

The ECE Leader's Guide To Improving CLASS[®] Scores With LENA Grow

A practical roadmap for early childhood leaders ready to raise the quality bar

Where Are Your CLASS Scores Now?

You can't improve what you don't measure. If you're reading this guide, you likely already know your CLASS scores aren't where you want them to be. Maybe you're at risk of losing funding. Maybe you're stuck at a 4 when you need a 5. Or maybe your scores fluctuate unpredictably, and you're not sure why.

The good news? You're not alone. And there's a clear path forward.

Note: This document refers to the 2008 version of the CLASS manuals and will be updated when the 2nd edition manuals are more widely adopted.



Understanding Your Starting Point

Instructions: Check all that apply to your program:

- Our most recent CLASS assessment showed lower scores than we'd like.
- We struggle most with the Instructional Support domain (Pre-K) or Engaged Support for Learning domain (Toddler).
- Our scores vary widely between classrooms in the same program.
- We've invested in professional development but haven't seen consistent CLASS score improvements.
- We're concerned about funding renewal or maintaining quality rating status.
- Our teachers understand CLASS conceptually but struggle to implement it in daily practice.
- We don't have real-time data on what's actually happening in our classrooms between formal observations.
- We want to improve quality but lack the time and resources for intensive training.
- We're seeing higher teacher turnover and it's impacting CLASS scores.



Keep reading to discover how data-driven professional development can transform your CLASS scores — and your teachers' confidence.

Quick Domain Overview

For Pre-K Programs:	For Toddler Programs:	For Infant Programs:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Support (typically highest scores) • Classroom Organization (moderate scores) • Instructional Support (typically lowest scores) — Often the most challenging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged Support for Learning — Challenge area requiring intentional interaction • Emotional and Behavioral Support — Foundational for connectedness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsive Caregiving — Requires moment-to-moment attunement



Question to consider: Which domain needs the most attention in your program?

Why Moving the Needle on Some Domains is More Challenging Than Others

Some domains naturally improve with experience and basic training. Others require a different approach entirely. The domains that prove most challenging share one thing in common: **They all require real-time, responsive interaction with children.**

Example: Engaged Support for Learning (Toddler)

Language Modeling	Quality of Feedback	Facilitation of Learning & Development
<p>What it measures: Rich language input, conversations, self and parallel talk, advanced vocabulary</p> <p>Why more support is needed: Teachers often talk AT children rather than WITH them. Without objective data, it's nearly impossible to know how much actual conversation is happening — especially with infants and toddlers who can't respond in full sentences yet.</p>	<p>What it measures: Scaffolding learning, expanding on children's responses, creating back-and-forth exchanges</p> <p>Why more support is needed: Requires in-the-moment decision-making and individualized responses to each child's unique communication style</p>	<p>What it measures: Active teacher involvement in supporting exploration, concept development, reasoning</p> <p>Why more support is needed: Requires moving beyond basic caregiving or managing behavior to intentionally deepening children's thinking</p>

Making Quality Improvement Visible and Actionable

What if your teachers could see exactly how much they're engaging with each child each day? What if improving CLASS scores didn't require hours of additional training, but instead fit seamlessly into existing routines?

That's exactly what LENA Grow does.

What Is LENA Grow?

[LENA Grow](#) is a five-week, job-embedded professional development program that uses the [LENA System](#), the world's only hardware and software suite to measure [conversational turns](#) between teachers and children. Teachers receive weekly data reports showing classroom-level and individual child interaction patterns, paired with strengths-based coaching on proven strategies to increase quality interactions.

Why it works: The domains that are hardest to improve for CLASS are the exact areas where LENA data make the biggest impact on an educator's practice.

Better CLASS Scores = Better Outcomes

The main goal of all of this is to support children and teachers, right? To help them grow and thrive. Improving CLASS scores means that better outcomes are inevitable! Because the quality of care is higher.

And one of the best ways to ensure you're investing in professional development programs that create better outcomes is to ask these questions!



Data & Accountability

- Does it provide objective, quantifiable data — not just observation checklists?
- Can you track interactions over an entire day, not just during relatively brief observation periods?
- Does it show individual child-level data to ensure equity?
- Will you have documentation to share with funders, boards, and families?



