

Advancing Student Success and Narrowing the Achievement Gap of Low Income Children by Aligning Educational Experiences to Create a Seamless Learning Continuum from Preschool to 3rd Grade

Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education
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Year 3 Pilot – School Year 2019 – 2020
Overall Summary Years 1-3 (2017-2018; 2018-2019; 2019-2020)
Evaluation Report

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P-3 Framework



LEADERSHIP

- Embrace the pre-k-3 early learning continuum
- Ensure developmentally appropriate practice
- Participate in a year long leadership academy and a community of practice

ASSESSMENT

- Ongoing, observation, standards based
- Include all domains of development: social emotional, language, physical, cognitive, literacy, mathematics social studies, science and technology

INSTRUCTION

- Align and coordinate standards
- Use consistent instructional approaches across grades
- Family engagement
- Horizontal and vertical team meetings
- Active Participatory Learning Approach/ project based
- Builds on the success of Alabama First Class Pre-K



Summary of Key Findings:

- The Alabama Preschool to Third Grade initiative (P-3) has expanded significantly in pilot year 3, serving more children in more schools and classrooms throughout the state – nearly quadrupling the reach compared to pilot year 1. In addition to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant, P-3 efforts have been reinforced through funding from the State Legislature and Governor Kay Ivey’s support as a key pillar of her Strong Start Strong Finish Initiative.
- Children in all grades showed significant improvements across all areas of development and school readiness based on Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. *(NOTE: Based on Year 2 performance; Year 3 data unavailable due to COVID-19.)*
 - Lower starting percentages of children meeting or exceeding widely held expectations at the higher grades support the need for a P-3 approach.
 - Consistent exit percentages in excess of 90% of children meeting or exceeding widely held expectations are reassuring and indicate across-grade success.
- Families, teachers, and leaders report growth in child academic performance, problem-solving skills, communication, and behavioral/social-emotional regulation along with decreased office referrals.
- Teachers and leaders both report professional growth in classroom and leadership skills, as well as job satisfaction and excitement in watching children be engaged in learning.
- The quality of teacher-child interactions was similar to national averages based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Alabama average was higher for the important dimension of Concept Development – shown to be associated with later student success in vocabulary, language, and math. P-3 classrooms also improved in quality on average from Fall (pre) to Spring (post) assessments across all domains. *(NOTE: Based on Year 2 performance; Year 3 data unavailable due to COVID-19.)*

Teacher Participant-Identified Needs:

- More/enhanced coaching, professional development, and observation opportunities to support the implementation of developmentally appropriate/active participatory learning approaches in the classroom, especially in the higher grades.
- Alignment of state educational standards, grading, and reporting requirements with student-led, participatory approaches.

Overall Grant Summary:

- A total of 93 administrators and state advisors participated in the annual Leadership Academy over the 3 years of the grant.
- A total of 231 classrooms in 12 counties were provided with funding to support full and authentic implementation of the Integrated Approach to Early Learning continuum over the 3 years of the grant (new and continuation awards).
- Across all three years of the grant, a total of 5,752 pre-K through 2nd grade children were provided with a research-based, developmentally appropriate assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD) to measure student achievement and success, and to guide instructional practices.

I. Project Overview

A high quality early education provides the foundation for student success in school. Having a seamless learning continuum from Pre-K to 3rd grade will align and integrate a comprehensive educational approach to student learning during the years when children have the greatest growth potential and ensure that children enter classrooms that promote their ongoing educational progress by building on what they have previously learned. In addition to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant, P-3 efforts have been reinforced through funding from the State Legislature and Governor Kay Ivey's support as a key pillar of her Strong Start Strong Finish Initiative.

Governor Kay Ivey's Strong Start, Strong Finish education initiative focuses on three stages of education: early childhood education, computer science in middle and high school, and workforce preparedness. With Governor Ivey's strong support for extending the First Class Pre-K (FCPK) principles and approaches into the K-3rd grade education system, the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education and the Alabama State Department of Education are working collaboratively to develop a Pre-K-3rd Strong Start Early Learning Collaborative. This initiative focuses on establishing a strong early learning foundation for the children of Alabama and will be accomplished through a comprehensive, systematic approach to high quality learning opportunities using the Pre-K-3rd framework and early learning continuum. The P-3 continuum surpasses the boundaries of preschool into the first few years of elementary school in order to produce a seamless learning experience for children from age four through third grade. The basic framework and three focus areas of the continuum are based on leadership, instruction, and assessment.

1. Leadership
 - a. Leaders embrace the Pre-K-3rd early learning continuum
 - b. Leaders ensure developmentally appropriate practices
 - c. Leaders provide personalized, blended learning environments
 - d. Leaders use measures to guide growth in student learning
 - e. Leaders build professional capacity across the early learning community
 - f. Leaders make schools a hub for Pre-K-3rd learning for families and communities
2. Instruction
 - a. Align and coordinate standards, curriculum, instructional practices, assessment, environments and professional development creating an incremental alignment plan for Pre-K-3rd
 - b. Use consistent, yet developmentally appropriate, instructional approaches across grades
 - c. Require horizontal and vertical team meetings
 - d. Use instructional coaches with early childhood learning experiences and credentials
 - e. Communicate proactively and involve parents, families, and the community
3. Assessment
 - a. Ongoing comprehensive system to include diagnostic, formative/progress monitoring, and summative assessments
 - b. Include all domains of development and learning: social, language, physical, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science and technology, and the arts

Two main strategies were undertaken to achieve grant goals:

1. Developing and delivering a Leadership Academy for elementary school principals and leaders serving children ages 4-8 years (Pre-K to 3rd Grade)
2. Providing grants to a subgroup of schools whose principals participated in the Leadership Academy to support the delivery of a coordinated and comprehensive high-quality early childhood continuum

The Department of Early Childhood Education awarded funds received from the Kellogg grant to the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) to support an Alabama Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy: Excelling Innovation in Leadership of Pre-K-3 Learning Communities. CLAS, in collaboration with the Department of Early Childhood Education and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), developed a high-quality professional learning and resource program to meet the needs of elementary principals serving children from ages 4 to 8, or Pre-K-3 in Alabama. The purpose of the Leadership Academy is to improve attitudes and knowledge regarding early childhood practices in education to assure incorporation of best practices.

Each year, participants in the Leadership Academy were invited to submit applications for grants that support the delivery of a coordinated and comprehensive high-quality early childhood continuum. The grants may be to support new classrooms, continued classrooms, or both. Also, funds may be used for teacher professional development and learning opportunities.

The Alabama Preschool to Third Grade initiative (P-3) has expanded significantly in pilot year 3, serving more children in more schools and classrooms throughout the state – almost quadrupling the reach compared to pilot year 1. In pilot year 3, Alabama P-3 Initiative Grants were awarded to support new classrooms and schools, as well as continue and expand pilot year 1 and 2 capacity. Taken together, the P-3 initiative in year 3 included 122 classrooms in 23 schools in 12 counties. This is an increase from the pilot year 1 reach of 35 classrooms in 7 schools in 9 counties. Through these Year 3 grants, a total of 3,151 Alabama Pre-K through 2nd grade children (up from 835 in pilot year 1) had opportunities to learn in classrooms enhanced with high quality, early childhood learning materials, coaching for teachers, and local leadership support to establish a strong foundation of early learning experiences that promote student achievement and success. These included 2,157 Kindergarten through 2nd graders (up from 636 in pilot year 1) and another 994 4-year-olds (up from 199 in pilot year 1) who received a high-quality preschool experience through First Class Pre-K classrooms located in these schools.

