

THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

First Class Pre-K
Issue Brief 7, July 2019

Disciplinary Infractions in Alabama Public Schools: First Class Pre-K Students have Lower Discipline Rates

Key Findings from this Study

- *Students who received First Class Pre-K have lower discipline rates.*
- *The discipline rate differences between students who received First Class Pre-K and those who did not are higher in middle school and high school.*

Background

The mission of the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education is to inspire, support, and deliver cohesive, comprehensive systems of high-quality education and care so that all Alabama children thrive and learn. Housed within the Department of Early Childhood Education, the Office of School Readiness administers Alabama's diverse-delivery, voluntary, high-quality, state-funded Pre-K program.

Classrooms are funded through a competitive grant process in which sites must meet specific quality assurances and abide by rigorous operating guidelines. Alabama's First Class Pre-K program has been awarded the highest quality rating by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for the past 12 years. The multi-disciplinary First Class Pre-K Research Evaluation Team – including faculty and staff from the UAB School of Public Health, UAB School of Education, and the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama – provides ongoing, rigorous assessment of the program's effectiveness.

Introduction

Research on First Class Pre-K in Alabama has shown that students who received those services have higher scores on educational assessments.¹ Behavioral factors can be equally important to student success in school and later in life. For example, prior research has indicated a strong connection between children's behavior and later school success.^{2,3} Research also finds a greater likelihood of staying in high school and going to college, less need for government assistance, and a reduction in crime rates for adults who had received pre-K services as children.⁴

The potential impact of early childhood education on the social-emotional learning of children has not been examined in Alabama. While longitudinal data are not yet available for adult outcomes in Alabama, comparisons between students who have been enrolled in First Class Pre-K and those who have not can be made using disciplinary records for students in Alabama public schools. These comparisons allow a glimpse of the potential impacts of the program on student behavior.

The purpose of this issue brief is to analyze disciplinary infraction records for students in grades 1 through 12 in

Alabama public schools and to identify any differences between groups of students who received First Class Pre-K and those who did not.

Methods

Data provided by the Alabama State Department of Education included records for 958,509 individual students enrolled over the three academic years 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017. Data included disciplinary records for the same period, with records for 537,573 infractions. These data provided the opportunity to compare students who had received First Class Pre-K with those who had not. What follows are comparisons using population statistics for students in Alabama public schools, representing a first glimpse of the patterns across the state.

These data included descriptions of infractions as well as the dispositions (punishments), which included the number of days suspended, if any, for each infraction, by in-school and out-of-school suspension types. The range of behaviors is broad, from various kinds of disobedience to criminal activity. For the purpose of this analysis, no distinction was made between types of infractions or their dispositions. The following analysis relies on whether students had infractions in grades 1 through 12 and excludes students in pre-K and Kindergarten, for which attendance is not mandatory. In 2014-2015, there were no 12th-grade students who had received First Class Pre-K.

Findings

Table 1 below shows the overall results for disciplinary infractions over the three-year time frame for all public school students in grades 1-12. As Table 1 indicates, students who received First Class Pre-K were about half as likely to have an infraction as those who did not receive First Class Pre-K.

Table 1: Disciplinary data for Alabama public school students

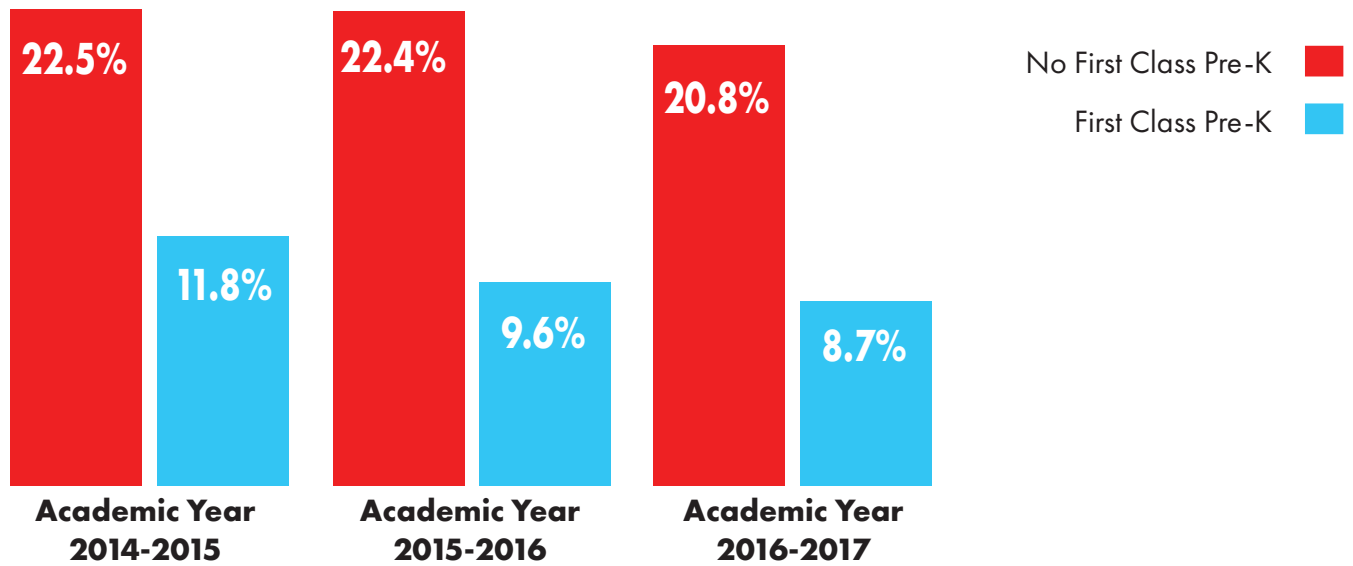
Grades 1-12	Academic Year 2014-2015		Academic Year 2015-2016		Academic Year 2016-2017	
	No First-Class Pre-K	First Class Pre-K	No First-Class Pre-K	First Class Pre-K	No First-Class Pre-K	First Class Pre-K
Students with Infractions	152,239	1,516	148,488	2,608	136,014	3,238
	22.5%	11.8%	22.4%	9.7%	20.8%	8.7%
Students without Infractions	523,183	11,376	513,501	24,419	517,818	34,049
	77.5%	88.2%	77.6%	90.3%	79.2%	91.3%
Total	675,422	12,892	661,989	27,027	653,832	37,287

