

2026-2027 Local Observation Protocol

Guidance for Community Network Lead Agencies

The Louisiana [Early Childhood Education Act \(Act 3\)](#) of the 2012 Legislative session requires that the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) establishes and carries out a statewide accountability system used to measure the quality of all publicly-funded early childhood programs. To achieve that statutory requirement, [Bulletin 140 §503](#) requires Community Network Lead Agencies to develop a plan and process to coordinate and conduct local observations reliably and without conflict of interest. The Department requires all Community Network Lead Agencies to adopt a written local observation protocol that meets the minimum requirements included in this document.

Community Network Lead Agencies must develop a coordinated observation plan by September 30, 2026 and have a schedule for completing local observations for each observation period. Lead agencies must submit their observation protocol [via Jotform](#). This will allow the lead agency to easily certify that it will follow Department policy and delineate any areas where local policy will differ.

It is a requirement for lead agencies to submit their local appeal guidance to the Department for review. This protocol must also be shared with program partners in your community network(s). All networks are required to have a policy for providers to contest a local observation. For more information, please see page 12 of this document.

If you have questions or need assistance, contact Sonia Gutierrez at sonia.fields-gutierrez@la.gov.

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Observation Protocol Updates

In addition to the considerations for typical local observations, the Department has also provided additional protocols and guidance for observing family childcare educators. For observations conducted at family childcare sites, Community Network Lead Agencies should refer to protocols in both “Column A: Local Protocol Requirements” and “Column B: Additional FCC Observation Considerations.”

Before the Observation Begins

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
Minimum Observation Qualifications	Local observers must meet the following minimum qualifications: • be certified by Teachstone as a reliable observer for every age group that will be observed by that observer in the 2026-2027 academic year (including certification on Pre-K-3rd Second Edition or Pre-K Second Edition for all pre-K observers); • observation certification should be filed with the Community Network Lead Agency; • participate in ongoing calibration exercises at least once per observation period; and • have a valid Child Care Criminal Background Check (CCCBC) that is on file with the Community Network Lead Agency (for early learning center observers only).	Because family childcare enrollment can change frequently and often includes multiple ages, the Department recommends that observers assigned to family childcare educators are certified in multiple tools. This will enable the observation to take place without rescheduling if a different tool should be used. For more guidance on age configurations in relation to family childcare sites, refer to “Observer Arrival on Site” in the Day of Observation table.
Scheduling Observations	Community Network Lead Agencies must develop a written plan to ensure they have all sites and the classrooms correctly entered in the Early Childhood Observation System (ECOS) Portal by September 30. Community Network Lead Agencies must also develop a schedule for completing local observations for each observation period.	Community Network Lead Agencies should contact family childcare educators to ensure that at least half the children enrolled will be present on the day of the observation and to verify the age of the children enrolled. Because some family childcare sites operate after school or during nontraditional hours, schedules may have to accommodate this.

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
	Lead agencies should ensure that the ECOS Portal reflects the reality of classrooms in the site. If there are two teachers who take turns working with the same group of children, this would count as one classroom in the portal. The same group of <i>children</i> should not be observed more than once per semester.	For reference, any family childcare site that receives public funding and that cares for children for 20 hours per week (or six hours during any one weekday) must be observed. <i>Family childcare providers in Academic Approval must opt in by Oct. 1, 2026 to be observed in fall. Family childcare providers in Academic Approval must opt in by Feb. 1, 2027 to be observed in spring.</i> <i>If a provider does not have children when the lead agency is scheduling observations, please reach out to LDOE for guidance.</i> <i>A family childcare provider will not be eligible for a 2026-2027 Performance Profile if they opt in to academic approval after Feb. 1, 2027.</i>
Observer Schedules	Community Network Lead Agencies must establish a process to review observer schedules for schedule conflict, conflicts of interest, or other concerns. Lead agencies should make necessary adjustments and appropriately communicate these changes to observers and sites. As a reminder, <i>Bulletin 140</i> requires that no one with a direct financial interest in a site can conduct observations. This includes childcare center owners observing their own center. For questions and concerns about this requirement, please reach out to the Department.	Although some family childcare observations may need to occur in the evening, Community Network Lead Agencies must ensure that observers are not conducting more than one observation per day. An observer should not conduct an observation at a school or early learning center in the daytime then conduct a family childcare observation in the evening. This is in accordance with Teachstone guidance and recommendations. If a provider does not have children from August 1 to November 15, lead agencies may submit a waiver from observation requirements for that semester. The same conditions apply for the spring if a provider has not had children from January 1 to April 15.

