

Building a Unified Quality Framework: Creating the Conditions that Unite Child Care, Head Start, and Public Pre-K

Supplemental Materials — Oral Comment

Child Care Associates
Tarrant County, TX

Governor's Task Force on ECE | May 18, 2026

The Challenge

No Common Picture of Quality Across Settings

- In Tarrant County, over 40,000 young children ages 0-5 are served daily across child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and public pre-K programs.
- In 2017, community leaders asked a question none of us could answer:

"How are children in our community, across all of our early learning programs and across all age groups birth to five, actually experiencing their classrooms each day?"

- Each system measured quality differently — different tools, different definitions, different benchmarks.
- There was no shared understanding. No way to compare. No way to identify gaps or bright spots to improve upon.

The Anchor: Quality of Teacher-Child Interactions

Why Interactions? The Research Is Clear.

Driving Decision-Making Factors in Tarrant County

- A common approach to measuring quality across age groups & settings
- An approach that held adults accountable rather than anchoring on inputs or assessments of young children
- A tool that was simple & provided actionable data
- A research-backed approach

The Research on Teacher Child Interactions

- Responsive, sustained adult-child interactions build neural connections that form the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. *(Harvard Center on the Developing Child)*
- Teacher-child interactions are the primary mechanism through which children learn in early education settings. *(Supported by 150+ peer-reviewed studies)*
- Children in classrooms with high-quality interactions show significantly better outcomes in reading and math through elementary school. (LoParco et al., 2004)

Long-Term Evidence: Why This Matters for Children

Average Performance on National Normed Reading Assessment at End of 1st Grade

KEY TAKEAWAY:

High-quality pre-K, as measured by classroom interactions, has a positive and lasting effect on student outcomes — even when controlling for the quality of later grades.

Pre-K / K / 1st Grade Quality Scenario	Performance
No PK + Low Quality K + Low Quality 1st Grade	50%
High Quality PK + Low Quality K + Low Quality 1st Grade	59%
No PK + High Quality K + High Quality 1st Grade	64%
Low Quality PK + High Quality K + High Quality 1st Grade	70%
High Quality PK + High Quality K + High Quality 1st Grade	74%

How We Built It: Strategic Braiding of Public Funding

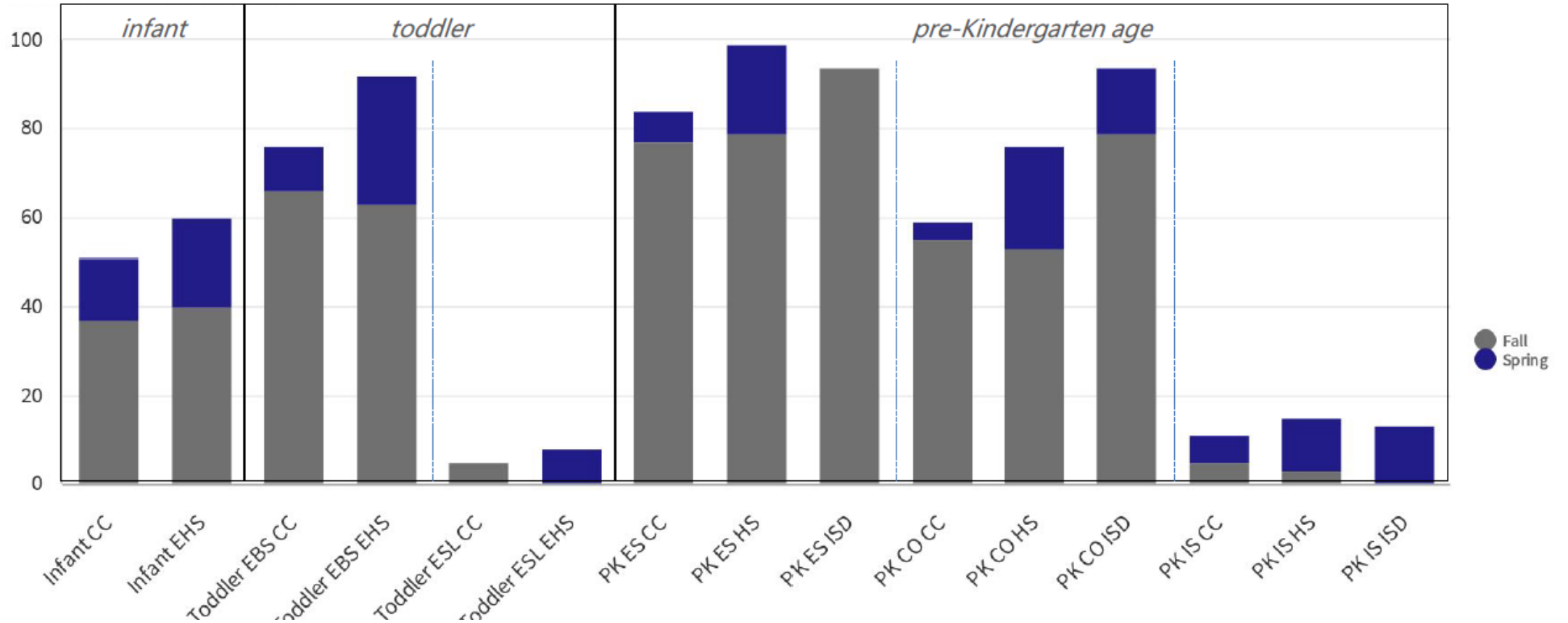
We Didn't Start from Scratch — We Aligned What We Had

