

Mid-America Head Start Board Update

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A monthly publication of Head Start news for the Mid-America Regional Council Board of Directors

A touch of CLASS yields results

CLASS pilot project studying teacher/child interactions starts to show positive changes and improved child outcomes

What is CLASS?

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) was developed by Robert C. Pianta, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, to collect empirical data on teacher/child interactions. "The evidence is quite clear that it is the teacher's implementation of a curriculum, through both social and instructional interactions with children, that produces effects on student learning," Pianta explained.

In July 2008, MARC received a grant from the H & R Block Foundation to implement a Mid-America Head Start (MAHS) pilot project to determine the efficacy of teacher/child interactions and improved child outcomes using CLASS. The project consists of two groups of teachers and coaches: the "intensive" group, which receives in-depth coaching support using CLASS as a professional development tool, and the "normal" group, which does not receive additional support in training sessions.

MAHS Results: Year One

Teachers and coaches engaged in CLASS are showing positive changes in their practices — coaches appear more focused in their sessions, while teachers are demonstrating sharper critical thinking skills when interacting with children. Teachers are more focused on listening, scaffolding, giving feedback, asking open-ended questions, and language

modeling. These teachers are also investing more time in planning and becoming more reflective in their teaching practices.

Pre-test and post-test data for the intensive group demonstrated statistically significant growth in concept development, quality of feedback to students, and overall instructional support. Data collected on teachers from the intensive group indicates more emphasis on promoting critical thinking in children, and teachers became better at understanding a child's point of view. Teachers and coaches in both groups reported significant overall improvement in their practices.

New Tools

Coaches in the intensive group reported that using video cameras to record teachers in the classroom helped them analyze and reflect on their practices, which improved child interactions. Coaches also reported that using CLASS allowed them to focus on increasing teachers' intentional use of best practices and improved focus in coaching sessions.

Looking Ahead: Year Two

In year two, MAHS will leverage H & R Block funds with additional quality improvement funds to expand the project to involve more coaches and teachers. Many coaching strategies will remain the same, but emphasis on project management when working with teachers will be added.

"I want to express my sincere appreciation for the advocacy and support provided by everyone at MARC. The CLASS project has improved my commitment to children and families."

—A participating teacher

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