ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF Early Childhood Education

Alabama First Class Pre-K Program Guidelines 2018-2019

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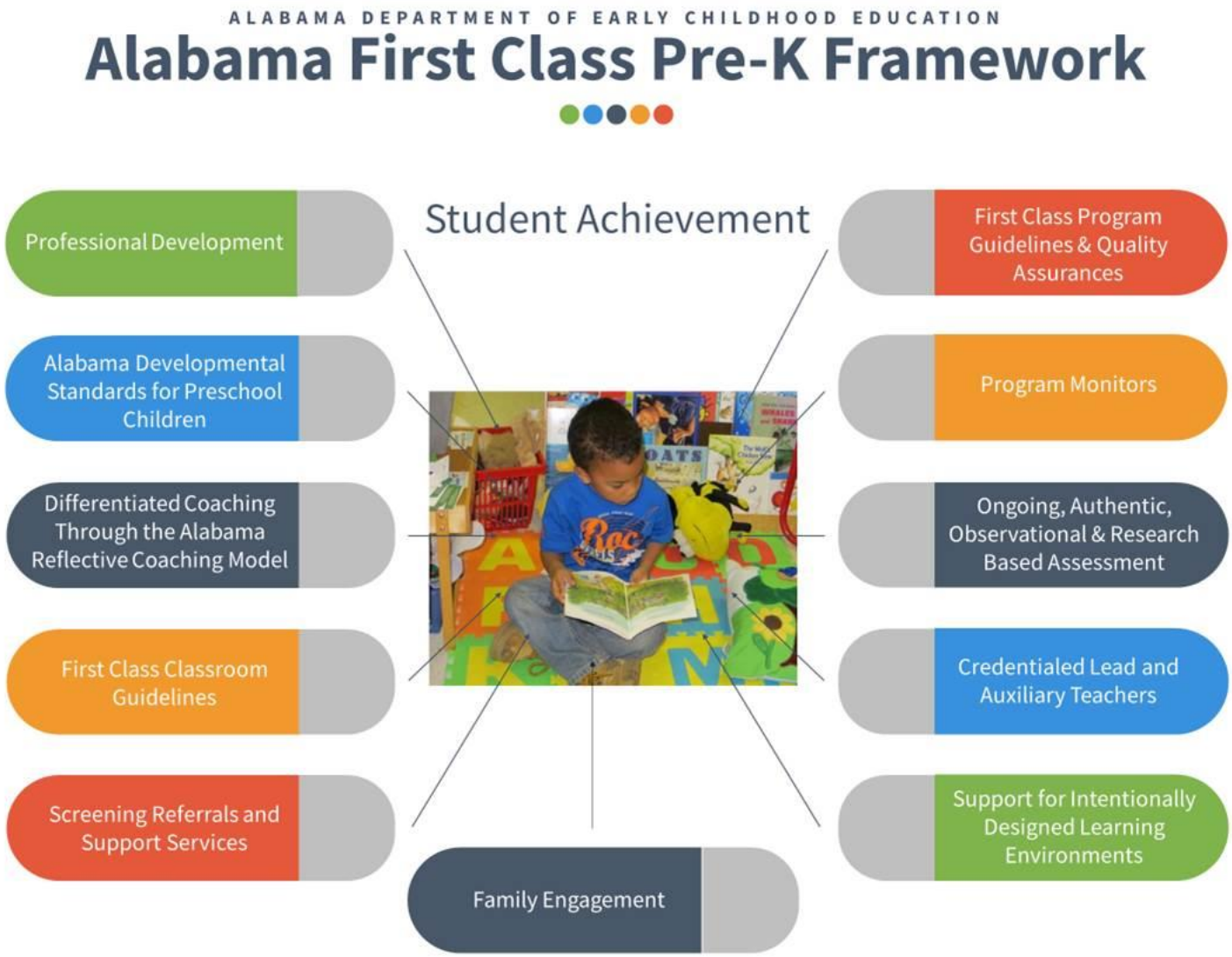
**First Class PreK is a high quality program of excellence that is continually improving. All suggestions are welcomed and changes needed to refine processes are ongoing.*

ALABAMA FIRST CLASS PRE-K FRAMEWORK



INTRODUCTION

The Office of School Readiness

The Office of School Readiness ("OSR") is housed within the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education ("DECE") and is charged with administering Alabama's state funded pre-kindergarten program. OSR funds First Class Pre-K classrooms through a competitive funding process and administers the program in a variety of settings that include:

- Public schools
- Private childcare and schools
- Head Start programs
- Community-based programs
- Faith-based programs
- Military programs

OSR was created in the 2000 legislative session. In the first year of operation and funded eight pilot pre-k programs. Since then, state funding for First Class Pre-K has grown almost 400 percent and the program has expanded into every single one of Alabama's 67 counties, serving 32% of eligible four-year-olds. OSR currently funds over 1,025 First Class Pre-K classrooms and supports the professional development of a high-quality workforce through education, training, and on-site coaching.

The Code of Alabama sections relating to OSR are contained in Appendix L.

High Quality Pre-K

Alabama's state funded First Class Pre-K program has been awarded the highest quality rating by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for the past twelve years. OSR is dedicated to working with pre-K programs to ensure that Alabama's 4-year-olds have access to high quality learning experiences that prepare them for future school success. OSR works with classrooms to promote those high-quality experiences in Alabama. Chart 1 outlines the quality criteria defined by NIEER as well as how Alabama implements the criteria in its First Class Pre-K classrooms.

The Department will work with First Class Pre-K programs ("programs") to ensure the state's plan for expanding access to high quality pre-k is effectively implemented. DECE provides professional development trainings for both lead and auxiliary teachers throughout the year. In addition, First Class Pre-K coaching will be provided for continuous improvement of effective teaching practices, opportunities for teacher self-reflection, and joint goal-setting between the teacher(s) and the First Class Pre-K Coach ("Coach"). The Department's expectations are that provided trainings, coaching, and opportunities for professional growth will contribute to a teacher's acquisition of high-quality developmentally appropriate teaching practices. If one-year in a grant cycle has transpired without a teacher showing satisfactory progress towards quality instruction based on coaching observations, child assessment results, and adherence to both program/classroom guidelines, the program may be defunded unless said teacher(s) is replaced.

NIEER QUALITY BENCHMARKS

Quality Indicators	Office of School Readiness Recommendations
Early Learning Standards	Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children http://children.alabama.gov/firstclass/firstclass-guidelines/
Lead Teacher Degree	Lead teacher must have a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education or Child Development, at minimum
Lead Teacher Specialized Training	Lead teacher must have specialized training in early childhood field
Auxiliary Teacher Degree	Auxiliary teacher must have a Child Development Associate credential (CDA) or equivalent of 9 hours of approved coursework in child development, at minimum
Professional Development, coaching, individualized plans for lead and auxiliary teachers	Lead teacher must have at least 30 hours yearly in-service professional development and training; auxiliary teacher must have at least 20 hours yearly in-service professional development and training
Maximum Class Size	Maximum number of children per classroom must be 20 or fewer; recommended number is 18
Staff-Child Ratio	Lowest acceptable ratio of staff to children in classroom must be 1:9 1:10 is permissible only for Head Start classrooms
Screenings and Referrals	Provide physical, vision, hearing and dental screenings and referrals and at least one additional support service to families; all parents complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3 (ASQ-3) developmental screener
Supports for Curriculum Implementation	First Class Pre-K classrooms will implement the Alabama First Class Framework, which consists of the Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children, First Class Program Guidelines, First Class Classroom Guidelines, the ASQ-3 Developmental Screener and the Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment. Classroom guidance and support will be provided by First Class Coaches.
Continuous Quality Improvement System	Site visits and monitoring will be provided by First Class Monitors to ensure continuous quality and compliance. A Learning Environment Checklist (LEC) and other assessments are administered to ensure the program is meeting children's needs and high-quality standards.

Source: NIEER State of Preschool Yearbook, http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Alabama2_YB16.pdf

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

PA 1 Compliance with OSR Program Guidelines Required

The Program Guidelines/Classroom Guidelines have been created and published by OSR to ensure that programs provide a safe and high-quality learning environment for the students in Alabama's state funded First Class Pre-K program.

The Program Guidelines/Classroom Guidelines also provide guidance and regulations for the expenditures of state funds and Federal Preschool Development funds. If programs do not use state and federal funds for the purpose for which they are intended, those programs will be in non-compliance and at risk of losing funding.

Failure to adhere to any of the written OSR Program Guidelines/Classroom Guidelines may result in a warning, probation, suspension, and/or immediate defunding of the program. A work-plan will be given to programs placed on probation and implementation of the work-plan will be supported by the OSR staff. If the program continues to be deficient, OSR may suspend or defund the program. A defunded program must wait two academic calendar years to reapply for First Class Pre-K funding. Programs may be immediately defunded if violations are considered severe. All OSR funds must be used according to OSR Guidelines and/or applicable state and federal laws.

