Alabama

First Class Pre-K: the Alabama Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (FCVPK) is a supplemental grant program administered by the Department of Early Childhood Education that provides funding for preschool education for 4-year-olds. First Class is available in all counties throughout Alabama and provides funding to start new classrooms, support quality improvements in existing classrooms, and provide extra support to classrooms serving low-income populations. First Class classrooms are in all 67 Alabama counties and are housed in many different locations, including Head Start programs, private child-care centers, community organizations, faith-based centers, colleges and universities, military agencies and public schools.

The program began in 2000, serving 750 children. As of 2015-2016, the program serves more than 11,000 4-year-olds in a full-day education program, approximately 19% of the state’s four-year-old population, and enrollment increased by approximately 4,000 children from the prior school year. The 2015-2016 enrollment total includes around 3,000 additional children partially financed by a $17.5 million federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG), which was awarded to Alabama in 2014 to expand pre-K access across the state in high-risk areas. State funding in 2015-2016 rose by $10 million to $48.5 million. Looking forward, slots created by PDG are expected to be funded on an ongoing basis with state and local appropriations. All state residents who meet the age criteria are automatically eligible for FCVPK.

FCVPK requires use of a curriculum incorporating recently updated early learning standards aligned to kindergarten content standards and Teaching Strategies GOLD objectives, the required formative assessment tool. All FCVPK classrooms are supported by a coach and monitored for continuous improvement. Monitors work with program administrators to ensure that FCVPK grants are properly administered, provide appropriate leadership to teaching staff in concert with coaches to improve instruction, and support the development of leadership skills necessary for effective program management and improvement. Alabama requires each classroom to have a lead teacher with a BA plus an early learning credential and in 2015 introduced policies to support salary parity.

Funds for FCVPK are distributed by the Alabama Education Trust Fund Budget on a competitive awarding basis to programs running full-day, school-year programs. Grantees must locally match the award, and sliding-scale fees can be included in the matching funds. There are three levels of grants that can be awarded to pre-K programs: (1) Pre-K Excellence Grants of up to $45,000 per grant are awarded to aid programs in meeting Alabama’s quality standards, such as financing teacher education and teacher support programs. These grants are intended for use by programs that have other primary sources of funding and are awarded on a three-year cycle.

(2) Pre-K Tiered Grants of $80,200 to $92,700 per grant differ from the Excellence grants as they are intended to be primary sources of funding. These grants are awarded to classrooms serving a certain share of the free and reduced-price lunch eligible population. These grants are also awarded on a three-year basis. (3) New Classroom or Plus Grants of $120,000 to $150,000 per grant are one-year grants awarded to new classrooms for the cost of materials, equipment, furnishings, and one full year of the general expenses of operation.
FIRST CLASS PRE-K: ALABAMA’S VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

ACCESS
Total state pre-K enrollment .............................................................. 11,296
School districts that offer state program .... 100% (counties/parishes)
Income requirement ................................................................. No income requirement
Minimum hours of operation ........................................... 6.5 hours/day; 5 days/week
Operating schedule ............................................................ School or academic year
Special education enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .................... 3,787
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .............. 14,388
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ............... 1,986

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICY</th>
<th>AL PRE-K REQUIREMENT</th>
<th>CURRENT BENCHMARK</th>
<th>MEETS CURRENT BENCHMARK?</th>
<th>NEW BENCHMARK</th>
<th>MEETS NEW BENCHMARK?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early learning &amp; development standards</td>
<td>Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum supports</td>
<td>Approval process &amp; supports</td>
<td>New in 2015-2016</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Approval process &amp; supports</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher degree</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher specialized training</td>
<td>ECE, CD, ECE SpEd</td>
<td>Specializing in pre-K</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Specializing in pre-K</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant teacher degree</td>
<td>CDA or 9 ECE/CD credits</td>
<td>CDA or equivalent</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>CDA or equivalent</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff professional development</td>
<td>30 hours/year (teachers); 20 hours/year (assistants); PD plans; coaching</td>
<td>For teachers: At least 15 hours/year</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>For teachers &amp; assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum class size</td>
<td>20 (4-year-olds)</td>
<td>20 or lower</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>20 or lower</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-child ratio</td>
<td>1:10 (4-year-olds)</td>
<td>1:10 or better</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1:10 or better</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening &amp; referral</td>
<td>Vision, hearing, health &amp; more; Support services</td>
<td>Vision, hearing, health &amp; at least one support service</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Vision, hearing &amp; health screenings; &amp; referral</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td>Lunch†</td>
<td>At least one meal/day</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Discontinued</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring/Continuous quality improvement system</td>
<td>Structured classroom observations (more than once/year); Improvement plan††</td>
<td>Site visits</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Structured classroom observation; program improvement plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESOURCES
Total state pre-K spending ………………………………………….. $48,462,050
Local match required? ................................. Yes
State Head Start spending ....................................................... $5,040,000
State spending per child enrolled ..................................... $4,290
All reported spending per child enrolled* ........................................ $7,299

* Pre-K programs may receive additional funds from federal or local sources that are not included in this figure.
** Head Start per-child spending includes funding only for 3- and 4-year-olds.
*** K-12 expenditures include capital spending as well as current operating expenditures.

STATE PRE-K AND HEAD START ENROLLMENT AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION

RESOURCES
Total state pre-K spending ………………………………………….. $48,462,050
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State spending per child enrolled ..................................... $4,290
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Spendings per child enrolled

10

Data are for the 2015-2016 school year, unless otherwise noted.