CHAT2LEARN
SUITE

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Chat2Learn Classroom Suite is a prize-winning messaging program that sparks regular conversations between adults and children.[1] It builds on evidence that caregivers engage with illustrated text prompts, which improve caregiver-child interactions and boost child skill development. With support from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), we recently tested a classroom version that connects to the existing parent program.[2]

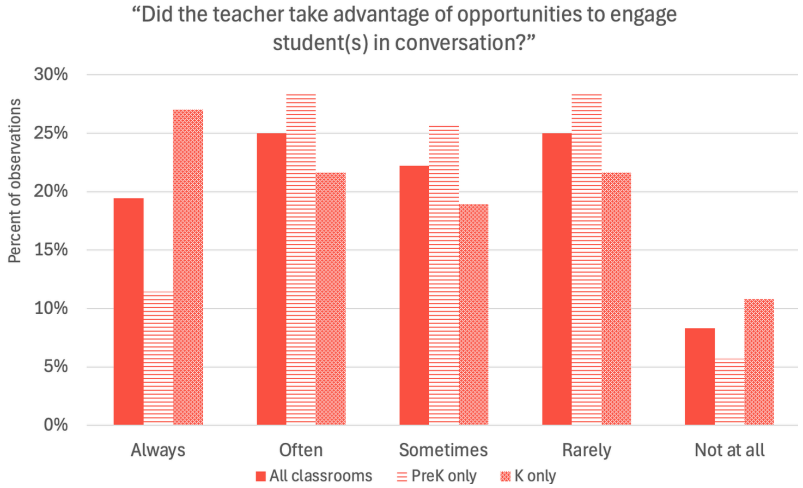
This snapshot draws on three parts of our IES-funded study: classroom observations, teacher interviews, and three consecutive 3-week rounds of user testing, with recorded observations and teacher and parent surveys.

The Challenge

Research shows that socioeconomically disadvantaged children have fewer opportunities for rich conversation with adults, both at home (Golinkoff et al., 2019; Rowe, 2008) and in the classroom (Justice et al., 2008; Reid & Ready, 2013), and that this "conversation gap" widens into a gap in school readiness.

Untapped Opportunities for Classroom Conversation

In our classroom observations (72 observations across 17 classrooms; 10 PreK, 7 K)[3], teachers missed conversation opportunities in **56% of observations** -- missed chances to turn a passing moment into a genuine exchange with a child.



Note: Researchers established norms for what taking advantage of an opportunity looks like — e.g., instead of "Good work!" a teacher asks, "Can you tell me about what you're working on?"

When teachers asked questions, they relied heavily on closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions outnumbered open-ended questions in **81% of classroom observations**, with averages of 0.89 versus 0.31 per minute.

Teachers Want a Tool to Support Conversation

In interviews (n=21; 13 PreK, 8 K)[3], teachers said they wanted a light-touch tool to support conversation with students.

- **100% of teachers** said that engaging children in conversation is important for developing language skills and expressed interest in the Chat2Learn Suite after seeing a demonstration.
- Teachers identified **recurring barriers to conversation**: limited time, a wide range of child language abilities and temperaments, and difficulty finding topics that interest children.
- They saw **many use cases**: group and individual instruction; centers, free play, transitions, structured meeting/circle time, and instructional time; and a way to meaningfully involve caregivers at home.

[1] The Chat2Learn Suite is a 2024 winning solution of the MIT Solve and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation AI-Assisted Assessment Challenge.

[2] The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through GrantR305J250039 to The University of Chicago. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

[3] Participating teachers were recruited mainly from subsidized preschools serving low-income families.

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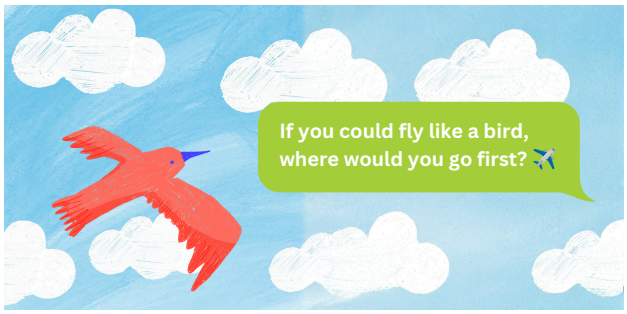
Our Solution: Chat2Learn Suite

To close the conversation gap, we built the **Chat2Learn Suite**, an evidence-backed messaging tool that prompts conversations between adults and children. The Suite sends teachers and parents interactive prompts that guide engaging interactions with children, linking teachers and families around one goal: building children's skills through the power of conversation.

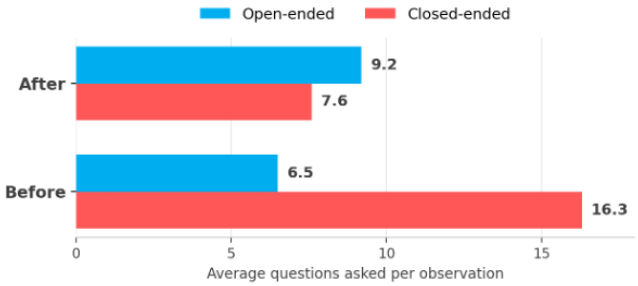


Note: Example of a Chat2Learn prompt and paired illustration.

Better Conversations, Better Engagement

In three consecutive 3-week-long classroom pilot experiments (24 Chicago-area charter school teachers; 17 PreK, 7 K)[3], both teachers and students improved the quality of their conversations.

After three weeks with Chat2Learn, open-ended questions rose from **29% to 55%** of the questions teachers asked. In absolute terms, teachers averaged 9.2 open-ended questions per endline observation, up from 6.5 — a **42% increase** — while the number of closed-ended questions fell. These open-ended prompts push students to think more imaginatively.



Teachers' open- and closed-ended questions per observation, before and after app use.

Teachers also reported greater student engagement in post-pilot surveys administered after the 3-week pilot periods.

A Use for Every Classroom and Home

Chat2Learn slotted into teachers' routines, with steady use across classroom contexts. Over three weeks:

- Teachers used the app roughly every other day (**54% of eligible study days**).
- Response rates were higher when teachers aligned prompts to their own lesson plans (**72%**, versus 56% for general prompts).
- When given the option, teachers sent an average of **12.4 conversation prompts** to students' parents over three weeks.
- Teachers said the light-touch approach **eased their planning burden while supporting good teaching practice**.
- Among 40 parents surveyed, **67% said Chat2Learn prompts helped them have better conversations** with their child.

"I would never have thought to ask [my child] these questions, and they have opened my eyes to the way [my child] imagines, learns, and thinks."

— Parent, Chicago

Partner Perspectives

We spoke with more than 75 early childhood agency directors, district and school leaders, technology leads, teachers, and parents about adopting the Chat2Learn Classroom Suite. Partners valued its ease of use, cost-effectiveness, light-lift approach, and flexibility to fit existing routines, and were enthusiastic about a tool that supports conversation both in school and at home through joint caregiver-teacher effort.

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