Alabama P-3 Initiative Classrooms by Year and Grade

County	School	2017-2018 Classrooms by Grade	2018-2019 Classrooms by Grade (continued and new classrooms)	2019-2020 Classrooms by Grade (continued and new classrooms)
Calhoun	Ohatchee Elementary		4 – Kindergarten	
Cleburne	Pleasant Grove Elementary	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First 2 – Second	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First 2 – Second
	Fruithurst Elementary		2 – Kindergarten 2 – First	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First
Coffee	Kinston	1 – Kindergarten 3 – First	2 – Kindergarten 1 – First 2 – Second	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First 2 – Second
	New Brockton Elementary	3 – Kindergarten 3 – First	4 – Kindergarten 3 – First 3 – Second	4 – Kindergarten 4 – First 4 – Second
	Zion Chapel School	3 – Kindergarten 3 – First 3 – Second	4 – Kindergarten 3 – First 3 – Second	3 – Kindergarten 3 – First 3 – Second
Covington	W.S. Harlan Elementary			1 – Kindergarten
Elmore	Wetumpka Kindergarten	3 – Kindergarten	6 – Kindergarten	10 – Kindergarten
Jackson	North Sand Mountain			2 – Kindergarten
	Skyline Elementary	2 – Kindergarten	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First 2 – Second
	Woodville High		2 – Kindergarten	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First
Lauderdale	University of North Alabama / Kilby Child Development Center			2 – Kindergarten
	Brooks Elementary			2 – Kindergarten
	Central High School			1 – Kindergarten
	Lexington High School			1 – Kindergarten
	Rogers High School			3 – Kindergarten
Marshall	Boaz Elementary			3 – Kindergarten

Mobile	Robert E. Lee Elementary		5 – Kindergarten 5 – First	6 – Kindergarten 5 – First
Montgomery	Brewbaker Primary			2 – Kindergarten
	Pike Road Elementary			9 – Kindergarten
Morgan	Barkley Bridge	3 – Kindergarten 4 – First	4 – Kindergarten 3 – First	3 – Kindergarten
St. Clair	Moody		5 – Kindergarten	11 – Kindergarten
	Odenville		1 – Kindergarten	8 – Kindergarten
Sumter	University Charter School			2 – Kindergarten 2 – First 2 – Second
Total Classrooms		35	74	122

The overarching goal of the project is to develop a seamless learning continuum from Pre-K through 3rd grade that will align and integrate a comprehensive educational approach to student learning.

Targeted goals focus on the three main areas of concentration: leadership, instruction, and assessment.

Goal 1. Provide the Early Childhood Education Leadership Academy annually to an additional two cohorts of 35 administrators and 12 state advisors (70 total administrators, 24 total state advisors).

Goal 2. Provide annual funding for 30 (60 total) pilot classrooms to support full and authentic implementation of the Integrated Approach to Early Learning continuum.

Goal 3. Provide 600 children annually (1,200 total) with a research-based, developmentally appropriate assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD) to measure student achievement and success, and to guide instructional practices.

Impact of COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, Alabama schools and First Class Pre-K sites transitioned to virtual learning in March, 2020. As a result, data related to child level outcomes and data to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher-child interactions in classrooms are not available for year 3 (2019-2020). Further, participants in the annual Leadership Academy presented their completed capstone projects virtually instead of in-person. Participants also faced challenges in managing the pressing needs of leading and supporting plans for the immediate transition to virtual learning, as well as longer-term planning efforts to assure equitable access to a high-quality educational program (digital access, virtual instruction methods, language access) and support staff and student safety.

II. Evaluation Results

A. Evaluation Plan

Evaluation of the Preschool to 3rd Grade Continuum is being completed by a subgroup of the First Class Pre-K Research Evaluation Team (led by the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health, along with and the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education, the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, and ThinkData Solutions). The research evaluation plan is a mixed methods approach that aligns strategies according to the three focus areas:

1. **Assessment:** Primary measure quantitative measure = Teaching Strategies GOLD
Primary qualitative method = Surveys with teachers and families
2. **Instruction:** Primary measure quantitative measure = Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
Primary qualitative method = Surveys with teachers
3. **Leadership:** Primary quantitative measure = Pre/post data from leadership academy
Primary qualitative method = Surveys with principal/director

Research evaluation aims are presented below.

Research Evaluation Aims

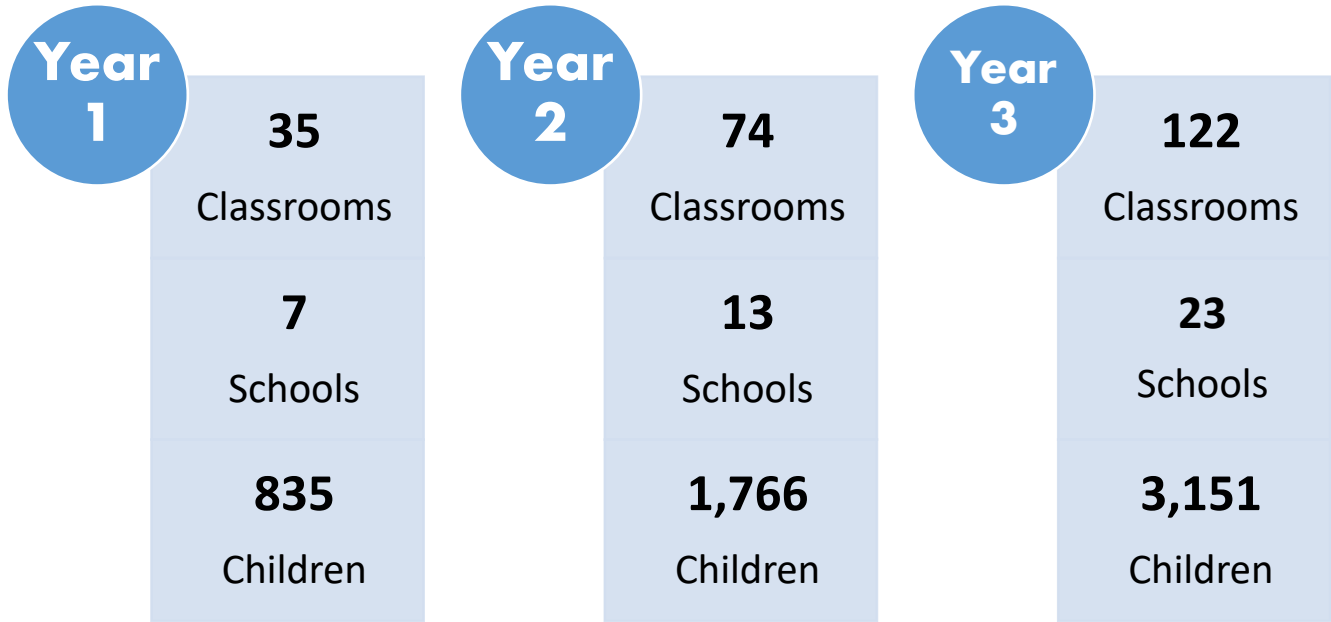
1. To describe the pilot development and implementation of a Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum in selected school systems in Alabama.
2. To gain knowledge and lessons learned to inform expansion of the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum model to additional school systems in Alabama.
3. To describe perceived benefits and challenges to implementing the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum model as experienced by project participants.
4. To assess academic outcomes and performance of children in Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum classrooms (standardized assessment, school system data, parent perception, teacher perception).
5. To assess classroom instructional practice for teachers in classrooms participating in the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum (quality; implementation of active participatory learning approaches; teacher perception).
6. To describe perceived changes in leadership skills and approaches related to implementing the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum model as experienced by project participants.
7. To assess subsequent differences in student academic outcomes between groups of children who attended school in Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum classrooms and those who attended schools implementing traditional approaches to learning.

