

2017

# First Class Pre-K Parent Survey Report



## I. Sample

### Respondents

The survey was distributed in electronic format to 7,540 First Class Pre-K parents or caregivers in spring 2017. Of these, 1,912 answered the survey, for a response rate of 33% (for valid, unduplicated email addresses).

Surveys emailed	7,540
Emails bounced	-925
Duplicates	-270
Total distribution	6,345
Completed and partially completed survey responses	2,086
First Class Pre-K Parent Survey response rate	33%

Responses were categorized according to Pre-K regions based on the county of residence identified by the respondent. The largest number of responses came from Region 2 in the northeast corner of the state, followed by Region 7 in the southwest corner.

Region	Number of Counties in Region	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
1	7	246	12.7
2	4	401	20.8
3	14	192	9.9
4	3	250	12.9
5	11	159	8.2
6	8	144	7.5
7	7	289	15.0
8	13	250	12.9

- Region 1
- Region 2
- Region 3
- Region 4
- Region 5
- Region 6
- Region 7
- Region 8



### *Child Demographic Characteristics*

The majority of children of responding parents/caregivers were White, non-Hispanic or Black, non-Hispanic. Most respondents indicated that their child had not received Early Intervention or Home Visiting services prior to entering First Class Pre-K and did not currently have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender (Q17)</b>		
Male	947	49.3
Female	973	50.7
<b>Race/Ethnicity (Q18)</b>		
White	1,283	67.5
Black/African American	641	33.7
Asian	28	1.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	40	2.1
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	9	0.5
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	79	4.2
<b>Received Early Intervention Program for children with developmental delays or special needs (Q19)</b>		
Yes	140	7.3
No	1742	90.9
I'm not sure	34	1.8
<b>Received services through a Home Visiting Program other than Early Intervention (Parents As Teachers/PAT, HIPPPY, First Teacher, Nurse-Family Partnership) (Q20)</b>		
Yes	87	4.5
No	1804	94.3
I'm not sure	21	1.1
<b>Currently has an IEP (Individualized Education Program) (Q21)</b>		
Yes	168	8.8
No	1,691	88.3
I'm not sure	55	2.9

### *Finding Out About the First Class Pre-K Program*

Respondents were asked how they found out about the First Class Pre-K Program. Individuals could select from a list of options (including all that apply) and also manually enter other responses. The most frequently identified source of awareness was from a friend. This finding illustrates the powerful role that overall reputation, record of success, and word-of-mouth plays in recruiting children to participate in the program and helping families become aware of the opportunity.

<b>Information Sources/ How families found out about the program</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Friend	977	51.1
Other*	558	29.2

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	248	13.0
Internet website	197	10.3
Brochure/Flier	152	8.0
Newspaper	65	3.4
Email	41	2.1
TV	15	0.8

\*Other included: Previous/current connection with school or Pre-K; School outreach; Daycare; General awareness/word of mouth; Personal research; Family; Doctor or other health professional; Head Start; Radio; Neighborhood outreach (signs, visits); Church; EI/Home Visiting programs; Other state service agencies (DHR, Housing Authority); Business connection

## II. Impact on Caregiver Ability to Work

Respondents were asked whether their child being in the First Class Pre-K program had influenced their ability to work at a job. About half of the respondents said that their child being in the program had allowed them to make a change in their job status. Nearly 60% of respondents who did report an influence on their job said they were able to go back to work either part time or full time, and an additional 30% were able to increase hours or days at a job they already had. Among respondents who said their child being in the program had not influenced their ability to work, more than 75% reported that they were already working and had not made any changes to their schedule or hours.

Responses	Number	Percent
Child being in the preschool program influenced parent/caregiver ability to work a job (Q12)		
Yes	979	51.1
No	938	48.9
If No, (Q13)		
I already work and haven't made any changes to my schedule or hours	707	76.2
I do not work and am not planning to go to work or look for a job right now	221	23.8
If Yes, (Q14)		
I am now able to look for a job	78	8.4
I have increased my work hours and/or days at a job I already had	301	32.4
I have been able to go to work or go back to work full time	379	40.8
I have been able to go to work or go back to work part time	170	18.3

### III. Results

Respondents were asked about their level of agreement with the following statements based on the rating scale:

- 1=Strongly Disagree
- 2=Disagree
- 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4=Agree
- 5=Strongly Agree

