects materials.
- The teacher defines the instructional objectives.

A teachers’ responsibilities can seem overwhelming.
We didn’t want CLASS to become just another stressful observation tool.
The question was: how do we connect this to the CLASS assessment in a meaningful way that will foster improvement across all domains?

We had to build an understanding of CLASS on our strengths not weaknesses in order to see improvement in classroom interactions.
We piloted MyTeachstone in 2017-2018

This was a wonderful opportunity for network!
As a part of the CLASS Pilot Enhancing Instruction for Special Learners, our teachers completed over 606 hours of CLASS professional development using MyTeachstone.

- Forty-one teachers and paraprofessionals participated.
- Special education teachers and paraprofessionals were included.
- Each participant spent in excess of fifteen hours in targeted professional development, dialogue and reflection. Many teachers and paras spent up to twenty-five hours in self-study.

This was an incredible experience for all those involved. I was the coach and we had some very exciting discussions about CLASS. Paraprofessionals and teachers were equal partners as they shared their opinions and reflected on what we were learning.

After completing the pilot, we felt that had gained a much deeper understanding of CLASS and felt empowered to take what we learned back to the classroom. The principal of our largest primary school felt that participation in the pilot had improved the positive climate of the entire school.
Using CLASS as the assessment, we thought our teachers were already doing well in two out of three domains, emotional support and classroom organization, but could they do better?

We had to focus on the positive.
Teachers must build relationship with children before instruction can begin.

- We know this statement to be true, but sometimes we forget how important it is.

Positive relationships between teachers and students foster positive peer relationships as well.
Creating a positive classroom environment where children feel loved and respected is essential.

Sometimes we become so caught up in managerial tasks that we fail to bond with our students in a meaningful way.

- In the first year of CLASS observations, all sites were proficient in emotional support but we wanted to be excellent. Our children deserved it.
- **School should be a safe haven where all students feel respected and loved.**
- **As teachers it is our job to make this happen.**
Emotional support is the key!

- Emotional support is much more than behavioral markers in an observation.
- A teacher can not have proficient instructional strategies if she doesn’t have a personal relationship with the student.
- Unfortunately, for so many of our children, the affection shown by the teacher is the only positive interaction the child will have all day.

The love and understanding we show children can make a real difference.
First, we have to show how much we care!

We are important!
How do relationships begin and how are they connected to classroom organization and instructional support?

Relationships begin with conversations and develop over time. Meaningful conversations deepen children’s understanding of the world around them and challenge their thinking.
An authentic conversation is one in which participants are genuinely interested in each other. Back and forth questions come naturally and are focused on topics of mutual interest to the participants. Turn to the others at your table for a moment and try to imagine what these two young ladies are talking about and how you, as a teacher, could expand this interaction. I think most of us can see this would be a great opportunity for some advanced language, maybe even some brain storming about they could make with all those pretty beads.
In targeted professional development we learned the importance of little things

- Saying good morning
- Addressing children by their name
- Smiles and laughter
- Eye contact
- Using polite language (please, thank you)
- Verbal and physical affection
- Being genuinely happy that they have come to school to be with you.

Little things can really make a child feel confident and happy.
In establishing relationships with students through conversations we began to see the ways in which the CLASS domains and dimensions overlap one another.

How do we, as adults, establish relationships?
Without conversations it would be impossible to make friends, learn new things, or even function in life.
It was essential to see the connections and the way what happens in each domain supports the others.
Our first year CLASS scores indicated that classroom organization was definitely proficient and even excellent most of our sites.
We all know that if we are not prepared we will not be successful. Strong relationships, a behavior plan, and organized materials are essential.
From the moment we say “good morning”, our focus is the student. This is true for all students from infants to kindergarteners. Our day is shaped by the children’s conversations, feelings, interests and their ability to understand the world around them.
• We knew teacher-child interactions were important.
• We knew a positive classroom was important.
• We knew we had to have a plan for handling problem behavior.
• We knew we had to have our materials prepared.

It is easy too see how a positive classroom environment and classroom organization are connected.
For improvement in the instructional domain to occur, positive climate and classroom organization must be proficient or even excellent.
We are good teachers and we can do this, but it will take practice and an understanding of how young children experience the world.

However, we knew we needed to improve our instructional strategies. Having proficient or excellent scores as measured by the CLASS tool is important, but not nearly as important as what those scores represent.
Excellent instructional strategies scores mean that excellent teaching is taking place in that classroom.

Every child deserves our best in the classroom!

We always have to look beyond scores and be aware of how important our interactions with children are and how closely they are connected to growth and development.
Intentionality has to include planning. How could you incorporate advanced vocabulary into this activity? Could you also provide new information connected to real world experiences?
Take a moment and think about how a conversation could lead to higher order thinking.
What type of questions could you ask this young lady?
How would you start your conversation?
Think about what you would say if she was a friend or neighbor?
Would you be genuinely interested in what she had to say and extend the conversation, or would you just say good morning and ask her to go sit in her square on the rug for circle time?