PA 2 Funding Awards

OSR funds high quality pre-k programs through a competitive funding application process. Funds are provided by state funds appropriated through the Alabama legislature each year. All programs should understand that the receipt of state dollars is a responsibility and should ensure that funds received are spent for the purposes of high quality pre-k in the classrooms for which they are appropriated. Development funds and some Enhancement funds are provided by the Preschool Development Grant as appropriated annually through Congress.

PA 2.1 Awarding of Contracts

Contracts will be awarded to First Class Pre-K providers through a competitive process, subject to funding availability, previous program compliance (for continuation programs), and identified regional need. Programs are reviewed every third year for refunding based on the availability of funds and adherence to OSR recommendations and stipulations. It is important that programs demonstrate financial solvency and sound fiscal management. All programs are expected to receive and spend state education trust fund dollars in accordance with state and federal requirements.

PA 2.2 Selection of First Class Pre-K Program Sites

The basis for selection of applicants proposing to operate a First Class Pre-K program will be based on the applicant's ability to demonstrate, in their application, the most effective implementation of a First Class Pre-K program. Interested applicants will go through a competitive application process, which is conducted annually. Existing programs will be required to reapply every third year. PLUS and Preschool Development funding awards (over $92,700) are only for the first year. After the first year of funding, these grantee recipients will be required to reapply for a 3 year Tiered or Excellence Grant.

The five criteria for selection will include:

1. The quality of the proposed program as indicated by adherence to the First Class Pre-K Program Guidelines and Quality Assurances
2. The qualifications and experiences of the applicant and staff in planning, organizing, and planning comprehensive child development services to families and children at the community level
3. The program design and suitability of facilities and the equipment proposed to be used in carrying out the program
4. Cost effectiveness of the proposed program
5. The need for pre-k services in the community served by the applicant

PA 2.3 Funding Application and Notification of Contract Awards

All approved programs will receive electronic notification via email from Foundant Grant Life-cycle Management System.

PA 2.4 Class Budgets

All classes must have a minimum of 18 students in order to receive funding. If a classroom has fewer than 18 students, there should be Regional Director approved waivers to decrease the number of students required (see *Section PA 4.5*). If a classroom has fewer than 18 students and no approved waivers, the class may be placed on probation and their OSR check disbursements will be prorated.

Initial budgets for the upcoming year should be submitted to OSR no later than September 30. Budgets must reflect the total amount of all funds used to support the OSR classroom including 25% supplemental matching funds, parent fees (if collected) and any other types of funding sources that support the classroom.

Budgets are required to be entered into the OSR electronic database at the beginning of the year. Amendments may be made during the time frame of January 1-31. Any budget change greater than 10% per line item will need approval of the First Class Pre-K Monitor ("Monitor") or First Class Pre-K Regional Director ("Regional Director"). Sites not complying with budget submission by required dates will be penalized according to OSR Program Guidelines (see *Section PA 3.1*).

PA 2.5 Contract Signature

The legal signatory for the program entity must sign and submit the funding award letter and the Memorandum of Understanding. ***Note: An electronic signature on documents has the same legal binding effect as a written signature.***

PA 2.6 Disbursement of Funds

Funds to First Class Pre-K programs will be disbursed in three equal payments, subject to the availability of funds and upon receipt of completed required paperwork. Anticipated disbursements of first funds will be October. Programs cannot wait until the first check disbursement from OSR to pay the lead and auxiliary teacher salaries or to purchase required equipment and supplies for the First Class Pre-K classroom.

All OSR funds must be spent by September 30 of the grant year or the funds must be returned to OSR. A spending plan for any OSR funds remaining on June 1 must be submitted to the program's Monitor no later than June 15 to show how the remaining funds will be spent before September 30.

PA 2.7 Budget Guidelines

Each program is required to provide at least a 25% supplemental match (cash or in-kind). All private childcare providers must have a separate bank checking account for OSR funding awards.

The following items may be included in your budget for OSR funds:

Expenditure Types	Allowed Items	Required Documentation
Personnel Costs	1. Pay for lead teacher and auxiliary teacher salaries in compliance with salary scale 2. Administrative costs which ***must not exceed*** 6% of grant amount 3. Substitute teachers which must be provided in absence of lead and/or auxiliary teacher 4. Background checks for ***new teachers only*** Note: OSR requirements establish that lead teachers and auxiliary teachers are paid within the pay scale provided in Appendix A. This amount does not include benefits.	Copies of cancelled checks from bank checking account statements
Benefits	1. Insurance, retirement, payroll taxes, or other benefits for lead and/or auxiliary teacher	Copies of cancelled checks from bank checking account statements
Education Equipment & Supplies	1. Instructional materials and supplies for classroom 2. Playground equipment and supplies 3. Classroom furnishings 4. Classroom electronic equipment Note: See Appendix P for the required list of equipment, materials, and supplies for classroom.	Itemized receipts or itemized paid invoices
Travel	1. Travel in support of classroom 2. In-state field trips (including travel costs)	Itemized receipts or itemized paid invoices
Professional Development	1. Registration, travel, lodging, and food	Itemized receipts or itemized paid invoices
Health Services	1. Vision, hearing, dental, and physical screenings 2. Special Education services 3. Health services and supplies	Itemized receipts or itemized paid invoices
Other	1. Classroom maintenance and cleaning supplies 2. Computer support for classroom 3. Utilities ($1,000 maximum) 4. Parent programs and involvement 5. Safety equipment and supplies 6. Nutritional allowance (prior approval required) 7. Administrative supplies ($500 maximum) 8. Advertising ($300 maximum)	Itemized receipts or itemized paid invoices

All furnishings and/or equipment in excess of $300.00 must be inventoried and pre-approved by the Monitor or Regional Director Directors using the form in Appendix M. Inventory lists should be kept on-site and available for review by First Class Monitors.

All budget changes exceeding 10% of a line item must be preapproved by the Monitor or Regional Director prior to the expenditure.

Itemized receipts or itemized paid invoices must be given to the Monitor or Regional Director within 90 days from the date of purchase or the purchase is ineligible to be paid from OSR funds. All OSR funds must be spent and accounted for by September 30 following each funding year.

PA 2.8 Parent/Family Fees

All children must receive the same opportunities during the 6.5-hour program day. The amount of parent fees allowed depends on the type of First Class Pre-K funds awarded:

For Excellence Awards, programs may charge parents the normal cost of child care that is common in the local community.

For Tiered and Plus Awards, fees may be charged, but must not exceed the amounts outlined in Appendix B.

For Federal Preschool Development Awards, fees may not be charged.

If programs choose to collect parent fees, they must show, on the budget form provided, how that money is reinvested in the First Class Pre-K classroom.

No child may be denied access due to the family's inability to pay requested parent fees because of economic hardship. If a child is designated as being served by Title I, migrant or homeless funds, programs should refer to the guidance of their local education agency ("LEA") concerning charging fees to these students.

Field trips, and all accompanying costs, made during the day must be free and available to all children. OSR funds may be used to provide field trips or other appropriate activities for children. If extracurricular activities such as computer, dance, or art are included in the 6.5 hour day, they must be free and available to all First Class children.

No additional fees or requirements for anything (other than meals) may be required of any child for the provision of First Class services (e.g., registration, uniforms, field trips, curriculum fees, classroom supplies, photographs, t-shirts). Voluntary donations and/or supplies may be requested. However, no child may be denied participation if families do not give requested donations and/or supplies.

PA 2.9 Fee Structure

Documentation that explains the fee structure for non-pre-k program days, such as holiday or vacation times, for children, transportation (optional) and/or food services must be given to each family. Copies of this documentation should be kept on file.

PA 2.10 Uniforms

Centers with uniform policies may request that parents dress children in uniforms. First Class Pre-K Program Directors are urged to provide uniforms for those who cannot afford them or work with community resources to secure uniforms.

PA 3 Documentation Requirements

First Class Pre-K programs are expected to complete, submit, and file all documents required by OSR. Copies of all First Class Pre-K documents and records, for each program year, should be retained on-site for three (3) years following the final financial report for that year. OSR documentation is confidential and must be stored in a locked, secure, and compliant manner.

The following documentation and/or information is completed online:

1. Complete Teacher Credential Verification Form for Lead and Auxiliary teacher www.bit.do/credentials

2. Complete Personnel Profile Form for Director, Lead, and Auxiliary teacher and any long-term subs (working longer than 3 weeks in a classroom) www.bit.do/profileform

3. Enter Teacher Training hours in STIPD

4. Ensure required class and student enrollment information is accurate in Teaching Strategies GOLD™

5. Complete Teaching Strategies GOLD™ Modules (new lead and auxiliary teachers only), IRR certification (new lead and auxiliary teachers, and as needed for certificate renewal), and documentation for all three (3) OSR checkpoints

6. Verify required staff, student, parent/family, and class information is accurate in BaselineEdge

7. Complete Student Change Report for any new students who enter the classroom from the waitlist after initial random drawing has occurred. This also needs to be completed for any student who withdraws, has a change in modified attendance (if applicable) and if IEP status is updated (if applicable)

8. Classroom Budgets three (3) times per year in BaselineEdge – initial, amended, final

9. End of the year director, teacher, parent surveys completed online via email link sent to participant

The First Class Pre-K director and/or provider must keep copies of all the following documents on file.