B. Progress Toward Project Goals

Progress	Goal	Comments/ Activities
Partially Met	Goal 1. Provide the Early Childhood Education Leadership Academy annually to an additional two cohorts	A total of 93 administrators and state advisors participated in an annual Leadership Academy over the 3 years of the grant. The annual breakdown was as follows:

	of 35 administrators and 12 state advisors (70 total administrators, 24 total state advisors).	<p>Year 1: 29 administrators and advisors</p> <p>Year 2: 26 administrators; 7 advisors.</p> <p>Year 3: 24 administrators; 7 advisors</p>
Exceeded	<p>Goal 2. Provide annual funding for 30 (60 total) pilot classrooms to support full and authentic implementation of the Integrated Approach to Early Learning continuum.</p>	<p>A total of 231 classrooms were provided with funding to support full and authentic implementation of the Integrated Approach to Early Learning continuum over the 3 years of the grant (new and continuation awards).</p> <p>Year 1: 35 classrooms in 7 schools in 9 counties</p> <p>Year 2: 74 classrooms in 13 schools in 9 counties</p> <p>Year 3: 122 classrooms in 23 schools in 12 counties</p>
Exceeded	<p>Goal 3. Provide 600 children annually (1,200 total) with a research-based, developmentally appropriate assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD) to measure student achievement and success, and to guide instructional practices.</p>	<p>Across all three years of the grant, a total of 5,752 pre-K through 2nd grade children were provided with a research-based, developmentally appropriate assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD) to measure student achievement and success, and to guide instructional practices.</p> <p>Year 1: 835 total children (636 children in K-2nd grade and 199 4-year-olds in First Class Pre-K classrooms)</p> <p>Year 2: 1,766 total children (1,323 children in K-2nd grade and 443 4-year-olds were served in First Class Pre-K classrooms)</p> <p>Year 3: 3,151 total children (2,157 children in K-2nd grade and 994 4-year-olds in in First Class Pre-K classrooms)</p>

Alabama Preschool to 3rd Grade Continuum: At a Glance



C. Results and Outcomes

Across all three years of the grant, a **total of 5,752 pre-K through 2nd grade children** were provided with a research-based, developmentally appropriate assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD) to measure student achievement and success, and to guide instructional practices. Further, a total of **231 classrooms in 12 counties** were provided with funding to support full and authentic implementation of the Integrated Approach to Early Learning continuum over the 3 years of the grant (new and continuation awards).

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and subsequent transition to virtual learning, data related to child level outcomes and data to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher-child interactions in classrooms are not available for year 3 (2019-2020). The analyses presented in the *Quantitative Results* subsection (1. Assessment and 2. Instruction) of this section are based on the performance of children served in year 2 (2018-2019) of the grant, as well teacher-child interaction measures in those classrooms.

A total of 1,323 student in Kindergarten through 2nd grades and 443 4-year-olds in First Class Pre-K were in classrooms participating in the P-3 Pilot during the 2018-2019 school year. As shown in the table below, demographics were similar across the group with higher percentages of Black and Other race and lower percentages of Hispanic ethnicity children in First Class Pre-K classrooms compared to K-2nd grade classrooms. Larger differences were noted in percentages of children who received free or reduced lunch, a proxy measure for low income, with First Class Pre-K classrooms having nearly 5 times the percentage of children receiving free or reduced lunch. First Class Pre-K classrooms also included slightly lower percentages of children who had Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Only 4 schools included 2nd grade classrooms in P-3 Pilot year 2. No schools included 3rd grade classrooms.

Students in P-3 Classrooms: First Class Pre-K and K-2nd Grade

Characteristic	First Class Pre-K (n=443)		K-2 nd Grade (n=1,323)	
	n	%	n	%
Grade				
Kindergarten	--	--	713	53.9
1 st Grade			421	31.8
2 nd Grade*			189	14.3
Gender				
Male	225	50.8	653	50.6
Female	218	49.2	670	49.4
Race**				
Black	36	8.1	55	4.2
White	363	81.9	1,036	78.3
Other	30	6.8	32	2.4
Ethnicity**				
Hispanic	10	2.3	61	4.6
Not Hispanic	433	97.7	1,240	93.7
Has IEP	11	2.5	52	3.9
Gets Free or Reduced Lunch	138	31.1	80	6.0

Quantitative Results

1. Assessment

Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD)¹ is an ongoing, observation-based, research-validated assessment system. Grounded in current research related to child development and learning, the assessment includes 38 objectives across six domains of development (social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and math) that are associated with school success based on school readiness standards.

Students are assessed at entry (Fall), midpoint (Winter), and exit (Spring) of the preschool year, with scores compared to widely held expectations (WHE) for children of their age and grade as provided by TS GOLD for each time point. Results are typically dichotomized to “below expectations” and “meets or exceeds expectations.” Fall and Spring checkpoint data were compared for each child in order to assure equal comparison of children with both an entry/pre assessment and exit/post assessment.

TS GOLD also provides an assessment of Kindergarten readiness by domain based on selected items. Kindergarten readiness is assessed for 4-year-olds in First Class Pre-K classrooms at the Spring checkpoint (exit) and for Kindergartners at the Fall checkpoint (entry).

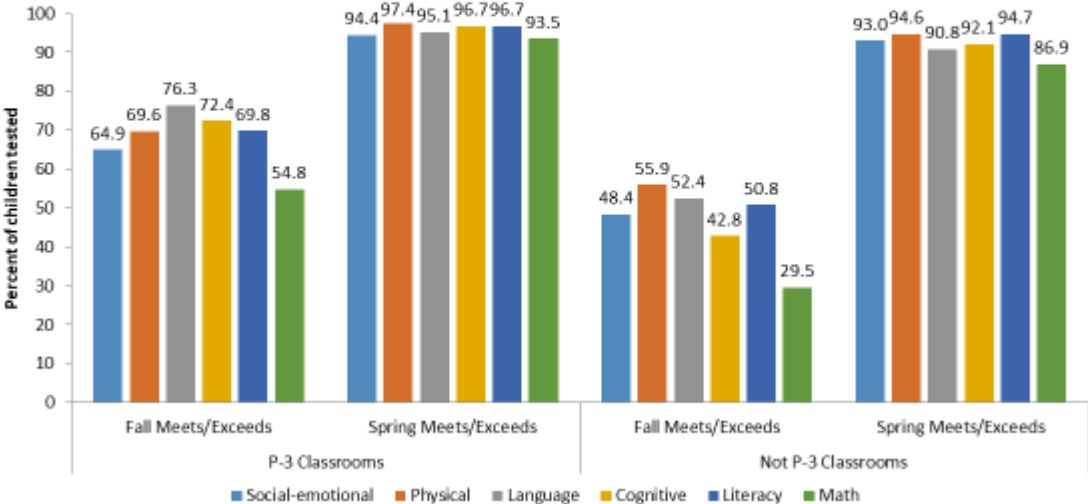
a. Meeting/Exceeding Widely Held Expectations (WHE): First Class Pre-K – P-3 vs. Non P-3 Classrooms

The chart below presents performance for 4-year-old children in First Class Pre-K classrooms, comparing classrooms that participated in the P-3 Pilot to all other First Class Pre-K classrooms. For each developmental domain, children in First Class Pre-K classrooms that were part of the P-3 Pilot had higher

percentages of meeting/exceeding WHE at the entry assessment (Fall) compared to non-P-3 Pilot First Class Pre-K classrooms. However, by the exit checkpoint (Spring) results were similar between the groups, with a trend toward slightly higher performance for the P-3 Pilot classrooms. More than 90% of children met or exceeded WHE for 4-year-olds at First Class Pre-K exit for all domains (except math for non-P-3 Pilot classrooms).