The frequency with which students were involved in an infraction was relatively consistent from year to year, with a slight decline in the last two academic years – 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 – for both groups statewide.

1. Students who had First Class Pre-K are less likely to have a disciplinary infraction.

Chart 1 compares the percentage of students who had disciplinary infractions in two different sets of students: those who had received First Class Pre-K and those who had not, over a three-year period starting in the fall of 2014 and ending in the summer of 2017.

Chart 1: Percent of Students with Infractions in Grades 1-12



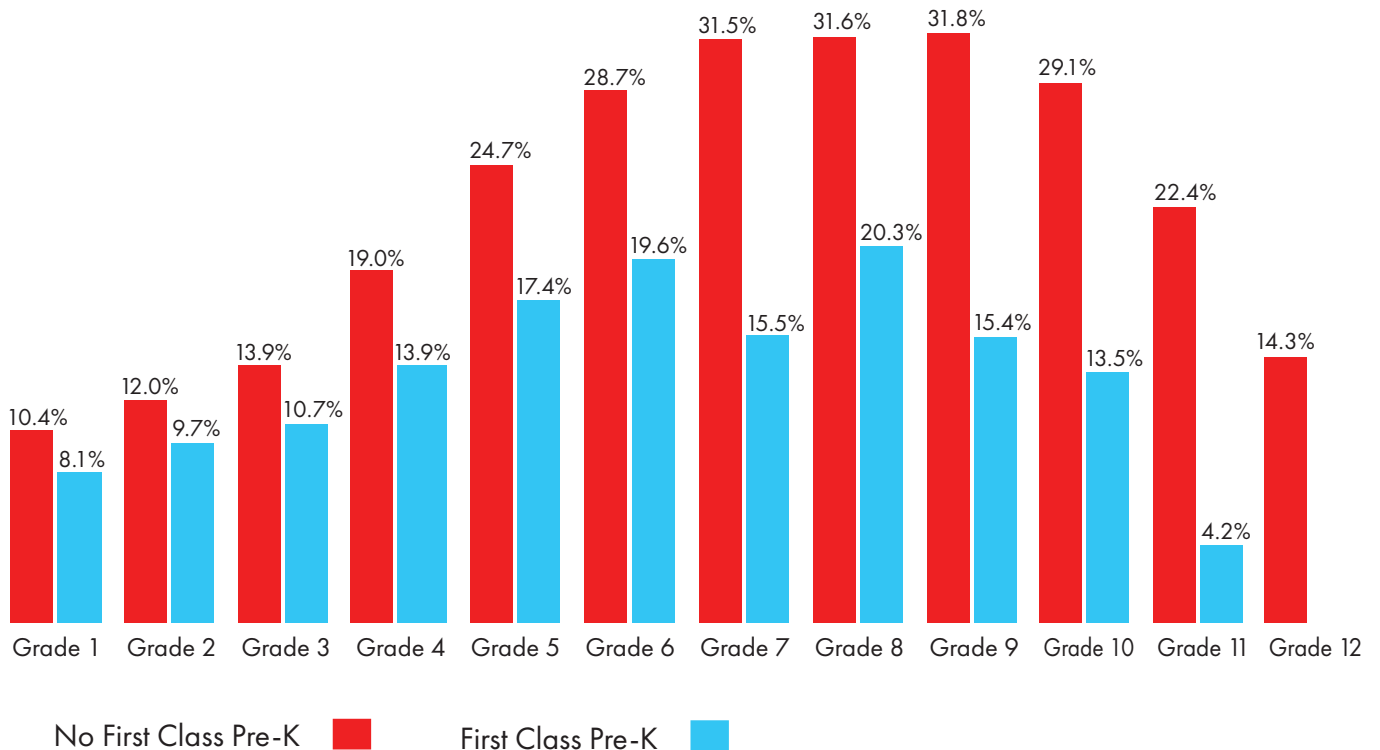
2. The discipline rate differences between students who received First Class Pre-K and those who did not are higher in middle school and high school.