The following documentation and/or information is kept on-site:

1. Annual Plan of Family Activities and monthly Calendar of Family Events

2. Family Involvement Sign-In Form (see *Appendix I*)

3. Family Involvement Log (see *Appendix K*)

4. Permission for and review of Health Screening Form (see *Appendix D*)

5. Health Screening Record Form for all children (see *Appendix E*)

6. Proof of immunizations "blue card" or affidavit citing religious belief exemption(s)

7. Birth Certificate documentation

8. Teaching Strategies GOLD™ parent conference verification form (printed directly from GOLD ™)

9. Teacher training verification, including copies of certification, background checks, etc.

10. OSR Inventory and Classroom Purchase List (see *Appendix M*)

11. Parent/Family Contract (see *Appendix H*)

Original forms and/or documentation to be mailed directly to OSR:

1. Official Teacher Transcripts, required for all new auxiliary teachers and any non-certified lead teachers

    a. For electronic transcripts coming directly from the regionally accredited college or university via email they must be sent to vickie.adams@ece.alabama.gov

    b. For official transcripts mailed to OSR they must be unopened and mailed directly from the regionally accredited college or university to the following address:

    Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education,
    Office of School Readiness
    Attn: Teacher Transcripts
    P.O. Box 302755
    Montgomery, AL 36130-2755

Criminal background checks to be mailed directly to OSR:

Official copies of criminal background checks are only required to be submitted for all license-exempt, faith-based programs. Other delivery systems require background checks through their licensing process or school system. All programs should complete and submit the DECE Background Check Verification Form (see *Appendix C*).

Official copies of background checks must be unopened and sent to the following mailing address:

Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education,
Office of School Readiness
Attn: Official Background Checks
P.O. Box 302755
Montgomery, AL 36130-2755

PA 3.1 Failure to Meet Documentation Requirements

Failure to submit and maintain the reports, documentation, and information listed above will result in withholding of funds. Continued failure to submit documents on time (anytime more than once) will result in discontinuation of all OSR funding. Please see the timeline at the beginning of the Appendices for a comprehensive list of forms and due dates as well as how to submit them.

Programs that are more than 30 days late with all required documentation will receive checks reduced by $2,000.00. If a site is 60 days late with all required documentation, the program will be placed on probation and funds for the current disbursements will be forfeited. If the site is 90 days late with all required documentation, the site may be defunded.

PA 4 Program Delivery

PA 4.1 Instruction Time and Number of Days

The Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children serves as the guiding document for lesson planning and classroom instruction. The Performance Standards provide learning outcomes to ensure that Alabama's four-year-olds enter school ready to succeed. They incorporate special education standards for preschool children and expound upon social-emotional behavior support strategies. A new revision of the standards will be introduced in Fall 2018.

The First Class Pre-K program is designed to provide a full day of developmentally appropriate instruction and support for four-year-old children. The pre-k program shall provide at least 6.5 hours of high quality and developmentally appropriate activities and instruction, five days per week. OSR recommends 180 days per year for eligible four-year-old children. Each program is funded for 187 days to include 7 days of professional development for staff.

Both lead and auxiliary teachers must be compensated and are expected to work for at least 187 days per year; 180 days are for classroom instruction; 7 days are for professional development to improve classroom practice. ALL non-public school lead teachers should be paid according to their correct salary matrix (see *Appendix A).* Public School systems should follow their local school system salary matrix.

PA 4.2 Dates of Operation

All First Class Pre-K programs will begin no later than September 1. Classrooms in public schools will be expected to coordinate with the local school calendar adopted by the local board of education. Head Start programs and local childcare programs are encouraged to follow their local school system calendar.

Days missed due to inclement weather must be made up unless a state of emergency was declared for corresponding school system in which site exists. Days may be added to the end of the year or taken from previously identified breaks i.e. spring break, etc.

A revised calendar with dates must be submitted to the Monitor and provided to all participating parents/families.

PA 4.3 Program and Staff Hours

The 6.5 hours of children's program shall begin no earlier than 7:30 a.m. The remaining required 1-hour of the lead teacher and auxiliary teacher's 7.5-hour funded day should be solely dedicated to First Class Pre-K program activities, such as parent conferences, meetings with Coaches and Monitors, classroom planning etc. The daily classroom schedule will be approved by the Coach.

PA 4.4 Wraparound Services

OSR does not require or provide extended day services. Extended day services for pre-k children may be provided at the parent's expense.

Income eligible families may receive services through the Department of Human Resources, Childcare Management Agency office or the Department of Family and Children's Services subsidized childcare program. If OSR staff members are used to work in wraparound services, OSR funds **may not** be used for compensation.

PA 4.5 Enrollment

First Class Pre-K programs are expected to begin the school year with 16 children in the classroom. By September 30, programs are expected to either have a full enrollment of 18 children, or Regional Director approved Increase/Decrease in Enrollment Waiver to support having fewer or more than 18 children. Waivers may be requested for children with diagnosed disabilities or significant developmental delays or significant behavior challenges that require additional time and attention from the teaching staff. Please reference Appendix H for the Increase/Decrease in Enrollment Waiver Request Form that should be sent to the Regional Director.

Head Start classrooms with more than 18 children enrolled must submit an Increase in Enrollment waiver to increase their class size up to 20 children (see *Appendix H*). This is allowed only for Head Start programs due to federal mandates. The waiver must be approved by OSR. An approved waiver means that the classroom meets the minimum square footage requirement both in the classroom and on the playground to support the increase in students. The classroom should also have ample materials to support the increase in children.

Programs may use a staggered approach at the beginning of the school year. For example, half of the students come the first day, then the remaining half of the students come the second day and then all students come the third day. Using this approach will not affect the total number of days the children are required to attend school.

PA 4.6 Required Health Information, Screenings, and Referrals

Meals and Snacks

School meals are healthy meals that are required to meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Strict federal nutrition standards, also referred to as "the meal pattern," require schools to offer students the right balance of foods. In 2012, school cafeterias were required to offer more fruit, vegetables and whole grains and limit sodium, calories and unhealthy fat in every school meal.[1]

In addition, USDA issued the "Smart Snacks in School" standards, which took effect July 1, 2014. These standards ensure all foods and beverages sold in competition to reimbursable meals during the school day are healthy choices.

Why are Smart Snacks important?

- More than a quarter of kids' daily calories may come from snacks.
- Kids who have healthy eating patterns are more likely to perform better academically.
- Kids consume more healthy foods and beverages during the school day. When they are Smart Snacks, the healthy choice is the easy choice.
- Smart Snacks Standards are a Federal requirement for all foods sold outside the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.[2]

OSR strongly encourages First Class Pre-K providers to follow the "Smart Snacks in School" Program.

[1] https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp

[2] https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/tn/USDASmartSnacks.pdf

Proof of Immunization

Upon admission into a First Class Pre-K program classroom, the pre-k provider shall ensure that evidence of age-appropriate, up-to-date immunizations "blue card" or signed religious beliefs exemption(s) affidavits against such immunizations are maintained on-site for each child.

Screenings

Parents or guardians will grant their permission to screen their child's vision, hearing, dental and physical health (see *Appendix D*). Parents or guardians will mark the screenings they are granting permission for on the form. Parents or guardians also have the option to opt-out and not allow their child to receive some or all the screenings offered.

Parents or guardians will be asked to sign the bottom of Appendix D after all four screenings have been completed, to indicate that they have been informed of the results of the screenings. Programs are encouraged to make copies of the completed screening form prior to sending them home for a signature in case they are lost in transit. Teachers may also choose to conference with parents to review the results. Appropriate referrals should be made based on screening results.

Physical Screenings

Programs are required to provide physical screenings **on site**. These may be conducted by a medical professional such as a nurse, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant; they do not have to be completed by a physician. They must include information regarding height, weight, body mass index and blood pressure. Programs are encouraged to use Appendix E, **but *other forms may be accepted as long as they contain the same information.*** These screenings must be completed no later than October 31, however, programs are encouraged to complete them closer to the beginning of the school year if possible. If a teacher has concerns about a child's physical health prior to the screening, it is strongly suggested to schedule a conference to discuss concerns with the child's parent or guardian.