Performance Compared to Widely-Held Expectations, FCPK 2018/2019 (Teaching Strategies GOLD)

Classrooms that were a part of the P-3 Pilot started with higher percentages of Meets/Exceeds in Fall compared to classrooms that were not part of the P-3 Pilot, but all had similar percentages in Spring.



b. Meeting/Exceeding Widely Held Expectations (WHE): P-3 Pilot Classrooms

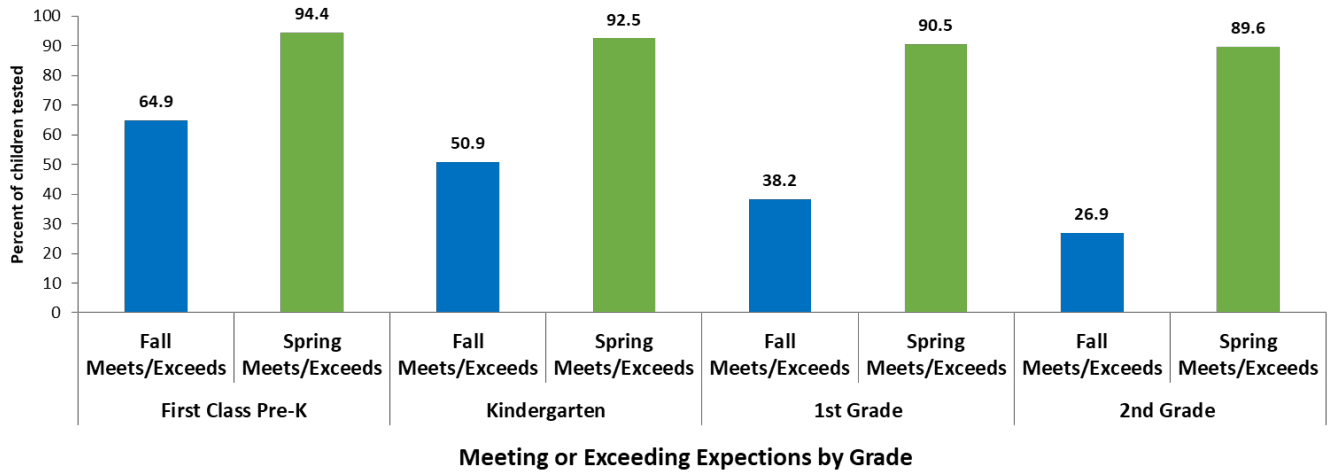
The charts below present performance for children in classrooms participating in the P-3 Pilot, including First Class Pre-K through 2nd Grades. Based on TS GOLD assessment at school year entry in Fall 2018, in general, the percentage of children meeting or exceeding WHE for their age tended to be lower as the grade level increased and this trend was consistent across all six domains of development. At school entry, the range of percent of children meeting or exceeding WHE was broader for children in these older grades, with significantly lower performance compared to 4-year-old children in the First Class Pre-K classrooms participating in the P-3 Pilot. These lower starting percentages observed in older grades support the need for the expansion of the P-3 approach.

The lowest performance at Fall 2018 entry was observed in 1st and 2nd grades for math, literacy, cognitive, and language. Two domains – math and language – saw no children (0%) meeting or exceeding at 2nd grade and only 7.6% for literacy. (Note that the second grade sample was small – 189 children in 8 classrooms within 3 schools.)

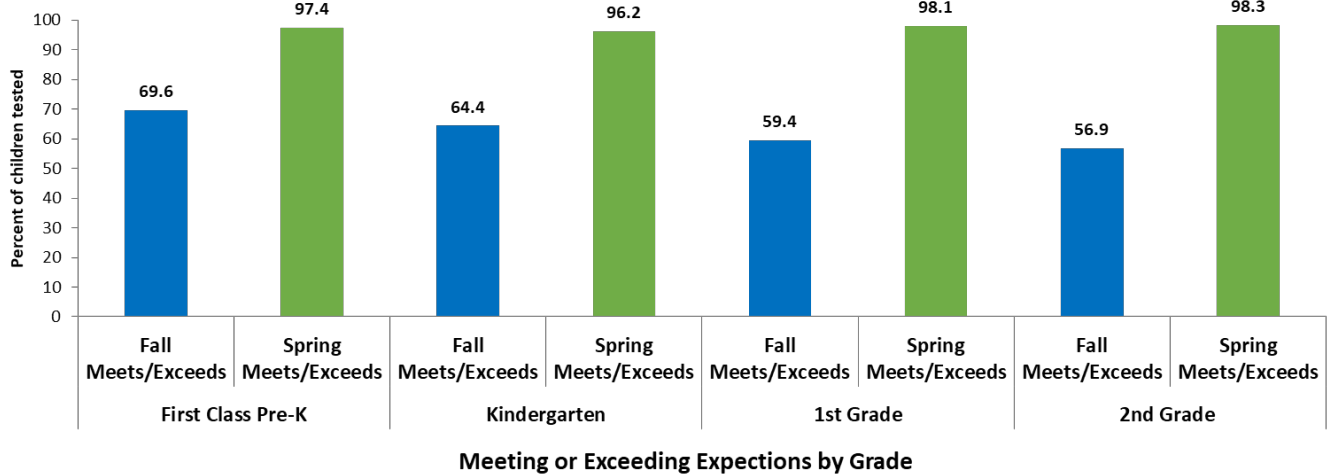
After completing the year, significant gains were achieved across all grades and in all domains as measured by the Spring 2019 checkpoint, with the majority of children (82.0%-98.3%) meeting or

exceeding WHE for their respective ages. The lowest performance overall and for all grades was observed for math at both Fall and Spring checkpoints.

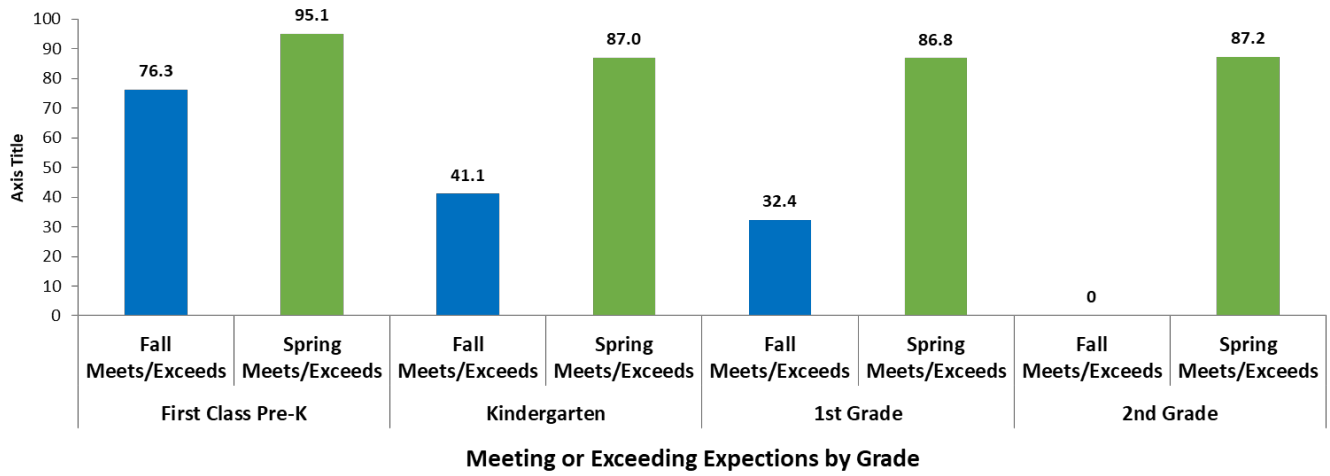
**Social-Emotional Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)**



