



What Is High-Quality Pre-K?

First Class Pre-K is Alabama’s state-funded, voluntary pre-k program that provides effective, early childhood educational experiences that prepare children for both school and life.⁵

The program began as a small pilot program in the 2000-2001 school year, administered by a newly created Office of School Readiness in the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education.⁵ First Class Pre-K employs a diverse delivery system, allowing children to participate in a quality early learning program in different settings ranging from faith-based centers to Head Start.²

In the years of success since its creation, the Alabama Legislature has increased funding for First Class Pre-K, making it possible for even more of Alabama’s four-year olds to have access to this high quality pre-k program due to limited state funding.⁵

Budget Year 2005-2006

\$4,326,050 in funding ● 57 classrooms

Budget Year 2015-2016

\$48,462,050
in funding

652
classrooms

For the last nine years,

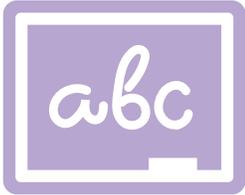
Alabama’s First Class has been ranked number one in the nation for quality by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and is one of only five states to receive this distinction.⁶

The First Class Pre-K classroom sets itself apart from other classrooms by its commitment to ten quality benchmarks, including highly qualified teachers and aides along with a research-based curriculum.⁶



Though this program is one of excellent quality, only one out of five four-year-olds in the state have access to it.⁵

High-quality pre-k is a proven strategy for increasing the “school readiness” of all children. Research shows that when children enter kindergarten ready to learn, they are more likely to read proficiently in third grade, graduate from high school, attend college and become successful in the workplace.¹



Why Pre-K Works

IT'S GOOD FOR KIDS.

The first few years of life are critical to a child's cognitive development and learning, making this the time that is critical to the future success of all children.¹ Access to high-quality, early learning opportunities can make the difference in whether a child is successful in K-12 and beyond.

First Class Pre-K helps to build a stronger foundation for children, resulting in a greater ability to reach their full potential. Several studies conducted have concluded that children who participate in high-quality Pre-K programs are less likely to repeat a grade, score higher on achievement tests, and are more likely to graduate from high school.⁷

Once First-Class Pre-K alumni reach elementary school, they are found to consistently outperform their peers in reading and math.³ The benefits for lower income students are even more pronounced, as participation in this program closes the achievement gap by an average of 25 percent.³

IT'S GOOD FOR THE COMMUNITY.

Research shows that high-quality early education benefits children, families, and communities. Participation in high quality pre-k helps build a more skilled workforce in Alabama³ and studies have shown a seven to ten dollar return on investment for every dollar spent on high-quality Pre-K⁴ as a result of reductions in remedial education, juvenile delinquency, and teen pregnancy.⁵



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VOICES for Alabama's Children recommends increasing funding for Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program by \$20 million with the goal to fully fund high-quality Pre-K by the 2022-2023 school year.

This recommendation is part of the Alabama School Readiness Alliance's ten-year plan for making First Class Pre-K available to all families on a voluntary basis. VOICES is a proud founding member of the Alabama School Readiness Alliance (ASRA), along with A+ Education Partnership, Alabama Giving, and Alabama Partnership for Children. To learn more ASRA, visit www.alabamaschoolreadiness.org.

References

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