Hearing Screenings

All programs must offer hearing screenings by trained professionals **on site**. Programs are encouraged to use the form in Appendix E but other forms may be accepted as long as they contain the same information. The screenings must be completed no later than October 31**.**

Vision Screenings

All programs must offer vision screenings by trained professionals **on site**. Programs are encouraged to use Appendix E but other forms may be accepted as long as they contain the same information. The screenings must be completed by October 31**.**

Dental Screenings

All programs must offer dental screenings by trained professionals **on site**. Programs may choose to partner with Sarrell Dental (www.sarrelldental.org) to offer these screenings state-wide. Programs are encouraged to use Appendix E but other forms may be accepted as long as they contain the same information. The screenings must be completed by October 31**.**

Developmental Screenings (ASQ-3)

Parents will complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3 (ASQ-3) for their child only if the child is selected for the classroom during the random selection process. The ASQ-3 will be completed by the parent via the online Family Information Form and Parent Contract link provided by the program. **It is the responsibility of the program to provide computer access and assistance to families if needed.**

Teachers should share ASQ results with families during the 1st semester required family conference unless a child has scored in the gray/black areas on the screener indicating a risk of possible developmental delays. In this case, teachers should schedule a conference with the parents as soon as possible to discuss the results and have parents complete and sign the Universal Resource Form *(see Appendix R)*. Any parental concerns noted on the ASQ Screener should be treated as a parental request for evaluation and addressed as soon as possible. Teachers should email or fax a copy of the completed form to the Help Me Grow Care Coordinator for their area. Your coach or monitor can assist you with this process if needed.

PA 4.7 Community Collaboration

Each First Class Pre-K program should partner with the county's Children's Policy Council (CPC), Early Childhood Education committee. Children's Policy Councils are coordinated by Liletta Jenkins at the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education. The Early Childhood Education Committees will be working to gather data about location of education programs and services available for 4-year-olds in each county. Community collaboration is an important component in the continuing growth of high quality pre-k. Programs may contact Liletta Jenkins at liletta.jenkins@ece.alabama.gov (334-202-3024) for more information.

PA 4.8 Licensing

Programs must abide by minimum standards and hold a current license from the Department of Human Resources (DHR). For licensing information, contact the Alabama Department of Human Resources Child Care Services (334-242-1310) or via the web at http://www.dhr.state.al.us/

Public school systems are not required to be licensed by DHR. However, programs receiving OSR funding must adhere to DHR safety requirements for both the classroom and the playground.

Any First Class Pre-K program that is placed on probation by DHR is automatically suspended by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education. Funds are forfeited during the period of probation. OSR also reserves the right to terminate funding.

PA 4.9 Accreditation

If a First Class Pre-K program is an accredited site by NAC, NAEYC, or SACS please give a copy of the accreditation documentation to your Monitor within 30 days of the program start date. OSR encourages all program sites to pursue accreditation from these organizations.

PA 4.10 Transportation

Transportation services are not provided by OSR. However, individual program sites that choose to provide transportation must adhere to local transportation guidelines, laws, and DHR Minimum Standards, including restraints, harnesses, and/or car seats.

PA 4.11 Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting and Investigations

It is required by law for anyone associated with the First Class Pre-K program to report suspected abuse or neglect. Please see full text of Alabama's Mandatory Child Abuse and Neglect reporting law in Appendix N.

The pre-k provider must notify OSR anytime there is an open abuse or neglect investigation involving the OSR First Class Pre-K classroom and resolution is completed.

OSR will temporarily suspend the First Class Pre-K program(s) that is suspended by DHR for the length of time that it takes the program to be reinstated by DHR. OSR also reserves the right to terminate funding.

PA 5 Recruitment and Enrollment Process

PA 5.1 Equal Access

A class of children with culturally, socio-economic, and gender diversity that is open equally to all Alabama children whose parents choose for them to participate is the ideal model of delivery.

The recruitment process for the First Class Pre-K program must be open and nondiscriminatory. Children cannot be denied participation on the basis of income, sex, race, color, or national origin, or disability (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964): (TITLE IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and Title 11 of the Vocational Education Amendments of 1976); or disability (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) in educational programs. Income may not be used as a consideration for enrollment unless a program is federally mandated to do so.

There must be a wide distribution of recruitment notices in English and Spanish (where appropriate). The notices should state that a ***public random selection drawing*** will be used to choose the children in the OSR pre-k classroom unless otherwise mandated by Federal law. Random selection means that every child in the population has an equal chance of being selected. Criteria such as gender, race, socio-economic status, academic ability etc. may not be used in drawing the children. Every effort should be made to ensure a socio-economically diverse classroom.

Random selection may be based on the percentage of funds provided by the OSR grant. For example, if the grant funds represent 50% of the total cost for actual class operations, then 50% of the children will be randomly selected (9 out of 18). Monitors can assist in reviewing the budget to calculate this number.

It is strongly recommended to use random selection exclusively if possible.

PA 5.2 Recruitment

With the expansion of First Class Pre-K in the past few years, collecting student registration information on paper is no longer a viable option. The vast amount of information required for decision-making, data analysis, and accountability makes it necessary to have all data in one platform to facilitate consistency, ease of access, cross-platform imports/exports, and information management and analysis. All programs are required to utilize the online ASAP program, which was carefully selected and custom-designed to meet the needs of First Class Pre-K (see *Appendix T)*.

Notices for recruitment must be publicly posted at least 1 (one) month in advance of the random selection drawing date in locations such as childcare centers, pediatrician offices, health departments, Children Policy Council meetings, newspapers, and/or social media where appropriate. Recruitment posters and or flyers will be provided to First Class Pre-K programs by OSR.

Recruitment notices MUST include: (a) date, time, location and required information needed for application, (b) non-discriminatory and equal opportunity statements, and (c) the date, time, and place of the random selection drawing.

Newly selected program sites will be notified of their timeline during the grant award process.

If the First Class Pre-K classroom is located in a center that currently has a program for 3-year-old children, those children may not be automatically moved up to the First Class Pre-K classroom unless the program is federally mandated. Those children must submit the online pre-registration form and be placed in the public random selection drawing like all other children from the community who submit applications. However, you may use the process described in section PA 5.1.

Mandated Timeline of Recruitment Events for Existing Classrooms

The DECE mandated timeline for pre-registration must be adhered to unless a written waiver is granted by DECE.

January 15 until March Random Selection Drawing: Programs should advertise by placing recruitment notices around the community (OSR will send an electronic flier to all directors). Programs will conduct pre-registration via the online ASAP platform for at least one calendar month prior to the random selection drawing. Parents should also provide a copy of their most recent utility bill (or other verification) as proof of Alabama residency (or district residency if required by the local school board). It is the responsibility of the program to provide computer access and assistance to families if needed.

March 1-31: Programs will hold a public random selection drawing. After the initial 16 children are drawn during the random selection process, the remaining students will continue to be drawn and numbered in the order they are drawn. This will be the order of the waiting list if new students need to be added to the classroom.

March Random Selection Drawing – April 13: Program directors mark each child's status in ASAP as "pending" (selected for an available position in drawing) or "waitlisted" (not selected for an available position in drawing).

April 16-18: The Department triggers emails notifying families of *pending* or *waitlisted status*. *Pending status* families are asked to accept or decline; parents have 7 days to make a decision.

April 19: Directors change *pending status* in ASAP to "completed", if the position is accepted, or dropped, if the position is declined. Directors will then assign completed status students to specific classes in ASAP.

If a program has multiple birth siblings (twins, triplets, etc.) all names should be placed in the drawing separately. If one but not all multiple birth siblings are drawn before the classroom cap at 16, the drawing should cease at this point and the 1 or 2 multiple birth siblings should be added to the classroom roster at this point to reach full classroom enrollment.

PA 5.3 Waiting Lists

Recruitment for the classroom should continue throughout the year in order to maintain enrollment and a comprehensive waiting list. The pre-registration ASAP list of students who did not make it into the program and any new student who registers via ASAP during the year will act as the waiting list and must be maintained for all children who are not attending the program due to a lack of space.

PA 5.4 Maintaining Enrollment

If a child withdraws from the classroom after April 1, the program may choose not to replace that child and have fewer than 18 children enrolled for the remainder of the school year.

PA 5.5 Including Children with Special Needs

OSR supports diversity in First Class Pre-K classrooms. However, OSR funds cannot be used to create special education pre-k classrooms. It is strongly recommended that OSR classrooms carefully consider and plan for children with disabilities to ensure that resources are in place in the First Class Pre-K classroom. Programs are encouraged to consult with their local education agency (LEA) special education staff for resources available through the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP.) For more information, visit http://www.alsde.edu/.

Additional Information about Home Visiting Programs

The First Teacher Home Visiting program provides grant funds to local programs around the state to deliver parent education and support through home visits with families. Programs use evidence-based home visiting models to education and assist families in finding appropriate social services to help them meet any unmet needs they may have. Models that programs use also help families achieve goals including, but not limited to, preparing their children for school, searching for employment, accessing healthcare and social services, and improving the overall lives of young children. Models vary, but some programs may choose to enroll women prenatally and continue to stay involved with the family until the child enters kindergarten. Other programs work specifically on school readiness with preschool-aged children. There are 33 programs available to provide services in 53 counties across the state. For more information on home visiting programs, visit https://children.alabama.gov.

The Alabama Pre-K Classroom

CR 1 The Classroom Learning Environment

First Class Pre-K program providers are expected to provide a learning environment which is at minimum clean, safe, and conducive to high quality learning. OSR staff will conduct an assessment of the environment and make recommendations for improvement as needed.