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
Site Notification	Community Network Lead Agencies must establish a process to contact sites to determine the optimal learning time during which to conduct observations. Community Network Lead Agencies must establish a process to require sites to contact the local CLASS® coordinator or the observer with any events that would preclude an observation no later than one week before the scheduled timeframe of the observation. Communication between the Community Network Lead Agency, site and observer must adhere to a local protocol for rescheduling observations.	
Rescheduling Observations	Communication between the lead agency, site, and observer must adhere to a local protocol for observations. If an observation needs to be canceled, lead agencies should reevaluate within two weeks to determine if the observation can be safely conducted.	

The Day of the Observation

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
Observer Demeanor, Attire and Conduct	Observers should be professional in demeanor and attire at all times and never let personal preferences influence scoring. Observers will not: - ask teachers to change schedules, move rooms, rearrange children or groups; - engage in conversations with children or teachers; - use their phone during the observation (time must be kept via a clock, watch, or stopwatch); - conduct observations during the 10-minute break time between cycles; - conduct more than four cycles of observations; or - perform more than one observation in a day. At the conclusion of the observation, the observer will confirm with the teacher that the observation is complete.	The observer should always be cognizant of the fact that they are a guest in someone's home. For example, family childcare educators may request that observers remove their shoes or may require that the blinds remain open during the observation. The observer should accommodate any request that does not detract from their ability to observe the classroom.

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations						
Observer Arrival at Site	Upon arrival at the site/school the observer must report to the administration office and: • introduce themselves to office staff and site administrator (if available); • present identification and sign in on appropriate site documentation; • present a Child Care Criminal Background Check (for licensed centers only); • request a roster of children and verify classroom information with site administrator/director or designee (e.g., classroom locations by age, child birthdates to confirm classroom configuration, and correct spelling of the teacher's name); • receive an updated daily schedule for the classroom being observed; and • request access to a quiet space for four, 10-minute scoring cycles. Based upon site reported optimal learning times, the CLASS® observation typically starts at the beginning of the school day and continues throughout the morning for at least two hours. The total time the observer is present at the site is dependent upon the daily schedule and extracurricular activities. For infant classrooms - While it is important that observers know the daily schedule of the infant classrooms that they observe, there is more flexibility in scheduling infant CLASS® observations. Observers should start infant CLASS® observations at the same time as they would start toddler and pre-K observations as much as possible. However, infant classroom observations may be conducted at different times of the day as appropriate.	Some family child care homes have a space set aside for child care such as a finished basement or a large family room that has been converted into a child care area. In other homes, activities take place in the same space where the family lives. Teachstone recommends that the observer find a place to sit or stand where they can see and hear without being disruptive, keeping in mind that they may need to move around. The observer should be aware that the educator may be the only adult present and it may take a few minutes to answer the door. For mixed age classrooms, the observer should use the tool corresponding to the age of majority (as of Oct. 1, 2026) for the children present on the day of the observation. To determine which tool to use, refer to the local protocol requirements for this section. The following table provides two examples to help illustrate this. For site-specific questions, please reach out to the Department. <table> <tr> <th></th><th>Classroom A</th><th>Classroom B</th></tr> <tr> <td>Children Enrolled</td><td>One infant, two toddlers</td><td>Two infants, one toddler, three preschoolers</td></tr> </table>		Classroom A	Classroom B	Children Enrolled	One infant, two toddlers	Two infants, one toddler, three preschoolers
	Classroom A	Classroom B						
Children Enrolled	One infant, two toddlers	Two infants, one toddler, three preschoolers						

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations		
	For mixed toddler and pre-K classrooms, the Pre-K CLASS® Second Edition tool will be used if 50% or more of the children are 36 months or older. The Infant/Toddler CLASS® Second Edition will be used if more than half of the children are 15 months up to 36 months of age. For classrooms where all three ages are present, use the tool corresponding to the age of majority in the classroom. If there is no clear age of majority, the Infant/Toddler tool should be used. Note: Use the age of the children on Sept. 30, 2026 to determine the classroom configuration for the school year.	Children Present During Observation	One infant, one toddler	One toddler, two preschoolers
		Observation Tool and Rationale	Infant/Toddler; 50% toddlers in a toddler and infant classroom	Pre-K; majority preschoolers in a mixed age classroom
Observer Classroom Entry	Upon entering the classroom, the observer will introduce themselves and request a daily schedule if they have not received one from the office. Based on the daily schedule, the observer will plan for the observation/scoring. The observer may be accompanied by a second observer to shadow score simultaneously. The primary purpose of this shadow score is to ensure inter-rater reliability, which has no reflection of the quality of the site being observed or alters the score. If the classroom is not available or the observer is unable to complete the observation, the following actions should be taken: • If it is practical and the classroom is likely to become available for observation, the observer should wait until the observation can begin. • If the site has multiple classrooms with children of the same age as the originally assigned classroom,	Family childcare homes are likely to be visited less frequently by unfamiliar adults than school or center-based programs. As a result, children in family childcare homes may be especially curious about CLASS® observers. The observer should ask the educator to let the children know who they are and why they are there (for example, “She’s here to see how our day goes and see the activities we do during our time together.”). The observer should be as unobtrusive as possible and avoid interrupting any activities. To minimize disruptions to the routine, the observer should plan to arrive early to give the children time to get used to their presence. If the observation cannot be completed on the day that the observation is scheduled, the Community Network Lead Agency should complete the family childcare observation attempts form. Each attempt should be thoroughly documented using this form and submitted		