- ▶ **Started with Head Start:** CCA was already using the CLASS Observation tool as part of federal monitoring and continuous improvement. Trained assessors and a data partnership with SMU CORE were already in place.
- ▶ **Extended to Child Care:** As the regional TRS contractor, CCA leveraged existing Head Start resources alongside Texas Rising Star quality investments from local workforce boards to embed the same interaction-based measures and supports into community child care settings.
- ▶ **Expanded to Public Pre-K (2018-2020):** In 2018, local philanthropy funded expansion into 17 pre-K classrooms across 5 school districts. Over time, the effort grew to 700+ birth-to-five classrooms across Early Head Start, Head Start, child care & public pre-K).
- ▶ **Result:**
 - A shared cadre of coaches and assessors working across Head Start, child care, and pre-K
 - Shared, community-wide data, combined with strategic peer-learning and collaboration days amongst coaches
 - Expanded capacity without infrastructure duplication

Results from Year 1, Cross-Sector Pilot Initiative (2019-2020)

Access to clear data, aligned coaching and targeted supports resulted in across-the-board increases in the percentage of classrooms at the highest quality level in every interaction domain.

% of classrooms at highest quality level



Cross-Sector Scale & Reach Today

A Unified System Across Settings and Age Groups

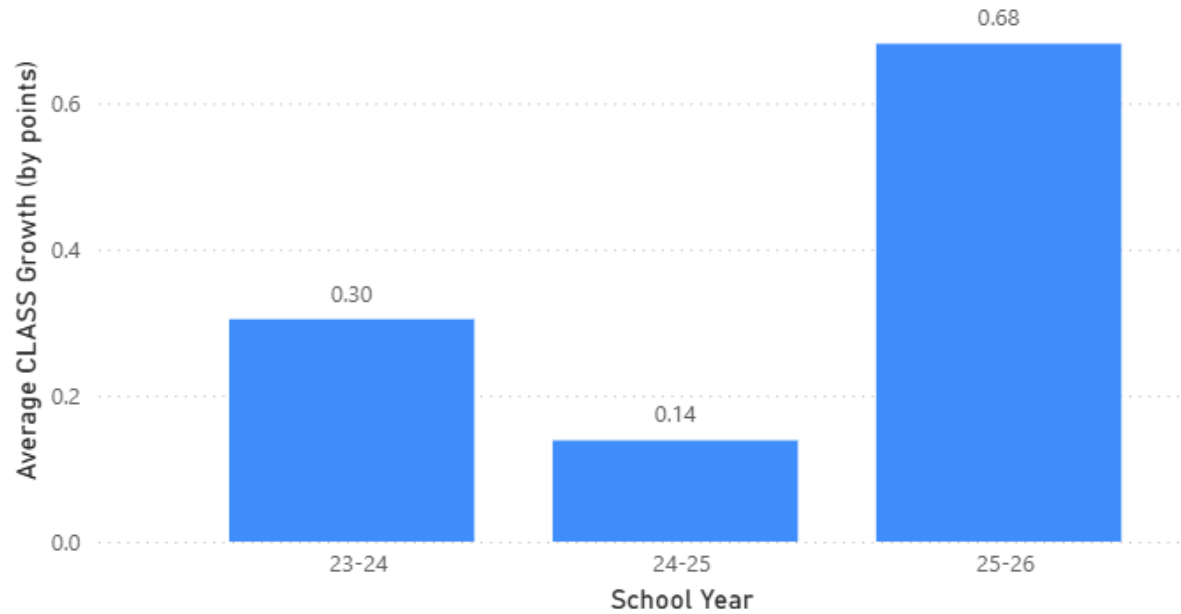
Metric	Detail
Sites	86+ across Tarrant County
Classrooms	220+ spanning infant, toddler, and preschool
Settings	TRS Child Care, Head Start & Early Head Start <i>(district participation 2018-2020, discontinued due to lack of philanthropic funding)</i>
Anchored By	One shared definition of quality — reinforced by strategically aligned public funding
Coaching Model	Tiered, differentiated dosage based on interaction data (Tier 1 = most intensive)