Practicality & Sustainability

- Does it fit into existing routines without adding burden to teachers?
- Is coaching built into the program?
- Can it be sustained long-term without constant external support?
- Does it respect teachers' time and expertise?



Proven Effectiveness

- Is it backed by peer-reviewed research?
- Are there case studies with specific, measurable CLASS score improvements?
- Has it been independently evaluated by respected institutions?
- Do other programs like yours see consistent results?



Alignment & Integration

- Does it complement (not compete with) your existing quality systems?
- Does it align with CLASS, QRIS, Head Start, and other frameworks you use?
- Will it help with multiple goals (CLASS scores, child outcomes, teacher retention)?
- Can it integrate with your current curriculum and assessment tools?



Teacher Impact

- Does it empower teachers with their own data?
- Will it increase teacher job satisfaction?
- Is it strengths-based rather than deficit-focused?
- Will it reduce (not add to) teacher stress?



What Makes LENA Grow Different?

It answers yes to all those questions!

Why administrators choose LENA Grow:

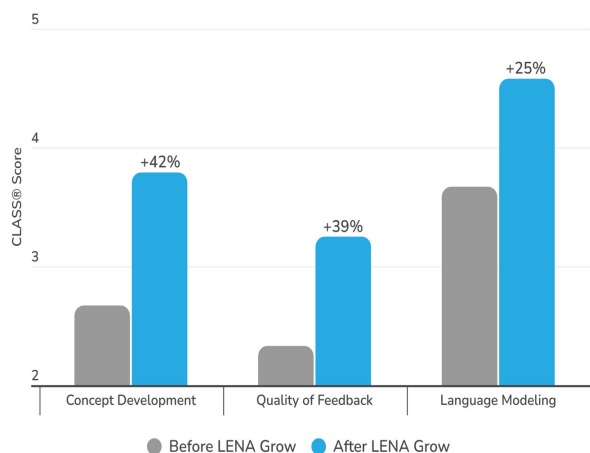
- ☑ **It works during regular routines** — Since it's job-embedded, teachers get to put what they learn into practice right away!
- ☑ **Teachers love it** — 90% report increased job satisfaction
- ☑ **Results are fast** — See measurable increases in interaction within weeks, not months
- ☑ **It's equitable** — Individual child data ensures no child is left out of conversations
- ☑ **It documents itself** — Built-in effectiveness measures show stakeholders exactly what's improving
- ☑ **Support is included** — Training, coaching materials, technical assistance, and ongoing consultation

Real Results From Real Programs

Pre-K Instructional Support Dimensions

The Primary School, Palo Alto (Pre-K)

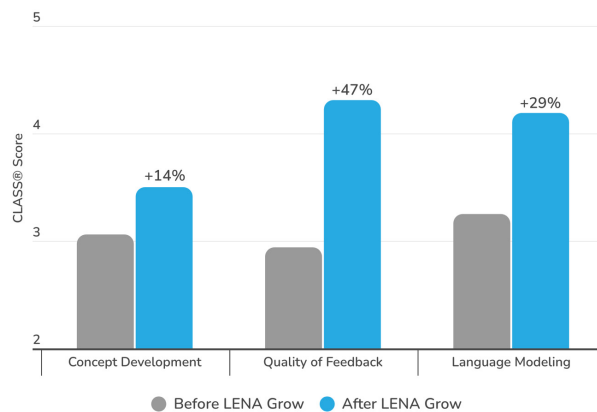
The Challenge: Three preschool classrooms serving children with identified language needs, requiring improved instructional quality.



Why It Worked: Teacher Jessica Pablo explained: "LENA Grow and CLASS merge well together. It came together beautifully. LENA backed up that we weren't talking enough. Then when it came time to identify strategies, our teaching teams brainstormed what tier two or three words we were going to use for the upcoming week."

Fort Worth Independent School District (Pre-K)

The Challenge: Four pre-K classrooms with low Instructional Support scores, particularly struggling with Quality of Feedback and Language Modeling — the two dimensions teachers find hardest to improve.