#### *Teacher, Respect, Communicating Progress, Excited about Learning, Sharing Information (Q1)*

Statements of Agreement	Strongly Disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Neither Agree nor Disagree % (n)	Agree % (n)	Strongly Agree % (n)	Mean
I feel that the teacher takes good care of my child, helps my child learn to get along with others, and has my child's best interest at heart.	3.4 (70)	0.8 (16)	2.6 (55)	13.8 (288)	79.4 (1,651)	4.65
I feel respected by the program staff and that my contributions are valued.	3.1 (65)	1.0 (21)	4.0 (84)	19.8 (411)	72.0 (1,495)	4.57
I am told about my child's progress in a language I understand and in ways that are respectful to me and my family.	3.0 (63)	1.8 (38)	4.0 (84)	19.6 (407)	71.5 (1,485)	4.55
My child comes home excited about learning and tells me about the things he or she did in Pre-K (what they talked about, books they read, things they learned).	3.4 (70)	2.2 (46)	4.7 (90)	24.6 (514)	65.1 (1,358)	4.46
The teacher often shares information about things happening in the program and wants to know about things my child is doing at home.	3.3 (68)	4.4 (91)	8.1 (169)	26.2 (546)	58.0 (1,209)	4.31

- **93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher takes good care of their child, has his or her best interest at heart, and helps them learn to get along with others**
- **92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt respected by the program staff and that their contributions were valued**

Statements of Agreement	Strongly Disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Neither Agree nor Disagree % (n)	Agree % (n)	Strongly Agree % (n)	Mean
Because my child has been in the preschool program, I believe he or she is better prepared to be successful in school.	2.3 (46)	1.3 (26)	4.5 (91)	19.0 (386)	72.9 (1,478)	4.59
Because my child has been in the preschool program, I understand how I can better support my child's learning and future school success.	2.1 (42)	1.9 (38)	7.2 (147)	25.5 (517)	63.4 (1,287)	4.46
The program has given me good information to help my child make a smooth transition to Kindergarten.	2.8 (56)	3.8 (76)	10.5 (213)	27.2 (551)	55.7 (1,127)	4.29
I feel that the preschool program offered some good parenting workshops that were beneficial to my family.	3.8 (72)	7.5 (143)	30.3 (580)	27.0 (517)	31.3 (599)	3.75
The program helped me find services and resources in my community to help my family.	3.8 (72)	8.9 (169)	39.1 (742)	24.2 (459)	23.9 (454)	3.56

- **92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their child is better prepared to be successful in school because he or she was in the First Class Pre-K Program**
  
- **89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understand how they can better support their child's learning and future school success because he or she was in the First Class Pre-K Program**

*Progress by Developmental Skill Area (Q3)*

Respondents were asked to rate their child’s progress during the preschool year across seven developmental skill areas based on the following scale:

- 1=No Progress
- 2=Minimal Progress/A Little Progress
- 3=Moderate Progress/Some Progress
- 4=Extensive Progress/A Lot of Progress

Developmental Skill Areas	No Progress % (n)	Minimal Progress/ A Little Progress % (n)	Moderate Progress/ Some Progress % (n)	Extensive Progress/ A Lot of Progress % (n)	Mean
School Readiness Skills: Recognizing colors, printing name, recognizing some letters of the alphabet	0.6 (12)	2.9 (57)	15.1 (299)	81.4 (1,609)	3.77
Fine Motor Skills: Using small muscles of the hand; drawing, cutting, lacing	0.6 (11)	2.4 (48)	21.1 (415)	75.9 (1,496)	3.72
Interacting socially with other children and adults	0.3 (6)	2.3 (45)	22.7 (445)	74.7 (1,468)	3.72
Gross Motor Skills: Moving large muscles; walking, pedaling, climbing, running, jumping, using stairs	0.6 (11)	3.6 (69)	24.0 (462)	71.9 (1,385)	3.67
Language/Communication: Understanding and speaking	0.3 (6)	2.4 (47)	27.1 (528)	70.2 (1,370)	3.67
Self-Care Skills: Dressing, eating, toileting	0.7 (13)	3.9 (74)	26.4 (506)	69.1 (1,325)	3.64
Positive problem-solving and dealing with conflict; controlling emotions and behaviors	0.8 (16)	5.7 (111)	36.1 (708)	57.4 (1,126)	3.50

- Respondents indicated that the developmental skill areas where children made the most extensive progress were school readiness, fine motor, and interacting socially with other children and adults.
- In open-ended comments associated with this question, a theme emerged that some respondents stated that they indicated “no progress” or “minimal progress” in some of the developmental skill areas because they felt their child was already proficient in the area prior to entering First Class Pre-K.