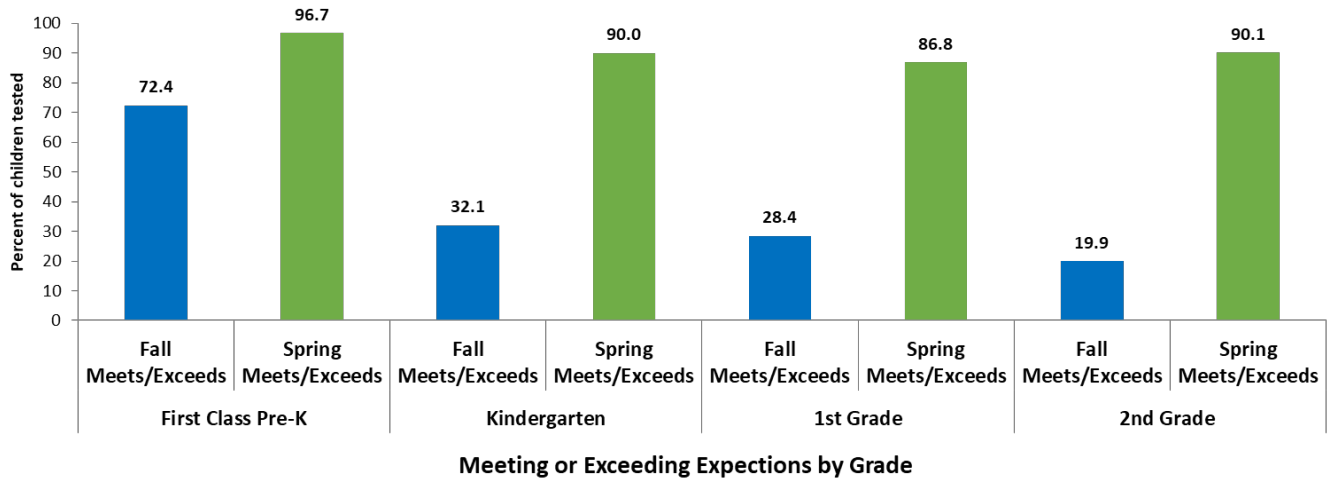
**Physical Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)**



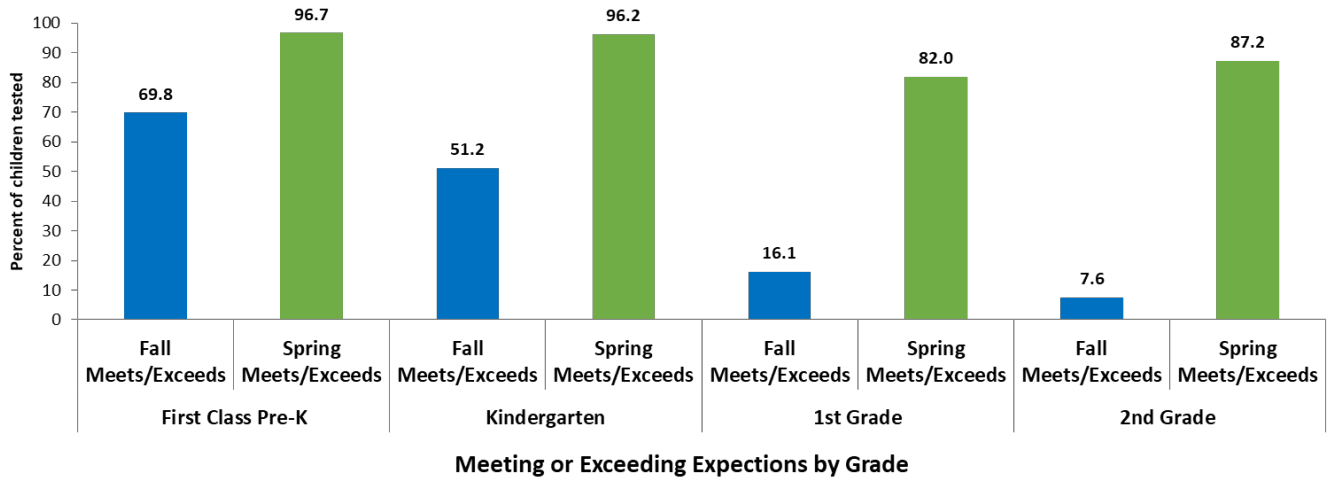
**Language Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)**



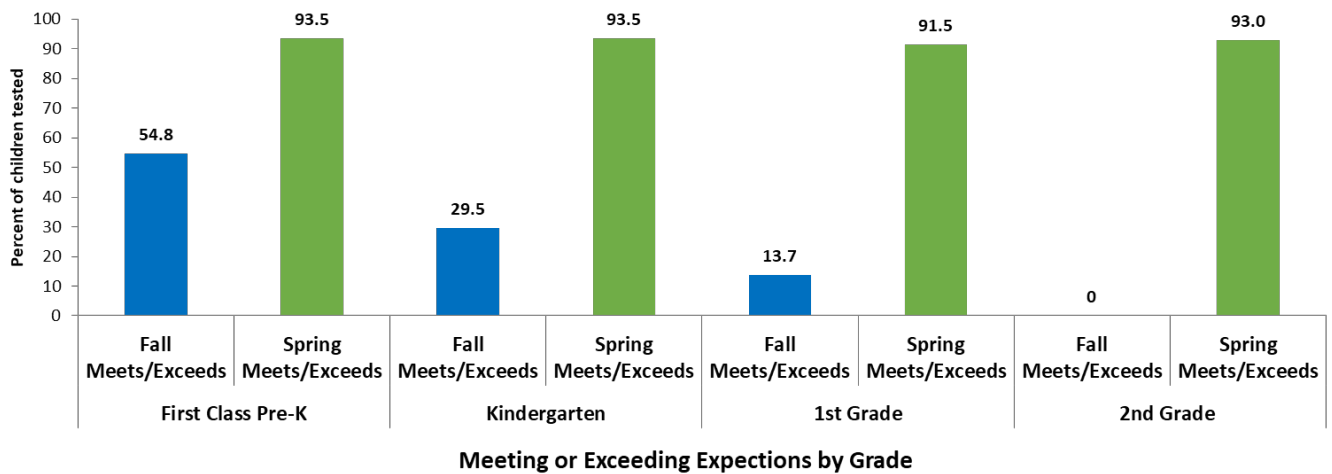
**Cognitive Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)**



Literacy Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)



Math Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)



The chart below displays the percentage point increases in children meeting or exceeding WHE between the Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 checkpoints by domain for each grade. The magnitude of these gains was larger for children in older grades. At each grade, the largest increases were observed in the math domain, ranging from a 38.7 percentage point increase for 4-year-olds in First Class Pre-K to a 93.0 percentage point increase for 2nd grade. The observed large gains for math skills is an important finding as research suggests early math skills not only predict math achievement through high school, but also are a better predictor of later reading achievement than even early reading skills. Large percentage point increases were also observed for language, literacy, cognitive, and social-emotional domains.

Percentage Point Increases by Domain (Fall 2018 to Spring 2019), Teaching Strategies GOLD				
	First Class Pre-K	Kindergarten	1st Grade	2nd Grade
Social-Emotional	29.5	41.6	52.3	62.7
Physical	27.8	31.8	38.7	41.4
Language	18.8	45.9	54.4	87.2
Cognitive	24.3	57.9	58.4	70.2
Literacy	26.9	45.0	65.9	79.6
Math	38.7	64.0	77.8	93.0

2. Instruction

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)² is an evidence-based tool for defining and measuring effective teacher-child interactions in classrooms. The tool includes 10 dimensions that are rated by a trained external observer using a 7-point scale, from low to high. In general, higher scores indicate better teacher-child interactions for all dimensions. The one exception is the negative climate dimension, for which lower scores are desirable. The 10 CLASS dimensions are aggregated into three domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.