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
	the observer should contact the Community Network Lead Agency for reassignment. If the site/school has mixed classes with infants and toddlers or toddlers and preschoolers, contact the Community Network Lead Agency to determine which age type the classroom is classified as in the Early Childhood portal.	to the Department no later than 10 days after the attempted observation visit.
Teacher and Child Attendance	A classroom must have the regularly assigned lead teacher who has been employed at least 10 work days, present during the observation. Lead substitute teachers are eligible for a CLASS® observation if they have been in the classroom for at least 10 consecutive days. Paraprofessionals or classroom aides who have taken on responsibility for primary instruction may be observed if they have been in the classroom for at least 10 work days and if children typically receive instruction from this adult. If the teacher scheduled is no longer employed by the site or the teacher is in a classroom with a different age type, the observer should contact the Community Network Lead Agency for assistance. If observers are unsure whether a classroom has been observed by another local observer, they should contact the Community Network Lead Agency before they begin observing. At least 50% of children on the classroom roster must be present. If less than 50% of children are present, contact the Community Network Lead Agency for assistance.	Because of the fluctuating nature of attendance at some family childcare sites, it may not be possible to ensure that observations are conducted when 50% of children are present. Because of this, Teachstone recommends that observations can be conducted at family childcare sites if at least one child is present. If an observation can be rescheduled to another day where more children will be present, the lead agency can determine whether to conduct an observation now or to wait for a later date. However, this must not preclude an observation from taking place in that observation period.
Observer Interactions	Observers will not interact with teachers beyond requesting a daily schedule and class roster. They will do their best to minimize any communications, distractions or intrusions into the classroom. Observers will not ignore children's bids for attention or greeting; they will simply state their purpose of being in the classroom and kindly re-direct the children to their activities.	

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
Scoring Cycles	The observation will consist of four cycles of 20 minute observations followed by 10 minutes of scoring (120 minutes total) for pre-K, toddler observations, and infant observations followed by 10 minutes of scoring. In pre-K classes, the observer will leave the classroom when possible to complete each scoring cycle. However, in order to minimize distraction in infant and toddler classrooms, Teachstone recommends observers remain in the classroom when scoring. In the event that observers remain in the classroom, they should turn their back on the class and quietly complete the scoring.	Before beginning the observation, the observer should determine where they will complete scoring between observation cycles. The site may not have a separate space in the learning environment for the observer to score. An outdoor area or separate room may be used to accommodate this.
Conducting Observations	Observers should follow the recommended procedures for using the CLASS® tool located within the CLASS® Manual. Infant teachers are required to spend time keeping records related to feeding, diapering, etc., which constitutes observable time. How the teacher interacts with the children during those periods of recordkeeping will impact the CLASS® score.	
Extracurricular Activities, Pull Out and Visiting Teachers	Extracurricular activities such as physical education, music, computer, library and art will not be observed. Pull out teachers and special visiting teachers will not be observed. Cafeteria-based meals and pre-K toileting will not be observed. Diapering in infant and toddler classrooms is an observable time. Outdoor recess is not included in pre-K observations but is included in toddler and infant observations. However, if pre-K teachers are leading instructional or interactional activities outside, these interactions can be observed. <i>Note: When a quiet space is not available at the site, observers may sit outdoors to complete scoring. This is not an opportunity to collect additional data for pre-K observations.</i>	In some family childcare sites, non-caregiver adults or children may interact with children in the home. These interactions, such as parents dropping off their children or family members who live in the home, should be taken into account in coding only if they enhance or detract from children's experiences. To illustrate this point, a grandmother who does puzzles with preschoolers while the provider sets out lunch is enhancing the preschoolers' experiences. Conversely, a neighbor who engages the provider in a long conversation which takes the educator's attention away from the children is detracting from their experiences.

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
Taking Notes	Notes must be detailed and must provide concrete examples of observations from the classroom. Summary statements for each dimension should address each indicator noting the presence or absence of particular behaviors.	
Observation Concerns	In the unusual circumstance of any suspected abuse or neglect observed at the time of the observation, the observer must report the observed behaviors as mandated by law.	