#### IV. Strengths of the First Class Pre-K Program

Respondents were provided a space to share their thoughts on the strengths of the First Class Pre-K program. The following consistent themes emerged from the text comments:

➤ *Teachers and staff:*

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This theme included comments about high quality teachers and staff who are nurturing, well-trained, professional, and genuinely care about children as if they were their own. It also included comments about teacher experience, passion for teaching, and feelings of safety in leaving children in the new setting (often for the first time).

➤ *Progress made/readiness for Kindergarten:*

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This theme included comments about significant gains related to basic academic skills, including letters, numbers, colors, shapes, language, reading, math, and writing. It also included comments about being better prepared for the academic demands of Kindergarten and having more confidence that their child will be ready to transition to the routine and structure of a classroom and expectations of “big school.”

➤ *Social skills, behavior, and independence:*

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This theme included comments about improvements in social skills through interacting with other children and adults, improvements in behavior and following rules, and gains in independence and confidence.

➤ *Approach to learning:*

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This theme included comments about the flexible, hands-on, creative, child-directed, individualized approach to learning; center-based learning; learning through play; and play-based approaches as supporting progress, being appropriate for 4-year-olds, and fostering a love of learning and excitement for school (often for the first time). It also included comments about the positive environment, learning in a low-pressure-to-perform setting that was seen as fun versus work, and children being eager to learn and wanting to go to school (even during holiday breaks and the weekend). Approach to learning was also discussed in the opportunities to improve First Class Pre-K section, perhaps representing a need to assure consistent awareness and caregiver education about developmentally appropriate practices related to learning for this age group.

➤ *Parent involvement:*

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This theme included comments about required parent participation and volunteer hours helping caregivers feel connected to their child’s education and supporting caregivers in continuing learning activities at home.



➤ *Communication from teacher to caregiver:*

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This theme included comments about good communication from teachers and staff and communication methods. Communication was also discussed in the opportunities to improve First Class Pre-K section, perhaps representing a need to assure consistency across program sites.

➤ *Small class sizes and low student:teacher ratio:*

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This theme included comments about the positive impact of smaller class sizes and lower student-to-teacher ratios as being supportive of children's overall progress.

➤ *Diverse peer group:*

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This theme included comments about the strengths of being exposed to a diverse peer group from different socioeconomic backgrounds and primary languages. It also included comments about the integration of students with special needs.

➤ *Cost of participation:*

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This theme included comments about the value of the program for the cost, especially those offered at no cost or low cost, and recognition that caregivers might not be able to afford a program like this otherwise.

➤ *Field trips and experiences:*

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This theme included comments about exposure to activities and places that some children might not otherwise experience.

## V. Opportunities to Improve the First Class Pre-K Program

Respondents were provided a space to share their thoughts on opportunities to improve the First Class Pre-K. The following consistent themes emerged from the text comments:

### ➤ *Better/more communication from the teacher to caregiver:*

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This theme included comments related to communication about weekly activities and learning; feedback on child's overall progress/progress reports; updates on behavior (good and bad); and consistent awareness of upcoming planned events, parent workshops, and community resources. Communication was also discussed in the strengths of First Class Pre-K section, perhaps representing a need to assure consistency across program sites.

### ➤ *More rigorous/advanced curriculum and focus on specific skills:*

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This theme included comments related to reading, writing name, math, letters, numbers, homework, worksheets, more structured classroom, more advanced learning, less child-directed play, etc. (though some wanted more hands-on learning and fewer worksheets). This may reflect a lack of awareness of developmentally appropriate, play-based learning approaches. Approach to learning was also discussed in the strengths of First Class Pre-K section, perhaps representing an opportunity for greater caregiver education about this model of learning for preschool children.

### ➤ *Approaches to discipline and challenging behaviors:*

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This theme included comments on the need for more active disciplinary measures, especially for specific behaviors such as bullying, physically harming others, and disrupting the classroom. This may reflect a need to assure consistency of understanding and implementing First Class Pre-K's behavioral management/discipline policy across all sites. It may also reflect a lack of awareness of positive discipline strategies and an opportunity for caregiver education about this model.

### ➤ *More funding for more classrooms and smaller class size:*

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This theme included comments about the need for continued funding, funding to expand Pre-K opportunities to more children, requesting more classrooms, and lower class sizes.

### ➤ *Pick-up and drop-off times and logistics:*

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This included comments about the lack of before- and after-school care, the burden for working families related to work hours and school drop-off/pick-up time conflicts, and families who needed to drop off/pick up multiple children at multiple sites.