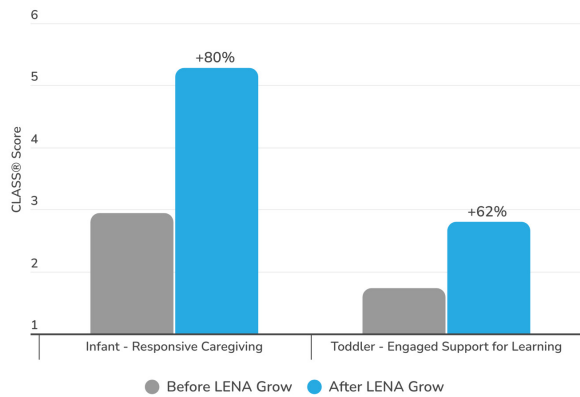


Why It Worked: Teachers could see their interaction data immediately, allowing them to identify and target specific changes. As one administrator noted, "Because the LENA Grow reports provided instant results that teachers could see, they gained more of an understanding of some of the CLASS dimensions and indicators."

Toddler and Infant Domains

Early Learning Coalition of Escambia County (Infant & Toddler)

The Challenge: Improving quality in 14 infant and toddler classrooms where interaction is harder to observe and measure.

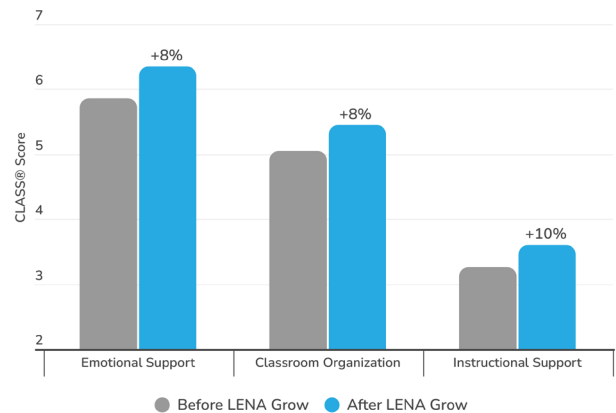


Why It Worked: The technology made the invisible visible. Educators could finally see how much they were talking with infants and toddlers throughout the day, and coaching helped them embed more conversation into routines like diapering, feeding, and transitions.

Pre-K Domains

Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County (Pre-K)

The Challenge: 13 pre-K classrooms with low Instructional Support scores.



Why It Worked: Instructional coach Kathy Cestaro said, "Actually seeing the [LENA] numbers on the paper was eye-opening. The idea that 'you can't improve what you don't measure' has really rung true for me, and it's rung true for teachers."

What Leaders Are Saying

"One of the things we worried about with additional programming is the stress it puts on teachers. LENA has been the exception. People want the data. They ask for the data. We got more pushback on the idea of not doing it."

— **Rick Bieker, Executive Director of ECE at Catholic Charities in Denver, Colo.**

"The classrooms using LENA Grow became much more child-centered than some of the other classrooms that didn't use the program."

— **Lisa Austin, former Instructional Coach at Fort Worth ISD, Texas**

"We've tried any number of things over the years to impact early literacy for our children. . . . I had heard about language modeling. I had heard about data-driven instruction. But I had never seen the way that LENA puts it together."

— **Vicki Wolin, Director of Early Childhood Programs at Pasco County Schools, Fla.**

"CLASS helps us understand the interactions that matter most. And tools like LENA can help educators see their progress in real time."

— **Veronica Fernandez, Vice President of Impact, Teachstone**

LENA Grow and CLASS[®] Alignment

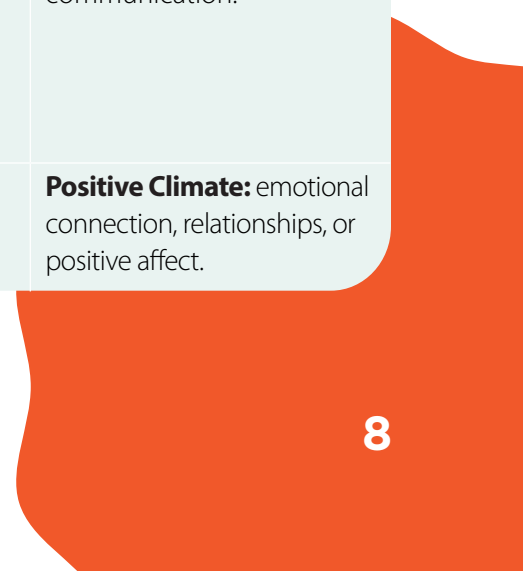
LENA's Talking Tips are research-based techniques for increasing early talk. They form the basis of LENA Grow's strengths-based coaching. The Talking Tips in each section below collectively support you in your efforts to continue improvement in adult-child interaction as measured by CLASS.