Pre-K providers shall maintain appropriate equipment, materials and supplies for each pre-k classroom (see *Appendix P*). Classroom furniture is required at the beginning of the school year. Worn out furnishings and equipment should be replaced and updated as needed.

CR 1.1 Purchase of Equipment, Materials, and Supplies

It is expected that each First Class Pre-K classroom will provide a high quality learning environment which includes appropriate classroom equipment, materials and supplies. First Class funds may be used for purchase of equipment, materials and supplies for the classroom. Single item purchases over $300 must be pre-approved by the First Class Monitor and/or Regional Director and a copy of receipts for purchases should be provided to the OSR Monitor. Documentation of single-item purchases over $300 must be provided to the Monitor/Regional Director using the Classroom Inventory and Purchase List (see *Appendix M*). The Monitor will check receipts on a monthly basis for all purchases made with OSR funds.

CR 1.2 Ownership of Equipment

If a new classroom purchases equipment using First Class Pre-K funds from OSR and is in existence for less than three years, materials, furniture, classroom equipment and supplies as well as playground equipment shall be returned to DECE. The program will incur the cost of removal of said items. Alternatively, the program can keep said items and refund cost of said items to DECE.

CR 2 Classroom Delivery

CR 2.1 Space

Each classroom shall have licensed space for 18 children, which includes a minimum of 35 square feet per child and 60 square feet per child on the playground. If a classroom is to be relocated for any reason, you must contact the Regional Director for approval prior to the move.

CR 2.2 Teacher Student Ratio and Classroom Make-Up

Enrollment of 18 children in all First Class Pre-K classrooms is expected by September 30, unless Regional Director approved Increase/Decrease in Enrollment Waivers are in place. This provides a 9 to 1 child:teacher ratio. Head Start classrooms may have no more than 20 children in their classroom which will insure a 10:1 ratio; however, they may request permission from Head Start to remain at 18. Head Start Classrooms must submit an OSR Waiver Request Form to request to increase their class size over 18 children (see *Appendix F*). This request should be submitted to the Regional Director.

Two adults – lead teacher, auxiliary teacher, and/or substitute – must be present at all times, with the exception of nap time. If either teacher is absent, the First Class Pre-K program must provide a substitute. First Class Pre-K funds may be used for substitute teachers. The Lead or Auxiliary teacher may not be taken out of the First Class Pre-K classroom to fulfill any other role or duty in the school, Head Start Center or Childcare Center.

Programs will be fined $500 for each instance. Recurring violations will result in a program being defunded.

CR 2.3 Classroom Size Waivers for Children with Diagnosed Disabilities, Significant Developmental Delays, and/or Significant Behavior Challenges

Classrooms may begin the year with 16 children. However, classrooms are expected to have either 18 children enrolled on or by September 30 or have 16 or 17 children enrolled with one or two Regional Director approved decrease in enrollment waivers (see *Appendix F*). If the initial classroom make-up includes children with diagnosed disabilities, significant developmental delays or significant behavior challenges, programs may choose to observe those children for the first few weeks to determine if a decrease in enrollment waiver application is warranted. If approved, this waiver would allow the classroom to have fewer children as long as that child remains in the class. If a waiver is not approved, the program is expected to add an additional child to the classroom from the waiting list to increase enrollment to the required 18 children.

Please see Appendix F for the waiver request form. This form (if needed) should be completed and sent to the Regional Director.

If a child is identified as having a diagnosed disability, significant developmental delay or significant behavior challenges after the school year begins and another child drops out of pre-k or is dismissed from pre-k, the teacher may request a waiver to decrease the classroom size. Documentation must include a meeting with the parents to provide them information to direct them to the local education agency that is responsible for the identification and evaluation of children with special needs. For contact information to local special education coordinators contact the Alabama State Department of Education at 334.242.9700 or www.alsde.edu.

CR 2.4 Children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Children with diagnosed disabilities and significant special needs should receive services and staffing in accordance with their IEP (see *Section CF 1.4*). First Class Pre-K teachers should have a copy or access to all IEPs for the children in their classroom. OSR teachers should attend all IEP meetings and work directly with the LEA to ensure progress is being made towards meeting IEP goals for any child with a current IEP in place.

CR 2.5 Administration of Medication

First Class Pre-K program providers must adhere to state licensing standards and federal and/or state law when administering medication to children (e.g. the Baby Douglas Law).

CR 2.6 Classroom Equipment, Materials, and Supplies

Each classroom is expected to provide developmentally appropriate furnishings, equipment, supplies, manipulatives and activities. A list of required equipment, materials, and supplies can be found in Appendix P.

CR 2.7 Outdoor Play Area

An age appropriate, fenced-in, playground with shade should be made available each day. Other opportunities for outside activities are encouraged (ex. tricycle trail, green space, gardens, art, music, etc.) Playgrounds should have a minimum of 60 square feet per child. Please see Gross Motor section of the *Classroom Guidelines* for additional information.

CR 2.8 Other Program Components

Breakfast, lunch, snacks, rest and supervised outdoor play are part of the First Class Pre-K program.

No part of the day may be religious in nature. A moment of silence is acceptable. Activities religious in nature must take place outside of the 6.5-hour school day.

Field trips are an important part of the educational experience. OSR requires at least one (1 off- site field trip. OSR funds may be used to pay for in-state field trips only. Programs should develop their own policies regarding field trips. Field trips and all accompanying costs must be free and available to all children in the First Class Pre-K Classroom.

CR 3 Instructional Services and Curriculum

CR 3.1 Curriculum

The Alabama First Class Pre K framework is an effective model based on the latest research on how to support young children as they develop and learn. Curriculum content is comprehensively presented and reinforced with intentional teaching strategies for pre-k teachers. Implementation of the curriculum is embedded into the ***Alabama Reflective Coaching Model*** that includes effective teaching practices, curriculum content based on early learning standards, and professional development.

Evaluations of statewide early childhood pre-k systems indicate that the most effective programs link early learning standards with curriculum and assessment. Alabama's Office of School Readiness (OSR) has developed early learning standards for guiding First Class instructional practices. Teaching Strategies GOLD is the state assessment tool that will guide the appropriate alignment of the standards with teacher's instruction. DECE does review curricula to provide guidance on which early learning childhood curricula are most aligned to the Alabama First Class Pre-K Framework and Alabama Developmental Standards for Pre-K. It is important to note that First Class Pre-K teachers and administrators work closely with coaches and/or program monitors to choose a curriculum that will help a teacher be successful. All curricula must promote appropriate instructional practice and be used as a supplement to the OSR Program Framework.

CR 3.2 Orientation

An on-site parent orientation for all teaching and administrative staff and families shall be provided within 20 working days of commencement of First Class Pre-K services for children. Orientation may also occur prior to the start of the school year. See Appendix J for suggested topics to cover during parent orientation.

The Alabama Pre-K Child and Family

CF 1 The Pre-Kindergarten Child

The First Class Pre-K program does not discriminate against any child or family based on race or color, national origin, religion, class, gender, disability, or income. The First Class Pre-K program encourages diversity in each of its classrooms. Any OSR grant recipient found to discriminate will be immediately defunded from the First Class program.

The intent of the First Class Pre-K program is to provide state supported, high quality, voluntary pre-k for Alabama's 4-year-olds.

CF 1.1 Age Requirement

Children must be four years of age on or before September 2, based on acceptable documentation, such as birth certificates, passports, official medical documents, or official documents from other countries (Authority: Ala. Code §16-28-4 (1975) Interpretation based on Report of Attorney General of Alabama October-December 1963, Volume 113, page 20). Children who are 5 years of age and are eligible for Kindergarten may not enroll in Alabama First Class Pre-K.

CF 1.2 Residency Requirement

The child must be an Alabama resident and maintain residency while enrolled. For purposes of this program, an Alabama resident is defined as a child who resides in the state of Alabama with proof of residence required (e.g. current utility bill). School systems may restrict residency to their school districts, but a written policy adopted by the local Board of Education must be in place prior to the school year start date in order to restrict enrollment to that school district only.

CF 1.3 Required Health Information

Upon admission into a First Class Pre-K program classroom, the pre-k provider shall ensure that evidence of age-appropriate, up-to-date immunizations or signed religious beliefs affidavits against such immunizations are maintained on-site for each child.

CF 1.4 Children with Special Needs

States and local school districts are required by federal law to educate preschool age children with special needs in typical early childhood programs alongside their typically developing peers to the maximum extent appropriate. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires programs to include children with disabilities in pre-k classrooms side-by-side with their typically developing peers (see *Appendix O*). See the Department of Early Childhood Education website for referral process at http://children.alabama.gov/.

CF 2 Parent/Family Engagement Expectations

Alabama First Class Pre-K programs shall provide meaningful opportunities for families to be involved in their child's education. A comprehensive plan for family engagement opportunities to implement strategies designed to develop partnerships with families and build reciprocal relationships that promote shared decision-making should be developed by all programs. An annual plan specifying the ways parents/families may earn hours and the number of hours earned specified is due October 1 and will be reviewed by the Monitor.