➤ ***Food offerings:***

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This theme included comments about the lack of meals and snacks, short meal times, poor quality of meals and snacks, and unhealthy food offerings.

➤ ***Naptime:***

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This theme included comments about nap time being too long, too short, and always required even for children who typically do not nap at home.

➤ ***Cost of participation:***

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This theme included comments about the cost being burdensome for some families and also mentioned the additional cost of field trips.

➤ ***Consistency of training for teachers on supporting children with special needs and health issues:***

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This theme included mixed response with some positive and some negative comments, suggesting that consistency of training and implementation may be an issue across sites.

## VI. Recommending First Class Pre-K to Others

Ninety-five percent of parents and caregivers who responded to this survey indicated that they would recommend First Class Pre-K to other families. Respondents were offered an opportunity to further express their thoughts on recommending the First Class Pre-K program to others. A sample of quotes that illustrate themes from the comments is provided below.

Would you recommend this preschool program to other families?

Responses	Number	Percent
Yes	1,839	95.1
Maybe	78	4.0
No	17	0.9

### Sample of Open-Ended Comments

**“The preparation they provide for kindergarten is unmatched and that was the ultimate goal for my son to be ready for k5 and they surpassed my expectations of the things he would learn and how much his character would grow.”**

**“As mentioned earlier, our child has blossomed because of this program. He's become independent and confident. He will, without question, be better prepared for kindergarten. This is an excellent program and our community is blessed to have it.”**

**“My child is definitely prepared to start Kindergarten next year! The structure of the PreK day and the variety of classes/activities offered allowed many opportunities for learning. I am impressed with her advancement academically, but even more impressed with her advancement socially. Our child has developed better problem solving skills and matured.”**

**“My child has grown so much. I was nervous about kindergarten, but now I am excited for him. I believe he is ready despite his special needs.”**

**“This is a wonderful learning opportunity for students. They learn so much educationally and socially, but in a way that is appropriate for four year old students.”**

**“I would recommend this program because it has helped my child tremendously! I feel that she is prepared for Kindergarten. I have watched her grow, not only academically as in recognizing letters and sounds and writing her name, but socially as well.”**

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**“My daughter gained more than just knowledge from Pre-K. She loves learning, her teachers, and her friends! This program also developed social and emotional skills that will benefit her, and me, throughout her educational experience.”**

**“I will recommend the preschool program because my child has progressed socially, has developed skills important in school, is more excited to learn, is developing early leadership skills.”**

**“I would recommend this program to other families because the children are allowed to be themselves in an emotionally safe environment. I believe those in charge of this program understand that children learn through play and that they also learn problem solving skills through playing and interacting with other children.”**

**“I love that this program is not curriculum based. I want my child to learn her letters, sounds, numbers, counting, etc.... and she has this year. But it has been through structured and purposeful centers and instruction (whole group and small). I LOVE THAT. She has thrived socially and academically. She is definitely ready for kindergarten because of her year in prek.”**

**“I have recommended this preschool program to many neighbors because it is very high quality and is FREE. Previously, we spent around \$1000 per month for my daughter to attend preschool. Had this program not been available to us this year, we would still be paying that much. As a result of her being able to attend this program, we are able to take that amount and put it in her college fund.”**

**“I would definitely recommend this program. They give opportunities for the children to go on field trips to expose them to things and places some children would never experience. The program prepares children, at an early age, for learning in a learning environment and that will help them succeed in their future.”**

**“Yes, I would recommend this program. Having two teachers is great and the required parental involvement really helps to keep the parents up to speed. My son will have a much easier time when he begins kindergarten.”**

**“Amazing program! My son has learned so much...and he is actually excited to learn for the first time ever. I feel completely comfortable leaving my child in the hands of his teachers every day because I know they truly care for him just as I would.”**

## VII. Additional Comments

Respondents were provided several open-ended question opportunities to share anything else about their child's First Class Pre-K experience. The themes were similar to those noted in previous sections, with some additional areas identified from the text comments. Sample comments reflecting themes are included below.