LENA Talking Tips	CLASS [®] Age Levels and Domains/Dimensions Alignment		
	Infant	Toddler	Pre-K
Talk about what you're doing and thinking	Early Language Support: (teacher talk) describe classroom events, use complete and varied sentences.	Language Modeling: (self and parallel talk).	Instructional Learning Formats Language Modeling: (self-talk) apply to what you are doing.
Comment on what they're doing or looking at	Facilitated Exploration: (infant focused) follow the infant's cue, support exploration. Early Language Support: (communication extension) provide words for infant's communication, expand and extend on infant's communication.	Language Modeling: (self and parallel talk, advanced language) labeling, variety of words, and/or descriptive vocabulary. Facilitation of Learning and Development: (active facilitation) teacher guides exploration.	Language Modeling: (parallel talk, advanced language) apply to what they are doing, comment on what they are looking at.
Name things that they're interested in	Early Language Support: (teacher talk) verbally label objects. Facilitated Exploration: (infant focus).	Language Modeling: (advanced language) labeling. Facilitation of Learning and Development: (active facilitation) teacher guides exploration.	Language Modeling: (advanced language). Regard for Student Perspectives: following child's lead.
Get down to their level: face to face	Relational Climate: (relational behavior) proximity, eye contact, joint attention.	Positive Climate: (relationships) physical proximity.	Positive Climate: positive communication.
Touch, hug, hold	Relational Climate: (relational behavior) affection.	Positive Climate: (positive affect) physical affection.	Positive Climate: positive communication.
Tune in and respond to what they look at, do, and say	Relational Climate: (relational behavior) joint attention. Facilitated Exploration: (involvement) join in experiences; (infant focused) follow infant's lead, support exploration; (expansion of infant's experience) encourage behavior.		Teacher Sensitivity: Tune in to what they look at. Regard for Student Perspectives: flexibility and student focus, contingent response in conversation with student.





LENA Talking Tips	CLASS [®] Age Levels and Domains/Dimensions Alignment		
	Infant	Toddler	Pre-K
Wait for their response	All 4 Infant CLASS Dimensions		Regard for Student Perspectives Language Modeling
Imitate and add words	Early Language Support: (communication support) imitate or repeat sounds; (communication extension) provide words for infant's communication, expand and extend infant's communication.		Language Modeling: repetition and extension.
Take turns — don't do all the talking	Early Language Support: (communication extension) model turn taking.		Language Modeling: frequent conversation.
Repeat and add to what they say and do	Early Language Support: (communication support) Imitate or repeat sounds; (communication extension) provide words for infant's communication, expand and extend infants communication.		Language Modeling: repetition and extension.
Follow their lead, do what interests them	Facilitated Exploration: (involvement) join in experiences; (infant focused) follow infant's lead, support exploration; (expansion of infant's experience) encourage behavior.	Regard for Child Perspectives: flexibility and student focus.	Regard for Student Perspectives: flexibility and student focus.
Encourage them, be positive	Relational Climate: (emotion expression) smiling, laughing, enthusiasm; (respect for infant's state) calm voice, gentle approach.	Positive Climate: positive communication.	Positive Climate: positive communication.
Be silly! Relax and have fun!		Positive Climate: positive communication.	Positive Climate: emotional connection, relationships, or positive affect.





Ready to Raise the Bar on Your Program's CLASS Scores?

Schedule a Free Consultation Talk with a LENA partnerships expert about your specific CLASS challenges, program goals, and how LENA Grow can help. No pressure, just answers.



LENA.org/programs/lena-grow/partnership-inquiries/

Access More Resources

- [CLASS[®] Crosswalk with LENA](#)
- [LENA Grow Funding Guide](#)
- [White Paper: LENA Grow's Impact on Kindergarten Readiness](#)