A calendar outlining monthly family engagement opportunities should be shared monthly with your First Class Pre-K families and your Monitor.

Family participation in the First Class Pre-K program is expected. Families are responsible for completing 12 participation hours each school year. Examples of ways to participate are attending the family orientation, completion of the ASQ-3 screener, attending field trips, volunteering in the classroom, attending parent/family conferences, attending enrichment meetings, participating in IEP meetings and completing take-home activities. Teachers must specify the amount of time a parent will earn when working with their child on a project at home. When the project is returned to school, the teacher will document the amount of time the parent/family has earned and record it on the family involvement log (see *Appendix K*). Children may not be dismissed from a First Class Pre-K classroom due to lack of parent/family engagement.

CF 2.1 Parental Programming

The following are examples of meaningful opportunities for families to be engaged in their child's education:

1. Home visits, including home visitation programs such as HIPPY, Parents as Teachers
2. Formal and informal parent/teacher conferences
3. Classroom visits and options for parents and families to participate in classroom activities
4. Parent education and parent/family engagement activities
5. Family involvement in decision making about their own child and about their child's early childhood program
6. Opportunities to engage families outside of the regular service day

CF 2.2 Parent/Family Orientation

All First Class Pre-K programs are required to have an on-site family orientation meeting within the first 20 working days of the school year. However, OSR recognizes the importance of having an orientation prior to the start of school and encourages programs to conduct them in this manner. A list of topics to discuss at this meeting is found in Appendix J. Parent attendance at orientation is expected and must be documented on the Family Involvement Sign-In Sheet (see *Appendix I*). Programs should have families complete the Parent Contract and ASQ-3 screener for their child at orientation.

It is the responsibility of the program to provide computer access and assistance to families when needed if ASQ-3 Screeners are completed online.

CF 2.3 Parent-Teacher Conferences

At least 2 (two) individual conferences per year between the lead teacher and parent/guardian are required. The first conference should be held after the October GOLD checkpoint but prior to December 15. The second At least 2 (two) individual conferences per year between the lead teacher and parent/guardian are required. The first conference should be held after the October GOLD checkpoint but prior to December 15. The second conference should be held after the final GOLD checkpoint and prior to May 3. Both conferences should be documented in each child's on-site file by using the Teaching Strategies GOLD Family Conference Form.

In some circumstances, it may be necessary to use the GOLD Development and Learning Report for parent conferences if finalization is not possible before holding parent conferences.

CF 3 Student Attendance

CF 3.1 Procedures for Student Attendance

Regular attendance ensures pre-k children benefit from participating in a quality early education. Regular attendance is a school readiness skill, in addition to a good measure of parent engagement. Pre-K providers are required to formulate written procedures for addressing issues regarding attendance and tardiness. These procedures should be shared with families during orientation. They will also be reviewed on site by the First Class Pre-K Monitor. Daily attendance records should be maintained on-site and include the dates when a child is absent and the dates/times when a child arrives late or leaves early. The attendance procedures should specify actions to be taken by the pre-k provider if attendance issues become problematic. For example, the procedures could require a phone call to parents after three unexcused absence/tardiness, a letter to parents from the director; after six absences/tardiness, a parent conference; and after eight or nine absences/tardiness a referral to the First Class Pre-K Monitor after 10 absences.

The goal of the attendance policy is to assist families in establishing and maintaining regular school attendance patterns.

CF 3.2 Chronic Attendance Issues

Chronic tardiness is defined as late arrival or early departure more than 2 days per week. A definition of tardiness should be developed by the provider. A five to ten minute drop off time is an acceptable part of a tardiness definition.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing more than 4 days per month without medical or other reasonable explanation. Chronic tardiness or absenteeism may also be defined by an established regular attendance pattern(s), e.g., if a child is late every Monday or absent every Tuesday or leaves early every Friday.

Chronic Tardiness and/or Chronic Absenteeism

Providers are required to document efforts to assist parents/guardians of children who do not attend on a regular basis, are routinely late, or routinely leave the program early in improving attendance. A meeting with the parent/guardian should occur to determine the reason(s) for the problem and identify ways to resolve the problem.

This documentation should be shared with your First Class Pre-K Monitor. The following information should be documented:

1. Number of school days so far in the year
2. Number of days the child has been absent and/or
3. Number of days the child has been tardy
4. Information regarding parent conferences to discuss tardiness and/or absenteeism and ways that were discussed to increase attendance and/or decrease tardiness

Consecutive Absenteeism is defined as not attending class for 10 consecutive days without a medical or other reasonable explanation. OSR approval "to dismiss after 10 consecutive days of non-attendance" should be requested in writing and sent to the First Class Regional Director. The following information should be included in the request:

1. Dates the child was absent from the program
2. Date teacher/director contacted parents with concerns
3. Date of documented parent meeting to discuss the absenteeism (if meeting was held)
4. Last date the child attended the program (this will be the dismissal date)

The program may only drop the child from the class roll if pre-approval is granted and received, in writing, from the OSR Regional Director.

CF 3.3 Attendance Expectations for Children Receiving Special Education Services

Occasionally, it will be necessary for children to receive special services outside of the pre-k classroom. They may be provided in other sites in the community such as Head Start centers and elementary schools. It is acceptable for children to be absent from the pre-k program to receive these services as long as they are in attendance for at least 75% of the school week. The pre-k teacher should have documentation from the parent or local school system stating where the services will be provided (location), the frequency of the services (number of days per week), and the duration of the services (30 minutes, an hour etc.) The teacher should also document the actual amount of time the student will be absent to ensure that the child will be in attendance for 75% of the school week. This information, along with a copy of the child's current IEP, should be kept on file in the pre-k classroom.

CF 4 Discipline

CF 4.1 Positive, Social-Emotional Approaches to Student Discipline

No employee shall use any form of corporal punishment as a method of discipline in the First Class Pre-K program. This includes, but is not limited to: paddling, striking, pulling, pushing, swatting, placing hands on, or hitting. No use of time-out will be allowed. Appropriate practices include: redirection, encouragement, problem solving, effective planning, calming strategies and smooth, engaging transitions.

CF 4.2 Individualized Student Interventions

We recognize that there are a broad range of abilities considered developmentally appropriate for 4-year-old children. Once children have an appropriate amount of time to acclimate to the classroom environment, typical differences in behavior and skills will be apparent. If a teacher notices a child has significant behavioral, developmental or health issues, individualized interventions may be necessary. Information from the parent-completed ASQ-3 combined with information from the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment may be used to substantiate the need for a parent conference to discuss a referral to the local school system's special education program for services and supports.

Programs and teachers should have a plan in place for scenarios involving serious social-emotional and behavioral concerns.

Example: A child is throwing a tantrum and throwing things. This incident could harm other students in the classroom, so one (1) teacher should remove the rest of the children from the classroom immediately while the other teacher remains with the child throwing the tantrum to work through the issue. After the issue has been resolved, the teacher would assist the child in cleaning up the classroom, talking about the issue, and thus developing and building a relationship with the child.

Please note it is important to remove the other children instead of the individual child because removing the child from the situation will only make it worse. The child cannot self-regulate if removed from the environment; you have to remove the other children to safety while the child receives support from the second teacher to work through the issue.

The Coach should be notified immediately, the child's parents must be notified the same day as the incident, and a follow-up conference with the parents must be scheduled. During this conference, the teachers need to share effective, positive behavior strategies with the child's parents to ensure continuity between the classroom and the child's home. The teacher needs to communicate with the parent/family using insight-oriented communication to reflect positive behaviors as well as challenging behaviors. This course of action is for serious social-emotional and behavioral concerns.

Teachers should make every effort to connect with parent/family and the child during the conference in positive ways to support a positive connection with the parent/family. This connection is integral in approaching a child's behavior from a stance of empathy and understanding to help a child regulate their emotions, think clearly, and manage complex social environments, such as the classroom.

CF 4.3 Modified Student Attendance

In some instances, it may be necessary to have a student attend a modified school day to be successful. Examples may include a child who is extremely disruptive or difficult to manage during certain parts of the day. A child may have a hard time transitioning to school in the morning, so it may be suggested that he temporarily come in 30 minutes after school starts in order to miss the chaos with lots of children arriving at the same time. If naptime occurs at the end of the day and a child is very disruptive during that time, he may temporarily be allowed to end his day prior to naptime.

Any form of modified attendance (i.e. less than 6.5 hours of instructional time a day) requires prior approval from the Regional Director.

Modified attendance should be used in conjunction with child specific interventions and documented responses to the intervention. A referral for special education testing should also be discussed with the parent and documented. Programs must contact their First Class Coach and Regional Director to discuss requests for modified attendance and the submission of the necessary documentation (see *Appendix G*).

CF 4.3 Modified Student Attendance

Preschool expulsions and suspensions have long-term implications. The U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services warns that "young students who are expelled or suspended are as much as ten times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration that those who are not" (ED/HHS, 2014, p.3).