Teacher-Child Interactions in Instructional Support: Within Year Growth

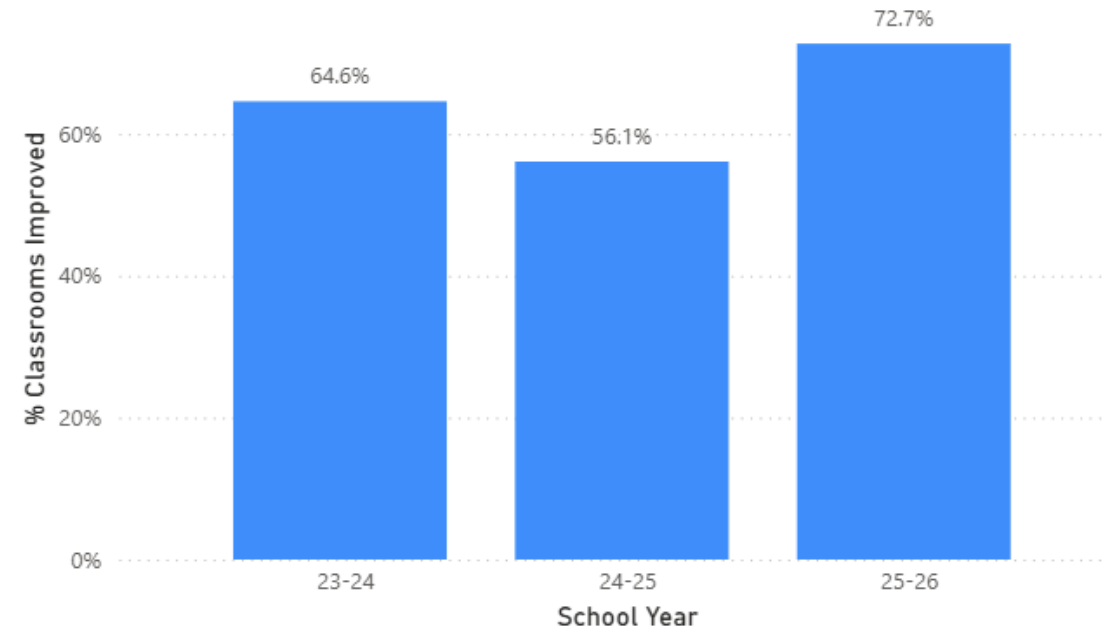
Growth from Fall to Spring Across SY 23-24, 24-25, 25-26

CLASS Scores are measured on a 7-pt scale
Growth > .25 point is considered significant