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***Overwhelmingly positive comments about the First Class Pre-K program, the teachers and staff, and children's progress and kindergarten readiness:***

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**"There isn't a price I can put on this year of Pre-K for my child. She has learned more than just academics. She has been able to experience things with peers that I am unable to provide from home. She has developed into an early reader. She has learned how to make connections to our "real world" at home. I have seen her grow from a toddler who didn't understand basic "school" procedures to what I call a "big girl" who is excited about moving to kindergarten to learn more words (to use her language). This experience has been life changing for my student."**

**"My daughter comes home very excited and shares with me knowledge that she has learned. I have been so excited about the science that she is learning! She bubbles over with facts about insects, animals, and the life cycle. She has begun to have truly intellectual conversations about such topics with our family. Pre-k has been a truly enriching experience for her and for our family."**

**"My child and I absolutely love the Pre-K program. She wakes up every morning excited to go to school. I am constantly amazed by what she is learning and comes home telling me about. The teachers could not be more caring and informative. They create a very educational and nurturing environment for all of the children. I feel my child has had a great opportunity and is going to be more than ready when starting kindergarten."**

**"This Pre-K experience has been the best gift that my child could have been given. She has grown and learned so much during her time in class. The teachers are incredible. I am so happy to feel that my daughter is well prepared to start kindergarten - something I wouldn't have felt prior to her attending this Pre-K class."**

**"My child has made excellent progression on the maturity, communication and behavior skills I feel are necessary for a successful student."**

**"Our child has improved socially and academically and she is confident. Our teachers have done a wonderful job of extending learning and providing authentic learning experiences. I am thankful for all they have done this year."**

**"My child will without a doubt be more successful in school due to being in Pre-K."**

**"It's great and has tremendously help my wild little boy learn how to learn. It has truly been a blessing."**

**"[My child] has learned so much this year! He has been very excited about what is going on in his classroom and loves to tell me all about what he has learned. He has really come out of his shell and tries new things, which is a direct result of the encouragement and positive environment he experiences in Pre-K!"**

**"As parents, we feel the program has encouraged our child, who tends to be very timid by nature, to step out of his comfort zone, allowing him to build confidence in himself through doing so. It is very evident that the teaching style and curriculum is such that the children find that learning is fun resulting in a greater interest**

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for academics. I feel the program and teacher has focused on the individual needs of each child to better prepare them for the transition from a childcare setting to Kindergarten.”

*Developmentally appropriate approaches to learning:*

“I was skeptical when told kids would learn through play but after reading information on how different private programs develop the young mind and follow similar learning techniques I was interested and now I'm a believer in the program. I truly love it and wish kindergarteners were taught the same way.”

“I would not trade this experience for the world. Being an educator myself, I understand just how valuable this program is to all our children. My most favorite thing about this program is that it is developmentally appropriate. My daughter gets to learn in a setting of individual need and not sitting in a desk doing worksheets at the teachers or school distracts pace!”

*Support for children who have Individualized Education Programs or are English Language Learners:*

“Our daughter has an IEP. Having her in this program has helped to set goals for her and to monitor her goals to be able to gauge her kindergarten readiness.”

“My son is pre-verbal autistic and has extra needs. His teachers have been very open to learning how to help him best, creating solutions alongside the special ed itinerant teacher and his occupational therapist and speech pathologist. He has done very well in this setting, astounding all with his progress.”

“My child has a speech IEP that he started on \_\_\_\_\_ and he has improved tremendously in Pre-k and will likely test out in May or the start of Kindergarten.”

“Before this Pre-K program, my son could not count numbers, but he can roughly count 1 to 30 or 40. Also, he became a very positive and active child. He learned another language as his 1st language, so he was not good in English, before this Pre-K program, but now he can explain what he is thinking.”

*Impact on the family:*

“While my son has been in preschool I am also in school and I will graduate in May with an AAS in medical assisting.”

“Because of this school I was able to get a full time job at a bank. I cannot express how thankful I am for their services.”

“I wish I could put into words how much this program has meant to my daughter and our family as a whole. It has been an amazing blessing and she has grown by leaps and bounds.”

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***Connection with other early childhood system programs – home visiting programs, screening programs:***

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**“My son has an eye condition that I realized but had not discussed with the school and shortly after he began the program the school was able to identify it through an eye screening and notified me not only by means of form sent home but also a call directly from the school to make sure the condition was taken care for him.”**

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**“Parents as Teachers encouraged me to enroll my son in our local First Class Pre-k program because he scored very high on the ASQ-SE screening. Thankfully, he got accepted. I have seen huge progress in his social/emotional development. He no longer has severe tantrums or hurts himself when he is mad. He "uses his words" instead of taking it out on others. He also knows how to describe his feelings. I am so thankful to his teachers who helped my son grow and learn. We had open communication, and the teachers helped me be a better parent.”**

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