OVERVIEW

During the 2021-2022 school year, Alabama preschool enrolled 21,939 children, an increase of 3,033 from the prior year, as the program began to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. State spending totaled $152,532,676, up $14,559,556 (11%), adjusted for inflation since last year. State spending per child equaled $6,953 in 2021-2022, down $345 from 2020-2021, adjusted for inflation. Alabama met 10 of 10 quality standards benchmarks.

WHAT’S NEW

During the 2021-2022 school year, the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) received a 15% increase in funding to support First Class Pre-K (FCPK) expansion efforts, which increased the total capacity of the program to 25,164 seats. The ADECE received additional funding for the 2022-2023 school year, to continue these expansion efforts. Increased funding provided access for an additional 2,052 children to enter state-funded pre-K which increased the total program capacity to 27,216 seats.

Additionally, in December 2022, Alabama was awarded a federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B–5) one-year planning grant for $4 million. The state will use the funding to continue strengthening Alabama’s integrated early childhood system. The funds are also being allocated to address early care and education workforce challenges and to support the inclusion of children with, or at risk of, disabilities in early care and education programming in the state.

BACKGROUND

First Class Pre-K (FCPK) is a grant program administered by the Office of School Readiness within the ADECE, under the Governor’s Office. The program funds full-day preschool education for 4-year-old children in every county in a variety of settings, including public schools, private centers, Head Start programs, community organizations, faith-based centers, colleges and universities, and military agencies. Using a multi-pronged approach, the ADECE Office of School Readiness has implemented evidence-based strategies and methods grounded in research to ensure that all children enrolled in FCPK have access to excellent, high-quality early learning classrooms in their communities.

Funding for FCPK is distributed from the Alabama Education Trust Fund Budget through competitive grants at three levels for pre-K programs: (1) Pre-K Excellence Grants (up to $48,300) are awarded to help programs meet quality standards and are not intended as the primary source of funding; (2) Pre-K Tiered Grants ($84,804 to $97,908 per grant) to classrooms serving a certain share of the free and reduced-price lunch eligible child population and are primary sources of pre-K funding; (3) New Classroom Grants ($120,000 per grant) cover costs of materials, equipment, furnishings, and general operating expenses in new classrooms for one year. Grantees must provide at least a 25% match to the awards locally, which can include sliding-scale fee revenue.

All teachers in FCPK classrooms must center their instructional strategies, classroom environment and activities in accordance with the Alabama First Class Framework. All FCPK classrooms are supported by a coach and monitor to support continuous improvement. Alabama requires each classroom to have a lead teacher with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in an early childhood-related field. Assistant teachers, who are also required for every classroom, must have a CDA or equivalent. To support the development of a qualified workforce, high school students are encouraged to complete a CDA and can use the FCPK classrooms housed in high schools to satisfy some of the required observation hours. In 2015, the ADECE introduced policies to support salary parity for all pre-K teachers.
ALABAMA FIRST CLASS PRE-K PROGRAM

ACCESS
Total state pre-K enrollment ................................................... 21,939
School districts that offer state program ................... 100% (counties)
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 .................... 3,653
Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 ....... 10,730
State-funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4 .......... 0

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

POLICY | AL PRE-K REQUIREMENT | BENCHMARK | REQUIREMENT MEETS BENCHMARK?
--- | --- | --- | ---
Early learning & development standards | Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive | Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive | ✓
Curriculum supports | Approval process & supports | Approval process & supports | ✓
Teacher degree | BA | BA | ✓
Teacher specialized training | ECE, CD, ECE SpEd | Specializing in pre-K | ✓
Assistant teacher degree | CDA or 9 ECE/CD credits | CDA or equivalent | ✓
Staff professional development | 30 hours/year (teachers); 20 hours/year (assistants); PD plans; Coaching | For teachers & assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching | ✓
Maximum class size | 20 (4-year-olds) | 20 or lower | ✓
Staff-child ratio | 1:10 (4-year-olds) | 1:10 or better | ✓
Screening & referral | Vision, hearing, health & more | Vision, hearing & health screenings; & referral | ✓
Continuous quality improvement system | Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement | Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement | ✓

For more information about the benchmarks, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages.
* Indicates that while policy meets the benchmark, it is not being implemented fully.

RESOURCES
Total state pre-K spending ................................................... $152,532,676
Local match required? .......................................................... Yes
State Head Start spending ................................................. $5,102,466
State spending per child enrolled ......................................... $6,953
All reported spending per child enrolled* .......................... $8,862

* 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.

PERCENT OF POPULATION ENROLLED IN PUBLIC ECE

3-YEAR-OLDS
- 10%
- 1%
- 89%

4-YEAR-OLDS
- 36%
- 5%
- 2%
- 58.8%

For teachers & assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching

For more information about the benchmarks, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages.
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