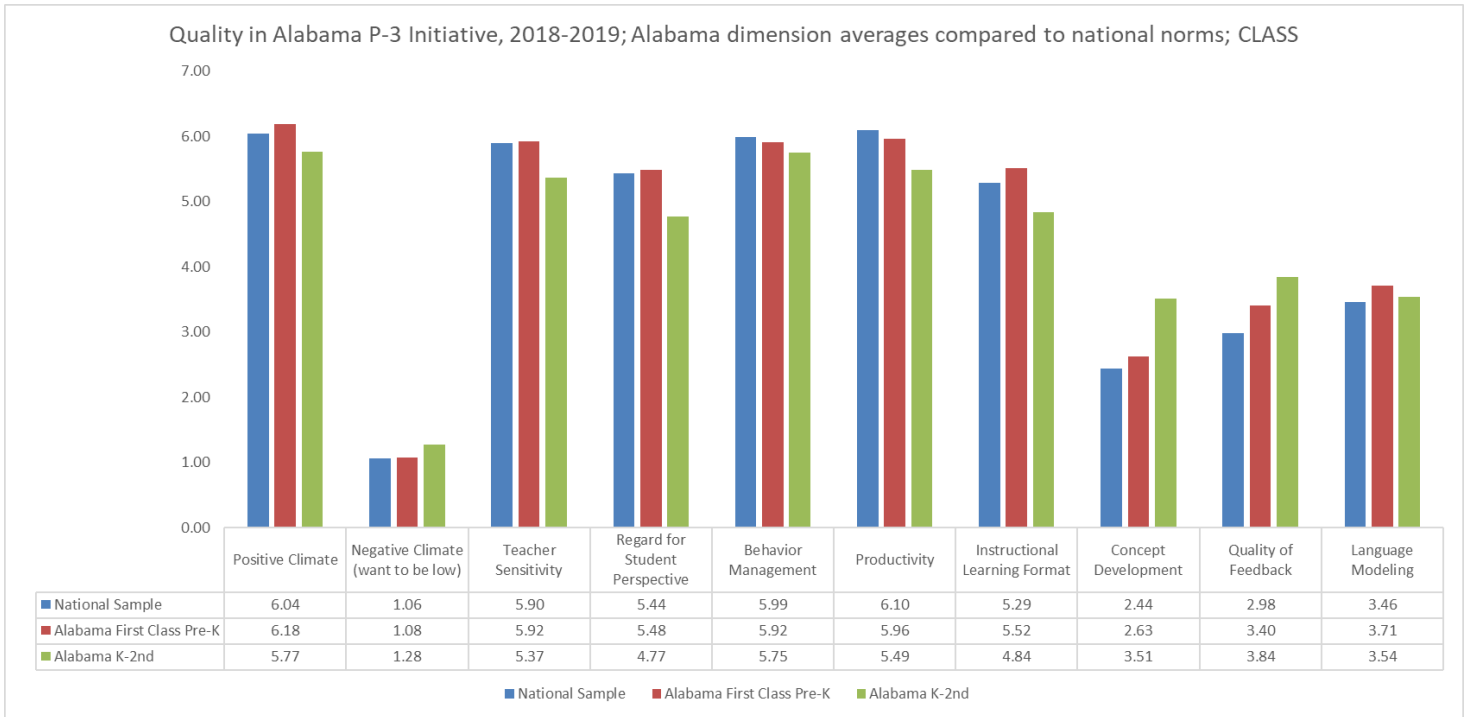
- Emotional Support assesses the degree to which teachers establish and promote a positive climate in their classroom. (Higher levels of emotional support have been shown to be associated with social competence in Kindergarten and growth in reading and math achievement from Kindergarten to 5th grade)³⁻⁴
- Classroom Organization assesses classroom routines and procedures related to the organization and management of children's behavior, time, and attention in the classroom. (Higher levels of classroom organization have been shown to be associated with gains in literacy in 1st Grade).⁵
- Instructional Support assesses the ways in which teachers implement the curriculum to effectively promote cognitive and language development. (Higher levels of instructional support have been shown to be associated with gains in pre-reading and math skills in preschool).⁶

a. Classroom Quality by Dimension

The chart below presents average CLASS scores by dimension for Alabama First Class Pre-K and Kindergarten-2nd grade classrooms in the P-3 Pilot. The Alabama averages are compared to national averages provided for the 2017-2018 Head Start grantees.⁷ Though these national averages are based upon 4-year-olds in Head Start classrooms, they are the best available comparisons as no national scores have been published at this time for classrooms of children in older grades.

For each dimension, Alabama averages were similar to national averages, with Alabama First Class Pre-K classrooms performing slightly better compared to K-2nd grade classrooms, not an unexpected finding given that the Pre-K classrooms have been established for a longer period of time and teachers have had more professional development and coaching related to developmentally appropriate practice. Further, Alabama First Class Pre-K classrooms exceeded national averages for 7 of 10 dimensions, including the critically important dimension of concept development. This is an important finding as previous research suggests that higher levels of concept development were beneficial to student outcome when teachers

had even moderate levels of emotional support and classroom organization domains.⁸ Alabama K-2nd grade P-3 classrooms exceeding national averages for 3 of 10 dimensions, again including concept development and also quality of feedback and language modeling. In fact, Alabama K-2nd grade P-3 classrooms even outperformed First Class Pre-K classrooms for these three domains.

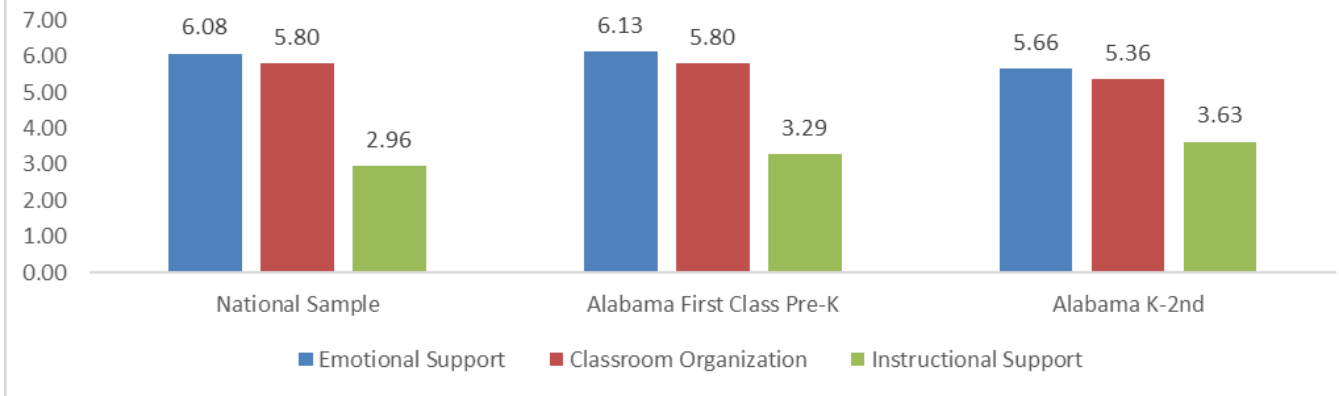


b. Classroom Quality by Domain

The chart below presents average CLASS scores by domain for Alabama First Class Pre-K and Kindergarten-2nd grade classrooms in the P-3 Pilot. Once again, Alabama averages are compared to national averages provided for the 2017-2018 Head Start grantees.⁷

Alabama averages were similar to national averages, though First Class Pre-K P-3 classrooms matched or exceeded national averages across all three domains and Alabama K-2nd grade P-3 classrooms exceeded national averages for instructional support. Previous research suggests that nationally, students are exposed to moderate to high levels of emotional support and classroom organization, yet lower levels of instructional support.⁹ Based on the 7-point CLASS scale, quality is divided into low (1-2), moderate (3-5), and high (6-7).¹⁰ Alabama averages indicate that all children in P-3 classrooms are in moderate to high quality settings. Prior research has found that as long as the scores are in the 5-7 range for emotional support, students on average improve and have better social outcomes.¹¹ Alabama’s higher than national average performance in the instructional support domain is an important finding given the previous discussion of the benefits of higher levels of concept development (a dimension of the instructional support domain).^{8, 11}

Quality in Alabama P-3 Initiative, 2018-2019; Alabama domain averages compared to national norms; CLASS



c. Changes in Classroom Quality: Fall 2018 (pre) to Spring 2019 (post)

The following table displays average changes in quality of the classroom setting between pre (Fall 2018) and post (Spring 2019) CLASS assessments. It is anticipated that quality will improve through professional development and coaching during the year. Increases were noted for 8 of 10 dimensions for First Class Pre-K classrooms and for all 10 in K-2nd grade classrooms. Increases were also noted for all domains across both types of classrooms. These are important findings, suggesting benefits to the quality of the classroom environment, likely related to professional development and coaching.