Chart 2 depicts those contrasting rates of involvement in disciplinary issues across grades 1 to 12 in the 2014-2015 school year.

A general pattern has emerged where we see a relatively low percentage of students with infractions in the elementary grades, increasing through middle school and junior high school, peaking around the 9th grade, then dropping off in the later grades of high school.

As the rate of disciplinary actions rises, so does the rate difference between the First Class Pre-K students and No First Class Pre-K students. The divergence between the two sets of students is most pronounced in the upper grades, where the highest number of infractions occurs.

Chart 2: Percent of Students with Infractions: 2014-2015 School Year



The 9th grade is a difficult transition year for many students, and the percentage of No First Class Pre-K students with infractions peaks in the 9th grade. In the 2014-2015 school year, about 31.8 percent of 9th-grade students who did not participate in First Class Pre-K were involved in disciplinary incidents, while only 15.4 percent of students who received First Class Pre-K were cited for an infraction.

Charts 3 and 4 show additional snapshots of student infraction rates across grade levels in the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. In 2015-2016, 33.6 percent of No First Class Pre-K students had an infraction, compared to 21.4 percent of First Class Pre-K students. In the 2016-2017, 32.4 percent of No First Class Pre-K students had an infraction, compared to 16.7 percent of First Class Pre-K students.