First Class Pre-K supports interventions for promoting social, emotional, and behavioral development of young children.

Primary Interventions include:

- Positive adult/child interactions
- Teacher sensitivity
- Teacher responsiveness
- High quality supportive environments
- First Class Pre-K Program Guidelines
- First Class Pre-K Program Appendices
- First Class Pre-K Classroom Guidelines
- Ages and Stages parent completed questionnaire (ASQ-3)
- Coaching support (including trauma-informed practices such as Conscious Discipline)
- Family/Teacher Conferencing

Secondary Interventions may include:

- Targeted social/emotional supports (including Devereux Early Childhood Assessment e-DECA)
- Referral to Help Me Grow (2-1-1)
- Specialist Consultation
- Family/Teacher Conferencing

Occasionally a child may exhibit serious social-emotional behavioral concerns. In severe instances when a child is in danger of harming himself/herself or others, he/she should be moved to a safe area to prevent the escalation of the behavior. Once the child has regained control and the situation has been diffused he/she may return to the classroom. Parents should be immediately notified concerning the incident and a conference should be scheduled. If behavioral concerns persist alternative services and resources to assist the child and the family should be pursued. Your Regional Director can provide information concerning community resources and support.

The Alabama Pre-K Teaching Team

TS 1 Lead Teacher

TS 1.1 Days of Service

All lead teachers are funded for 187 days of service – 180 days of classroom instructional services provided to children and 7 days of pre/post planning and/or staff training. The teacher is expected to work and be compensated based on 7.5 hours of work per day which includes 6.5 hours of instruction and 1 hour of planning with the auxiliary teacher

In cases where the governor declares a state of emergency in your county, OSR teachers must be paid for days out of school and can use OSR funds. Additionally, any missed school days due to this circumstance do not have to be made up.

If a First Class Pre-K program provider requires teachers to work more than 187 days, the provider cannot use First Class program funds for this expense. If a First Class Pre-K program teacher is required to work more than 8 hours per day, the teacher must be paid using non-OSR funds.

TS 1.2 Age Requirements

All lead teachers must be at least 21 years of age or older.

TS 1.3 Education Requirements

All lead teachers must possess one of the following degrees:

1. Human Environmental Science degree with a concentration in Early Childhood Development or Child Development
2. Early Childhood Education degree (B.S., B.A., or M.A./M.S.) or completion of a bachelor's degree program leading to P-3 certification in Early Childhood Education with a minimum of 18 credit hours in early childhood/ child development coursework.
3. Special Education degree in Early Childhood with a minimum of 18 credit hours in early childhood/child development coursework, or a bachelor's degree program leading to certification in Early Childhood Special Education with a minimum of 18 credit hours in early childhood/ child development coursework.

Note: Teacher certification is only required for teachers employed in public schools.

Waivers are no longer granted for teachers without the above credentials, effective August 2011. Official transcripts on all new lead teachers must be submitted to OSR no later than September 1. Transcripts must be official and mailed, sealed and unopened, or electronically received by OSR from the actual institution. All degrees must be earned from an institution that has received regional accreditation.

TS 1.4 Lead Teacher Salary

Lead teacher salaries must be paid according to their Salary Matrix (see *Appendix A*). The aforementioned is the base salary and does not include benefits.

Programs are responsible for paying teacher salaries out of local funds until OSR funds are distributed to the program.

TS 2 Auxiliary Teacher

TS 2.1 Days of Service

All auxiliary teachers are funded for 187 days of service: 180 days of classroom instructional services provided to children and 7 days of pre/post planning and/or staff training. All auxiliary teachers are expected to work and be compensated for a 7.5 hour work day to include 6.5 hours of instruction and 1 hour of planning in coordination with the lead teacher. OSR requires programs to pay the CDA salary for Auxiliary Teachers (see *Appendix A*).

TS 2.2 Employment Requirement

An auxiliary teacher must meet all of the following minimum requirements:

- Must possess a high school diploma or GED.
- Must possess a Child Development Associate credential (CDA) or at least 9 credit hours of college coursework in Early Childhood Education or Child Development from a regionally accredited institution.

Official transcripts of college coursework or a copy of the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential for all new auxiliary teachers must be submitted to OSR no later than September 1. Transcripts must be officially mailed directly to OSR, sealed and unopened, or sent electronically to OSR from the actual regionally accredited institution. All college coursework must be from an institution that has received regional accreditation.

TS 2.2 Auxiliary Salary

A minimum salary for auxiliary teachers is indicated on the OSR Salary Scale (see *Appendix A*). The aforementioned is the base salary and does not include benefits. Programs are responsible for paying teacher salaries out of local funds until First Class funds are distributed to the program.

TS 3 General Personnel Requirements

TS 3.1 Criminal Background Checks

All First Class Pre-K program personnel must have a satisfactory criminal background check, Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) background check and fingerprinting, with documentation on file with their employer. Criminal background checks are required of all First Class Pre-K program personnel including substitute teachers and any other person having regular contact with the classroom children.

Volunteer parents may not be left in the classroom unsupervised by classroom personnel. If an OSR grantee personnel are arrested or convicted of criminal behavior during employment in the First Class Pre-K classroom, the program must promptly inform OSR.

All classrooms must have a completed notarized Background Verification Form submitted to the First Class Pre-K Monitor within 10 days of the first day of school(see *Appendix C*). In addition, all licensed-exempted faith-based programs must submit official criminal background checks documenting suitability for employment for any employee that has regular contact with the classroom children.

TS 3.2 Employees

All First Class Pre-K program personnel are not employees of OSR. First Class Pre-K personnel may not occupy more than one position during the 7.5 hour day (e.g. director and teacher; director and auxiliary teacher).

TS 3.3 Substitutes

The First Class Pre-K provider shall ensure that a substitute lead teacher and/or substitute auxiliary teacher is present and working when the regular teacher(s) are absent, whether due to illness, required training, personal leave, etc. Long-term substitutes, which is defined as longer than 3 weeks, should meet the credentials of the teacher they are replacing. If a long- term substitute is required, the Regional Director should be notified prior to the sub placement. Each site is responsible for compensating all substitutes, and OSR funds may be used for this purpose. Criminal background checks are required for all substitute teachers.

Any classroom that does not have the appropriate substitute(s) in place when either teacher is out will be fined $500/day per each incident and may be in jeopardy of losing funding.

TS 4 Professional Development Requirements

TS 4.1 Importance of Professional Development

In order to maintain quality teaching standards, annual professional development is required for all staff directly associated with the First Class Pre-K program. OSR staff will work with a variety of providers to develop and deliver professional development for high quality pre-k.

TS 4.2 Attendance at Professional Development

All levels of administrative, teaching and support staff are required to attend training offered or approved by the OSR. Lead teachers must attend a minimum of 15 hours of OSR sponsored training each year plus 15 additional hours of training offered by local or regional programs, for a total of 30 training hours. Auxiliary teachers must attend a minimum of 10 hours of OSR-sponsored training each year plus 10 additional hours training offered by local or regional programs for a total of 20 hours.

Because professional development is an important component of quality, OSR expects all sites to make training opportunities accessible to staff by paying for regular training costs, travel and substitutes from OSR funds.

Teachers who are certified and employed by school systems using EDUCATEAlabama are required to participate.

Online professional development opportunities approved by OSR may also serve as professional development hours. Coaches are the best resources to learn about professional development opportunities and expectations.

Teachers are required to document all local and OSR training attendance using STI-PD. Teachers should also keep copies of training certificates onsite for verification of attendance.

Attendance at the OSR-sponsored pre-k conference (2 full days) is mandatory training for all lead and auxiliary teachers. If only one teacher from a class attends the conference, the program will be fined $500 per day. Classes that have no representation at the conference will be charged $1,000 per class each day.

"No shows" at any OSR-sponsored training will be charged $500 per class. The $500 per class will be deducted from the next OSR check disbursement.

TS 4.3 Training Reimbursements to Staff

The program provider shall ensure that OSR funds are used to pay for substitute teachers and costs associated with staff travel (e.g. meals, lodging, mileage at the current state mileage rate) to all required state training sessions. In addition, the providers shall pay staff salaries and expenses for all required OSR trainings (up to 7 days), within 30 days of training and/or upon receipt of invoices from teachers.

IT Instructional Support Team

IT 1.1 First Class Pre-K Support Team

The Office of School Readiness will work closely with program sites to ensure the highest possible quality pre-k programs. The First Class Pre-K Regional Directors, Coaches and Monitors will work closely with directors, lead teachers and auxiliary teachers throughout the year and will be available for consultation regarding questions about the program; enrollment; approval of equipment, materials, and/or supplies requests; training needs; and other assistance.

All First Class Pre-K classrooms will be assigned a Coach and a Monitor. Coaches will support classroom teachers by providing assistance with adhering to the Classroom Guidelines. They will also connect teachers and administrators among First Class programs. Monitors will assist Regional Directors in ensuring programs are adhering to the Program Guidelines and funding compliance.