Additional Requirements

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
Providing Observation Feedback	Community Network Lead Agencies must establish and implement a protocol to ensure that written results and feedback from each local observation are reported to sites within 10 business days. Observers should provide high-quality supportive feedback that recognizes teachers' practices while focusing on opportunities for growth and skill development.	
Reporting Scores	CLASS® scores must be entered in the portal within 10 days of conducting the observation or by the end of the observation period, whichever is first. Community Network Lead Agencies are responsible for ensuring that all local observers submit their score sheets in a timely manner and that they retain these score sheets on file for a period of three years.	
Error Corrections	If the Community Network Lead Agency determines that there is a mistake in the EC CLASS® Portal, an error correction form should be completed. All corrections must be completed by June 30, 2027, though it is recommended that corrections be submitted as soon as possible. The Department may reach out for further information if needed. As a reminder, if a local observation is deleted, another observation must be completed to fulfill the <i>Bulletin 140</i> requirement of one local observation per semester.	
Observer Accuracy and Shadow Scoring	Community Network Lead Agencies should ensure that all local observations entered into the EC CLASS® Portal are conducted according to Teachstone's standardized procedures. Develop and implement a written process to monitor and compare the results of all local observers for the purpose of ensuring accurate observations. Identify a process to address concerns regarding reliability of local observers to ensure they can continue to observe for the accountability system. For local observation scores, high scores, low scores, and concerning patterns will trigger additional third party observations to ensure accuracy. <i>Bulletin 140</i> section 503 requires the state to take action when observers are demonstrably unreliable. Lead agencies should conduct a minimum of one observation calibration activity each semester and ensure that all observers participate in at least one observation calibration activity each semester. Shadow score requirements for lead agencies are as follows: • At least 10% of all local observations each observation period must be shadow scored. • Each local observer must be shadow scored at least once each year. • The lead agency must conduct a shadow score for all age configurations present in their community network. For example, if a community network has eight school-based pre-K programs and one childcare center that serves toddlers, at least one pre-K and one toddler observation must be shadowed during the academic year.	

	Column A Local Protocol Requirements	Column B Additional FCC Observation Considerations
Conflicts of Interest	Community Network Lead Agencies must collaborate with all program partners to establish and implement written procedures that minimize potential observer conflict of interest as described in <i>Bulletin 140</i> and in guidance published by the Department. Potential conflicts of interest include anyone who supervises or coaches the teacher, or anyone with a direct financial interest in the site. This also includes immediate family members of the selected group or any immediate family members of the teacher.	
Record Keeping	Community Network Lead Agencies must collect and maintain copies of current certification documents for all observers, copies of the background checks necessary to enter sites for all observers, and original or complete copies of all observation scoring forms from the school year. These records must be maintained and available upon Department request for three years.	
Appealing Local Observations	Because local observations are managed by Community Network Lead Agencies, the Department does not prescribe a specific policy or protocol for local appeals. Community Network Lead Agencies should create a procedure that allows sites to elevate concerns in a timely manner and provides the agency with time to review concerns before finalizing observation scheduling for the 2026-2027 academic year. Each lead agency must submit a document that explains their local appeal policy along with their local observation protocol. It should be reviewed by program partners along with the network’s local observation protocol.	
Waiver from Observation Requirements	If a lead agency cannot observe a classroom in the community network, they must submit a request for a waiver from accountability requirements for that semester. If a classroom was open for at least fourteen days <i>and</i> was open on Nov. 1, 2026 or March 15, 2027, it must be observed. If the classroom is not observed, a waiver must be submitted. Please note that this is a request which does not guarantee the requirement will be waived. If a site requests a waiver for three semesters in a row, a waiver will not be granted for that site until one academic year has passed since the last waiver request. If there are no comparable observations¹ to use when calculating this site’s Performance Score, LDOE may assign ones to all dimensions as applicable.	

¹ When a local observation is not available for a classroom in a given semester, LDOE uses the third-party observation for that classroom and semester as a proxy for the local score. When there is no third-party observation in the same semester, another semester’s observation for the same classroom is used instead. If the classroom has not received any third-party observations, the average of all dimensions in all third-party observations within that age configuration may be used to calculate a Performance Score. If none of the previous options are available, other comparable observations such as local observations or third-party observations from the network may be used (referring to the same age band as the missing classroom).

References and Additional Resources

Teachstone. (2020). Considerations for Observing in Family Child Care Homes. Retrieved from [https://f.hubspotusercontent10.net/hubfs/336169/Considerations%20for%20Observing%20in%20Family%20Child%20Care%20Homes%20\(10_8_2020\).docx.pdf](https://f.hubspotusercontent10.net/hubfs/336169/Considerations%20for%20Observing%20in%20Family%20Child%20Care%20Homes%20(10_8_2020).docx.pdf).