Chart 3: Percent of Students with Infractions: 2015-2016 School Year

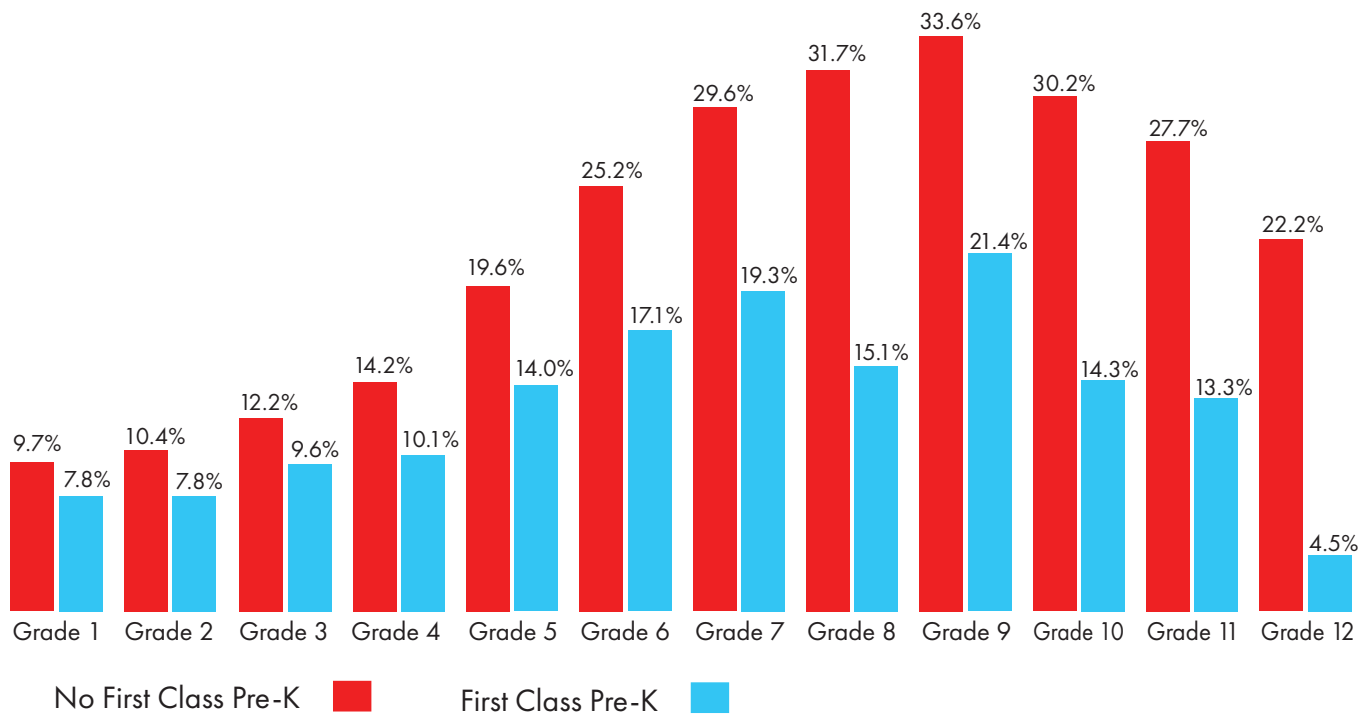
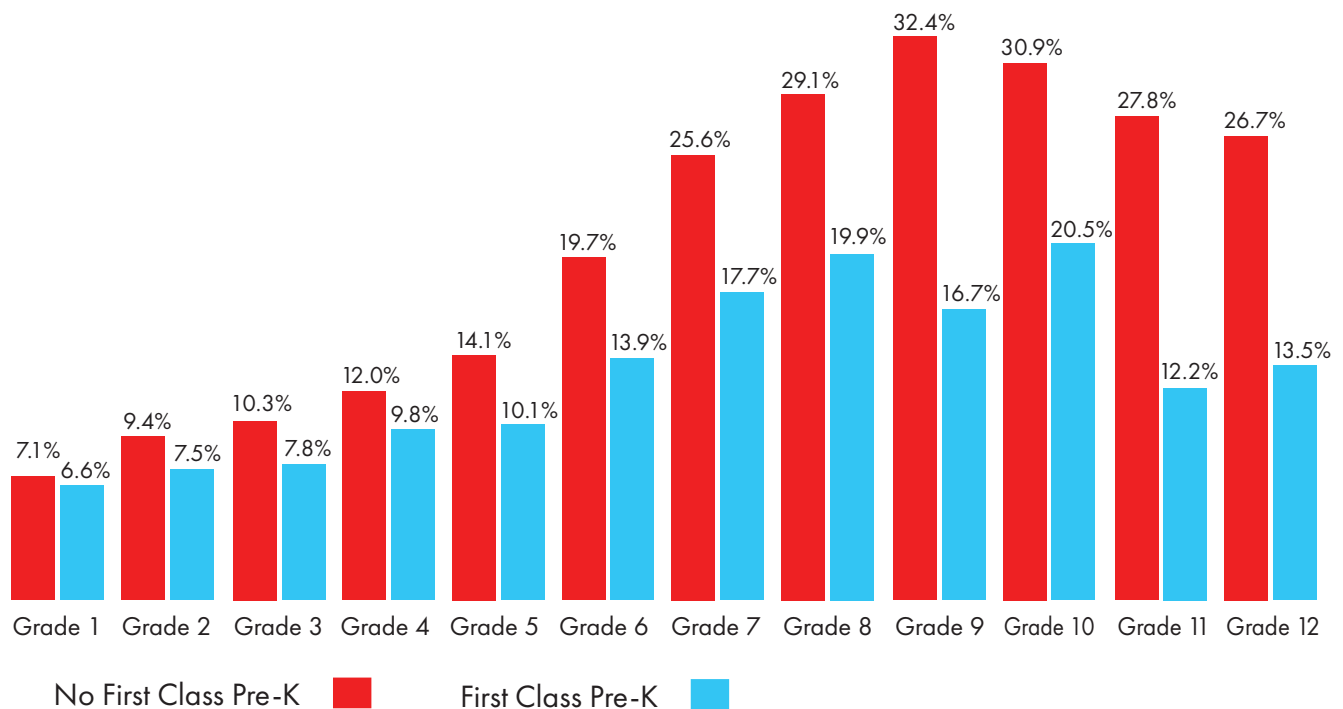


Chart 4: Percent of Students with Infractions: 2016-2017 School Year



The number of students who have participated in First Class Pre-K has increased over the years as the program has expanded, resulting in more students having received services in the lower grades than in the upper grades. As First Class Pre-K continues to expand, the number of students who received First Class Pre-K will increase in those upper grade levels.

Conclusion

The difference between students who received First Class Pre-K and students who did not is large and consistent over time. Across 13 cohorts of children, there were significant differences in behavioral infractions between children who received First Class Pre-K and those who did not. For cohorts of children who are now in middle and high school, there are large differences in behavioral infractions, with children who attended First Class Pre-K having far fewer behavioral concerns. For children in elementary grades, those receiving First Class Pre-K still had fewer behavioral infractions. Future data will support analysis for similar trends over time.

The magnitude of differences across all grades warrants consideration of First Class Pre-K as a tool in addressing student behavioral issues. Additional research – using other sampling methods, longitudinal analyses of cohorts, and analyses of student subgroups – may provide further insights for administrators and policy makers regarding the effectiveness of early childhood education in reducing behavioral issues in public schools in Alabama.

References:

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