IT 1.2 First Class Pre-K Monitors

Monitors will work closely with Regional Directors. They will monitor and evaluate program progress during planned and random on-site visits throughout the year. They will provide guidance, support, and resources to ensure program quality.

IT 1.3 First Class Pre-K Coaches

Coaches will provide feedback, coaching and assessments through regular site visits. Evaluation data are important for the overall First Class Pre-K program and serves the purposes of continuous program improvement as well as measurement of progress toward goals. Coaches will work closely with classroom teachers to identify and track progress toward goals.

IT 1.4 Additional Support System for Instructional Strategies for Teachers (ASSIST) Team

The ASSIST Team provides a comprehensive support for teachers in settings that serve children ages 0-8 years of age. This support is provided by assessing the classroom environment, the teacher's philosophy of discipline, the impact of the classroom community and the specific needs of each child in the classroom. The ASSIST team can support teachers in all settings related to Early Childhood with a comprehensive knowledge of child development, early childhood education, trauma-informed practice, developmentally appropriate practice and critical brain development science. With these pieces, support can be given to meet the needs of individual classrooms, teachers, and children. When behaviors arise that may be challenging to the child, teacher, and other children in the setting, classrooms need supports that create a community and awareness to support the child with the behavior so the missing skills can be modeled and taught.

An awareness of the effects of trauma and toxic stress on the developing brain is also emphasized to help teachers understand that all behavior including challenging behavior is a form of communication. Children are not able to verbalize anxiety, stress, anger, frustration but do convey these feelings through behaviors. Reflecting with teachers as to the "why" of the behaviors brings solutions with permanent impact whereas a focus on controlling behaviors only brings short-term strategies with no real impact. This switch from "what's wrong with you?" to "what's happened to you?" is the basis for truly changing the trajectory that many young children find themselves on due to living in toxic stress or the effects of intergenerational trauma. Every child does not have trauma; however, every child benefits from trauma-informed practice.

This lens provides teachers an individualized lens of each child to meet them where they are and build the skills the child will need to be successful in school and life. Teachers may struggle with this lens, may have limited access to this information, and may struggle with how to apply it to the age group they serve. The ASSIST Team brings the information to the teacher and individualizes it to meet the needs of the teacher, children and their families. When challenging behaviors arise, the impact is far reaching and impacts not only the teacher and child, but also the larger classroom community and their families as well. Teachers may feel their position pushes them to teach "academics" however in early childhood education a strong foundation in social-emotional and opportunities to strength their executive functioning skills is the foundation that all learning will be based upon. This is also a focus of the ASSIST Team to support teachers in this notion as well by broadening the scope of what a teacher feels is their responsibility a child truly does receive an education that is developmentally appropriate and truly a strong start that meets not only the academic child but also the social-emotional child.

To ensure that the whole child is being addressed in the classroom, the DECA-P is used as a social emotional assessment to determine the child's need when behaviors arise. The parents and the teachers complete the assessment and a coach supports the teacher in implementing the results. This purpose of the assessment is to create strategies for the child so they will be successful in the classroom and build the social emotional skills needed for success. Recent research indicates that a child's development in the social emotional skills in early childhood are strong indicators of a child's future success into adulthood. When challenging behaviors arise, teachers may feel overwhelmed or unsure as to how to help the child. By using the assessment and the ASSIST team, not only are steps being taken to build a strong foundation of the child but also relieve stress on teachers.

DA Disciplinary Action for Non-Compliance with Office of School Readiness Regulations

Disciplinary action will be imposed on pre-k sites that ***DO NOT*** meet OSR Program and/or Classroom Guidelines and stipulations by prescribed dates given by OSR staff, including Regional Directors, Coaches, Monitors, and/or the OSR Director or Secretary of Early Childhood Education. Warnings, fines, and/or proration may occur for sites with noncompliance issues. Recommendations and stipulations will be documented and shared with each site by First Class Monitors during each site visit. Failure to comply with stipulations as mandated by the OSR Program Guidelines, OSR Classroom Guidelines and given by the Regional Director may result in suspension or termination as described herein.

DA 1.1 Suspension

Suspension Recommendation

The Regional Director will notify the program director, in writing, of his/her recommendation to suspend funding.

The suspension notice shall include:

1. The reason(s) for the proposed suspension;
2. The effective date of the proposed suspension; and
3. Information which states that the program has the opportunity to submit written material in opposition to the recommended suspension and/or request a hearing.

If a hearing is not requested, the hearing committee will meet within 15 days after the deadline for the program to submit written materials or request a hearing. The decision of the hearing committee regarding suspension of a site will be made within five business days after the conclusion of the informal hearing. The written decision of the hearing committee will be promptly transmitted via certified mail and electronic mail to the assigned monitor and program director.

Grounds for Immediate Suspension

First Class Pre-K programs that are suspended or placed on probation by DHR are automatically suspended by the Department of Early Childhood Education, Office of School Readiness. Funds are forfeited during the period of the suspension or probation. Funding is not automatically reinstated if the program's license is reinstated by DHR. OSR reserves its right to review the program upon reinstatement of the DHR license to determine whether to reinstate funding, continue the OSR suspension for a period of time or terminate funding.

No funds will be disbursed to a program during suspension proceedings. Fund disbursement will begin when the program is reinstated or back in good standing. The Department of Early Childhood Education reserves the right to relocate students and all classroom supplies and equipment during the suspension process.

If the program makes a written request for a hearing in response to a suspension recommendation, such a hearing will be scheduled

1. The Regional Director will notify the program of the date and time for the hearing.
2. The hearing committee will be composed of the Secretary of Early Childhood Education, OSR Director or designee, and the Regional Director.
3. If the program does not appear for the hearing, the hearing process will continue.
4. The hearing committee will determine the suspension status of the program.

The decision of the hearing committee regarding suspension of a site will be made within five business days after the conclusion of the hearing. The written decision of the hearing committee will be promptly transmitted via certified mail and electronic mail to the assigned monitor and program director.

DA 2 Termination of First Class Pre-K Program Sites

The Regional Director may recommend a site for termination. Funding may be terminated for any or all of the following reasons:

1. The program has misused or lost program funds;
2. The program is no longer a licensed center;
3. The program provides false data in submitted reports;
4. The program has failed to comply with the required guidelines and reporting requirements that are outlined in the OSR Program and/or Classroom Guidelines; or the program has failed to correct one or more deficiencies identified by the assigned monitor in an evaluation or documented during a site visit, in a timely manner.

Termination Recommendation

The Regional Director will notify the program, in writing, of his/her recommendation to terminate funding. Within five (5) days of the recommendation for termination, the Regional Director will contact the Director of OSR who will arrange a date and time for a formal hearing. A formal hearing will be scheduled within thirty (30) days of the recommendation for termination. If the program director does not appear for a formal hearing, the formal hearing process will continue. The OSR formal hearing committee may terminate funding. The decision of the formal hearing committee is final. No funds will be disbursed to a program during termination proceedings.

Grounds for Immediate Termination

The Secretary of Early Childhood Education may immediately terminate funding without a formal hearing in cases of child endangerment or gross negligence. Termination of pre-k sites are immediate when the facility and/or campus is found to pose safety risks to the children. Aid will be terminated and students will be removed from the facility.

Thereafter, all unused funds should be refunded to the Department of Early Childhood Education. Equipment, furniture, classroom equipment and supplies as well as playground equipment shall be returned to the Department if purchased within past the three (3) years, and grantee will incur the cost of removal of said items. Alternatively, the program can keep said items and refund cost of said items to the Department.

DA 2.1 Formal Hearing Regarding Termination

When a recommendation for termination of funding is made, the presiding officer (Secretary of Early Childhood Education) shall conduct a full and fair hearing, avoid delay, maintain order, and make a sufficient record of the facts and issues. To accomplish these ends, the presiding officer shall have all powers authorized by law and may make all procedural and evidentiary rulings necessary for the conduct of the hearing. The hearing shall be open to the public unless the presiding officer for cause shown, otherwise determines.

1. The formal hearing committee will be composed of the Secretary of Early Childhood Education, OSR Director or designee, and the Regional Director.

2. The Regional Director and program director are entitled to present their case by oral and/or documentary evidence, to submit rebuttal evidence and to conduct such examination and cross-examination as may be required for a full and true disclosure of all facts bearing on the issues. The issues shall be those stated in the filed notice.

3. The decision of the formal hearing committee regarding suspension or termination of funds will be based on evidence provided during the hearing process and made within five (5) business days after the conclusion of the formal hearing.

4. The written decision of the formal hearing committee will be promptly transmitted via certified mail to the Regional Director and program director.

If a decision is made to terminate, thereafter, all unused funds should be refunded to the Department of Early Childhood Education. Equipment, furniture, classroom equipment and supplies as well as playground equipment shall be returned to the Department if purchased within past the three (3) years, and the program will incur the cost of removal of said items. Alternatively, the program can keep said items and refund cost of said items to the Department.