CLASS Growth from Fall to Spring



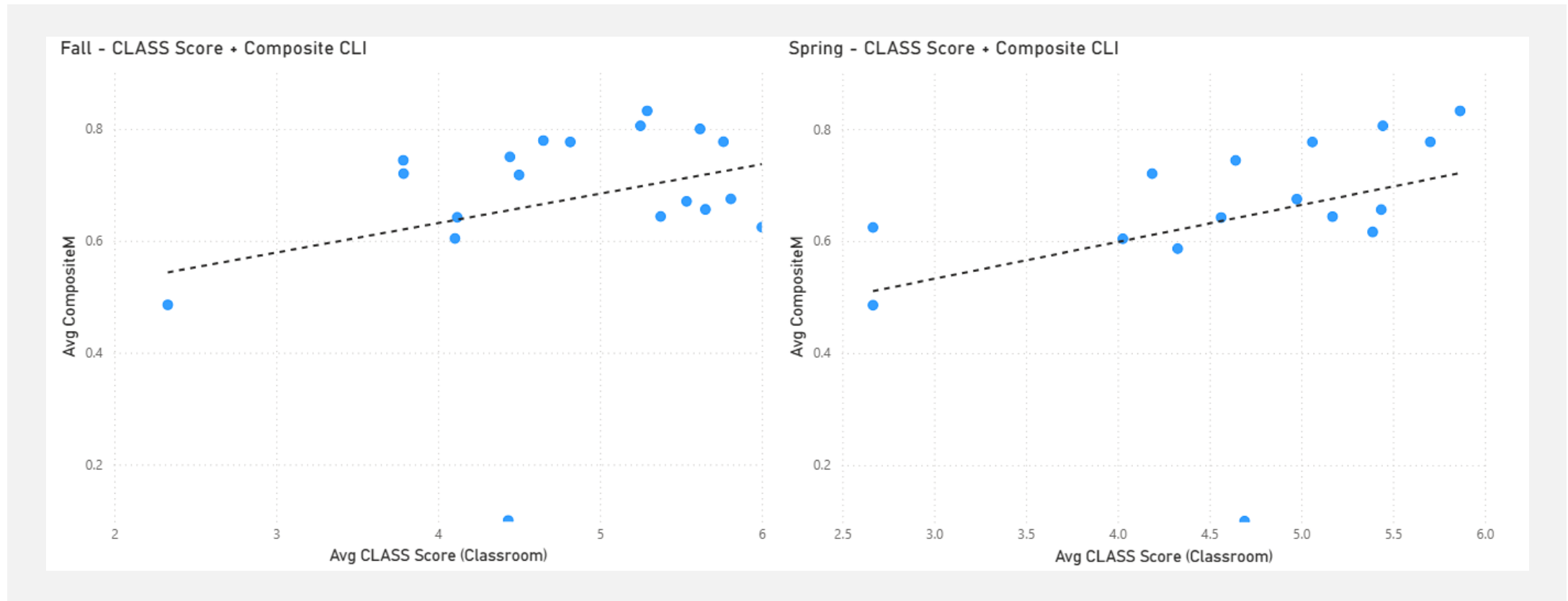
% Classrooms Improved by School Year



Correlation Between Teacher-Child Interactions & K-Readiness

Child Care Associates Head Start – Correlation between CLASS Scores & CLI Circle Progress Monitoring at Classroom Level

Analysis of Head Start Fall & Spring Scores from Fall 2021 – Spring 2025



The Opportunity for Texas

What Tarrant County's Story Teaches Us

When you anchor a system around a simple, shared, research-backed definition of quality — one centered on what children actually experience each day — and you strategically braid and deploy existing public funding to reinforce that system, you build something that is:

- ✓ **Unified** — A common language connecting providers, coaches, families, and policymakers
- ✓ **Scalable** — Built on existing infrastructure, not new bureaucracy
- ✓ **Sustainable** — Reduces duplication, achieves economies of scale
- ✓ **Outcomes-Driven** — Every investment tied to measurable interaction quality

A unified quality framework — built around adult-child interactions — would give Texas a clear, comparable, and actionable picture of quality across the mixed-delivery system. Other states are moving in this direction. Communities like ours have already shown it's possible.

Thank You

For questions, please contact:

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