Seeing the connections between the domains was essential in this process.

- When does a friendly social conversation become more?
Intentionality is the key.
• For instructional strategies to successfully overlap with emotional support, they must be intentional.
• Conversations are learning opportunities and must be planned in a way that considers children’s perspectives and supports their independence.

If it is not planned, it won’t happen.
We have to be **intentional** as we prepare our children for success in the real world.

- to get children to explain their thinking
- to learn to solve problems
- to analyze situations
- to apply knowledge to their everyday life

Intentionality is essential and it can be supported in many ways, such as teacher word walls or questioning prompts on note cards taped to the walls. Can you think of any?
Once we have built genuine relationships with our students, our use of **conversational language** becomes an essential tool.

We knew that conversations are a part of language modeling but they are also a component of positive climate, teacher sensitivity and a regard for child perspectives. Conversations between children are very important too. Conversations don’t have to be teacher initiated or directed. Sometimes, the teacher should join the children’s conversation and not direct it.
Conversations need to aligned to the interests of the children.

What do you think this child might be interested in talking about?
We learned that meaningful questions need to be embedded within conversations. Conversations need to be connected to the real world, and students’ prior knowledge and experiences

- We learned we had to map new words and concepts so that children could deepen their understanding of the world around them.
- No one wants to be barraged with rapid fire questions that only require one word answers.
- We learned that intentionality is essential.
- If you don’t plan it, it won’t happen.
- This takes practice.

New words need to be connected to other words that the children are familiar with.
What kind of meaningful questions could you ask this child?

Take a moment, turn to your neighbor and share some questions or advanced vocabulary that would be appropriate for this situation.
What about this child?

How do you think she feels about this experience?
What do you think she is thinking?
Intentional Questions
Close-ended vs. Open-ended

- **Close-ended question**: “What color play dough is this?”
- **Open-ended question**: “You used a lot of blue on your sculpture. What does it remind you of?”
- **Close-ended question**: “How many dinosaurs are on the block?”
- **Open-ended question**: “What are those dinosaurs thinking about?”
- **Close-ended question**: “What’s your robot’s name?”
- **Open-ended question**: “Your robot is so strong! Tell me about him.”

Turn to those at your table and ask them an open-ended question about their experiences at the summit so far.
What about the curriculum?
We adopted the *Creative Curriculum* by Teaching Strategies in 2015.

It was chosen because it is closely aligned with the GOLD assessment (created by the same company) and its structure of investigations could be aligned to CLASS. We are trying to build a crosswalk for GOLD and CLASS to use in professional development next fall.
When we received targeted professional development this January, we began to see all the connections between CLASS and the Creative Curriculum and the ways in which one supports the other.

We plan use the curriculum to improve instructional strategies scores through questions that promote higher order thinking. “What do we know and what would we like to find out?”, are the opening questions of each Creative Curriculum investigation.

We plan to create crosswalks between CLASS, TS GOLD and the Creative Curriculum to maximize these connections.

Some curriculums have crosswalks (Frog Street and Conscious Discipline) and although they take time to create they provide important support in the classroom.
What we do in the classroom matters. Our childcare classrooms are equally important. We have piloted CLASS in our infant classrooms this year and in our kindergarten classrooms as well.

CLASS is a process!

*Leadership is the process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective.
*The teacher is the leader, and the objective is to teach children the skills they need to learn.
Through targeted professional development we released that that essential “learning to learn skills” are embedded in CLASS. These skills are best developed by fostering meaningful relationships. Relationships develop through conversations.

- Attention
- Persistence
- Tolerance

These are skills that are important in life not just in the classroom. **The greatest predictor for a child’s success in the school setting is his/hers ability to self-regulate.** We need to be attentive and aware.

We need to be persistent to overcome challenges and develop new skills.

We need to develop tolerance. (We have to share, we have to take turns, we have to be kind and patient)

What might happen to a child in first grade if these skills had not been developed?

Turn to your partner for a moment and discuss why these skills are important.
Next Steps

- Be intentional!
- Plan for more conversations at specific times during the day.
- Questions should be a natural part of an authentic conversation.
- Elicit the students point of view.
- A conversation with a child should have the same qualities as a conversation with a friend.

We plan to schedule additional professional development targeted at successfully integrating *The Creative Curriculum* with CLASS and creating a crosswalk between the two.

*Our childcare, Early Head Start and Head Start teachers will participate in MyTeachstone in order to improve their understanding of CLASS.*
We are not just preparing students for success in kindergarten, we are preparing them for success in life. As we learn more about ourselves as teachers, we can become more intentional in our interactions with our students. Relationships, authentic conversations, and prepared classrooms create an environment that will nurture young children, develop their curiosity, challenge their thinking and prepare them for success in the real world.
We need to remember how important we are as teachers.
Please contact us if you have any questions or would like copies of slides.
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From Approaching Proficient to Excellent

“Tell me and I forget,
teach me and I may remember,
involving me and I learn.” - Benjamin Franklin
Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding this presentation and we will be happy to share and offer support.