Alabama P-3 Initiative, 2018-2019; Classroom Quality, Pre (Fall 2018) to Post (Spring 2019) Comparison; CLASS

Domain	Dimension	Alabama First Class Pre-K		Alabama K-2nd	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Emotional Support	Positive Climate	6.20	6.17	5.47	6.08
	Negative Climate (want to be low)	1.12	1.03	1.29	1.27
	Teacher Sensitivity	5.89	5.94	5.11	5.63
	Regard for Student Perspective	5.30	5.67	4.41	5.13
Classroom Organization	Behavior Management	5.97	5.86	5.54	5.96
	Productivity	5.92	6.00	5.25	5.72
	Instructional Learning Format	5.37	5.67	4.54	5.14
Instructional Support	Concept Development	2.45	2.81	3.20	3.83
	Quality of Feedback	3.40	3.86	3.37	4.32
	Language Modeling	3.47	3.94	3.03	4.05
	Emotional Support	6.07	6.19	5.42	5.89
	Classroom Organization	5.76	5.84	5.11	5.61
	Instructional Support	3.05	3.54	3.20	4.06

3. Leadership

The primary project strategy focused on leadership is a Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy, facilitated in partnership with Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) and National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and based on the six leadership competencies identified in a 2014 NAESP white paper “Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice.”

A total of 93 administrators and state advisors participated in the annual Leadership Academy over the 3 years of the grant. The annual breakdown was as follows:

- Year 1: 29 administrators and advisors
- Year 2: 26 administrators; 7 advisors.
- Year 3: 24 administrators; 7 advisors

Due to COVID-19, pre and post self-assessment data are unavailable for Year 3. However, the chart below provides analyses based on the Year 2 Leadership Academy.

Based on pre and post testing (before and after participation in the Leadership Academy), participants reported statistically significant growth on each of the six NAESP Pre-K-3 leadership competencies. Further, advisors also reported statistically significant growth across the 6 competencies for the participants assigned to them during the Academy.

Average Participant and Advisor Ratings of Knowledge and Skills by NAESP Leadership Competency, Before and After Participation in Leadership Academy (1-6 scale, 1=low-6=high), Alabama P-3 Initiative

Competency	Participant Rating		Advisor Rating	
	Before/Pre	After/Post	Before/Pre	After/Post
1: Embrace the Pre-K-3 early learning continuum	2.5	5.0	3.1	5.4
2: Ensure developmentally appropriate teaching	3.0	5.1	2.4	5.0
3: Provide personalized learning environments	3.2	5.1	2.6	5.1
4: Use multiple measures of assessment to guide student learning growth	3.4	5.0	2.7	4.7
5: Build professional learning capacity across the learning community	3.3	5.2	3.1	5.6
6: Make schools the hub of Pre-K-3 learning for families and communities	3.2	4.8	3.1	5.0

*All differences are statistically significant based on paired t-test.

Qualitative Results

To supplement quantitative results, surveys were developed for P-3 classroom teachers and families of children in P-3 classrooms. Both surveys were provided in electronic format. Highlighted results are discussed below. Responses and response rates could potentially have been impacted by COVID-19 given the timing for when the surveys were launched and active. Based on response numbers and rates, findings from the teacher survey may be considered representative of the experiences of teachers and leaders who participated in the P-3 Pilot project. However, family survey findings should be considered as trends that are helpful for planning purposes but not necessarily representative of the experiences of all families of children in P-3 classrooms.

1. Teacher Surveys (n=83)

A. Perceptions

- Most teachers (92%) agreed (somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) with the following statement: “An active participatory learning approach fits with the way I believe children of this age learn best.”
- Teachers expressed a belief that most of the 14 areas of learning presented were best addressed through active participatory approaches vs. traditional direct instructional practices. Teachers were more evenly divided in their perceptions of the best approach for literacy/pre-literacy/reading skills.
 - Traditional direct instructional approaches were favored by 50.0% of teachers.
 - Active participatory approaches were favored by 36.8% of teachers.
 - The remaining 10.5% stated there were no differences in the learning between the two approaches for did not know/were not sure (2.6%).
 - One teacher stated: “As a second grade teacher, everything but literacy is very easy to apply to P3 practices. As the pressures of testing arise in 2nd grade, traditional learning is more effective in those literacy skills. But I see the importance of P3 in all other skills.”

	Better addressed through traditional direct instructional practices and approaches to learning	No differences	Better addressed through active participatory approaches to learning
Literacy/Pre-Literacy and Reading Skills: letters, sounds, words, vocabulary, spelling, words	√		√
Math/Pre-Math Skills: shapes, numbers, counting, arithmetic			√
Language/Communication: understanding and speaking			√
Science and Technology Skills			√
Motivation to learn, receptiveness to learning, engagement in the learning process			√
Wanting to come to school			√
Problem-solving, making decisions			√
Positive ways of dealing with conflict; controlling emotions and behaviors			√
Interacting with other children			√
Interacting with adults			√

Self-Care Skill Management: managing clothes and jacket, buttoning and zipping, eating/feeding self, hanging up backpack			√
Fine Motor Skills: using small muscles of the hand; drawing, writing, cutting			√
Gross Motor Skills: moving large muscles; walking, pedaling, climbing, running, jumping, using stairs			√

B. Progress and Improvements

- Teachers described positive differences observed in how children in their P-3 classroom(s) interacted with each other and learned, which they attributed to the active participatory learning approaches implemented as a part of the P-3 Pilot project.
 - Improved student engagement, participation in learning, and eagerness to learn
 - Increased student interaction, language development, and vocabulary
 - Growth in social emotional skills, problem-solving, and conflict resolution
 - Student confidence and creativity
 - Fewer behavioral problems

Selected quotes:

<i>“My children are eager to learn, write, read, play math games... because they WANT to-not because they have to or because the curriculum/pacing guide dictates our day. My children are much more independent and have many more social skills than in years past.”</i>
<i>“I believe my students are better at communicating with others because they have more “free time” during centers to communicate with their peers and myself. They also get along with other better and have better problem-solving skills.”</i>
<i>“I feel like our problem-solving skills are much better, they are able to play in a group with less arguments. I feel that the children are more creative and have a much bigger vocabulary.”</i>
<i>“I believe that students are better at problem solving and managing behavior as a result of P3.”</i>

- Teachers reported extensive professional growth as a result of participation in the P-3 Pilot project.
 - Most notable areas of growth related to:
 - Classroom management
 - Teacher-child interactions
 - Knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice
 - Instructional practices incorporating active participatory learning approaches

C. Successes

- Teachers described successes related to their participation in the P-3 Pilot. Successes were divided into the following themes:
 - Student engagement and motivation for learning
 - Student learning – overall improvements, including those who have learning difficulties, Individualized Education Programs, children who are shy, children with language delays, and children who are English Language Learners
 - Students working together; social-emotional learning/social development
 - Student problem-solving
 - Children learning at their own pace; individualized learning approaches
 - Teacher job satisfaction, enthusiasm, and growth of skills

Selected quotes:

<i>"I had several students with speech and language delays blossom with the support of active participatory learning."</i>
<i>"The children in my classroom were very diverse in their abilities. I believe the biggest success of the year was not just seeing them demonstrate new knowledge of skills, but show the empathy and kindness and begin to really seek the best interest of another child."</i>
<i>"The biggest success is the students' attitudes about learning are more positive."</i>
<i>"Students come to school excited and ready to learn!"</i>
<i>"I was favorable of the P3 Initiative because I know that children are natural born learners and they learn best through play and through things that are of interest to them. I want to teach 'children,' not a curriculum or a pacing guide. I want to instill a love of learning in children and create children who are seeking wisdom as they grow."</i>
<i>"We have so many students with different backgrounds. This allows us to meet each student where they are."</i>
<i>"I can tell a difference in my students' happiness and their willingness/eagerness to learn. I am a much happier teacher as well."</i>
<i>"Students that had repeated K [indergarten] and still came to me not knowing letters or sounds are now reading."</i>

D. Challenges

- Teachers described challenges related to their participation in the P-3 Pilot. Challenges were divided into the following themes, listed in order of most to least common major theme:
 - Teaching Strategies GOLD concerns (insufficient training, learning to document, time involved to collect and document data, alignment with other assessment and grading requirements)
 - Grading policies; alignment of strategies and standards with other assessments and school/district/state mandates
 - Perceived need to teach from two philosophies or integrate two approaches
 - Time to implement P3 approaches and other school/district requirements and mandates for specific tools, assessments, programs, and curricula; balancing these requirements
 - Time management for planning and implementation

E. Additional Support Needs

Teachers and leaders described additional support needs as follows:

- Opportunities to watch implementation in other classrooms, especially with more seasoned teachers who have been successful and can mentor in use of GOLD, Creative Curriculum, documentation, and incorporation of approach
- Complementary alignment of assessments, grading, and approaches (Teaching Strategies GOLD and other district mandated assessments, objectives more specifically targeted to grade, competing philosophies, grading requirements)
- Addition of a classroom aide or para-professional to assist with implementation and documentation; smaller or capped classroom sizes
- Curriculum (most notably requested by teachers in higher grades)
- More time overall (to document and implement)
- More coaching supports on checkpoints, documentation, and implementation in general
- More resources (money for classrooms, materials, texts, supplies)
- More professional development and access to materials such as Conscious Discipline, conferences, magazines, and workshops

2. Family Survey (n=185)

A. Awareness, Perceptions, and Knowledge

- Nearly half of family respondents (49.4%) reported knowing a “pretty good bit” or “a lot” about active participatory approaches to learning and how they can be used in classrooms. However, nearly one in five family respondents (19.4%) reported no knowing anything about the approach, offering an opportunity to increase family engagement and education.
- Nearly half (47.6%) were moderately or extremely aware that their child’s teacher and school were participating in the P-3 pilot project.
- Parents overwhelmingly agreed that children were excited about learning (84.7% agree or strongly agree; mean=4.4).

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral/ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
My child comes home excited about learning.	1.5%	3.0%	11.8%	22.2%	62.5%

- Nearly eight out of ten parents agreed that they can better support their child’s future learning because he or she was in the P-3 classroom (79.1% agree or strongly agree; mean=4.2).

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral/ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Because my child has been in this classroom, I understand how I can better support his or her learning and future school success.	1.5%	3.0%	16.4%	35.8%	43.3%

- More than eight out of ten parents agreed that they believed that their child would be better prepared for success in the next school year because he or she was in the P-3 classroom (85.9% agree or strongly agree; mean=4.4).

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral/ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Because my child has been in this classroom, I believe he or she is better prepared to be successful next year in school.	1.5%	3.0%	9.6%	28.9%	57.0%

B. Progress and Improvements

- Parents noted progress in each of the 14 areas of learning and development discussed in the survey, but the most extensive progress was reported for the skills listed below. For each of these, half or more of parents reported extensive progress made during the school year (*scale: no progress, minimal progress/a little progress, moderate progress/some progress, extensive progress/a lot of progress*).

	Extensive Progress/ A Lot of Progress
Gross Motor Skills: moving large muscles; walking, pedaling, climbing, running, jumping, using stairs	69.3%
Literacy/Pre-Literacy and Reading Skills: letters, sounds, words, vocabulary, spelling, words	61.6%
Fine Motor Skills: using small muscles of the hand; drawing, writing, cutting	59.2%
Language/Communication: understanding and speaking	58.7%
Self-Care Skill Management: managing clothes and jacket, buttoning and zipping, eating/feeding self, hanging up backpack	57.5%
Love of learning, motivation to learn, wanting to go to school	56.1%
Math/Pre-Math Skills: shapes, numbers, counting, arithmetic	54.7%
Interacting with other children	54.7%

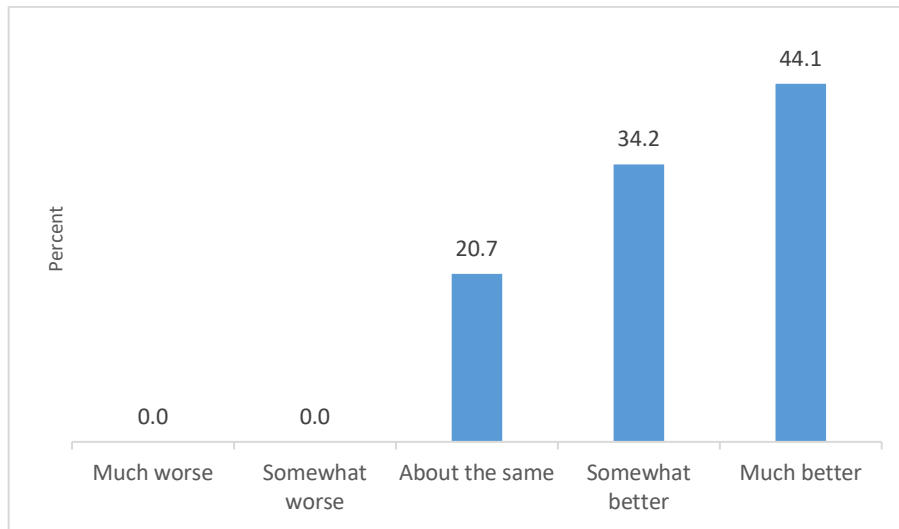
- Families were asked to describe any differences they may have noticed in their child’s learning, communication, behavior, or social skills this year compared to past years.
 - Families described more positive differences versus neutral or negative comments. Themes included the following:
 - Improvements in social skills/social interactions and independence
 - Improvements in reading, writing, and math
 - Increased creativity, confidence and problem-solving skills
 - More positive attitude towards learning and going to school
 - Improvements in vocabulary, language, and communication with peers and adults
 - Improvements in empathy, awareness of others, conflict resolution, behavior, attitude, and anger management
 - Six out of a total of 67 family comments were negative in nature, though there were no consistent themes.

Selected quotes:

<i>“She loves going to school. She is more independent and confident. She shows more problem-solving capability.”</i>
<i>“My child came to this class from another school the 1st of December 2019. In this short time, I have seen a large growth in his speech & reading (he has a speech disorder and dyslexia) and this is without other interventions. He is now happy and loves going to school.”</i>
<i>“He has become more positive about reading. He has a learning disability that has made reading frustrating in the past, but now he is willing to read, and practice.”</i>
<i>“He is reading books on his own and confident in doing so. He is able to do exercises, math equations and so much more. We are blown away by how much he has learned this year.”</i>
<i>“My child has become more fluid, willing to accept change and go with the flow. He’s learned better conflict resolution, and his teacher has sparked a joy for group learning.”</i>
<i>“My child’s vocabulary has become quite extensive.”</i>
<i>“My child is able to brainstorm on her own more. She is more interested in literally crafting responses, far more creatively than before. She is also able to visualize numbers and mathematics much better through her teacher graphing responses.”</i>
<i>“The main thing for my child is his social skills. Before he was so shy and now he seems to have come out of his shell completely”</i>

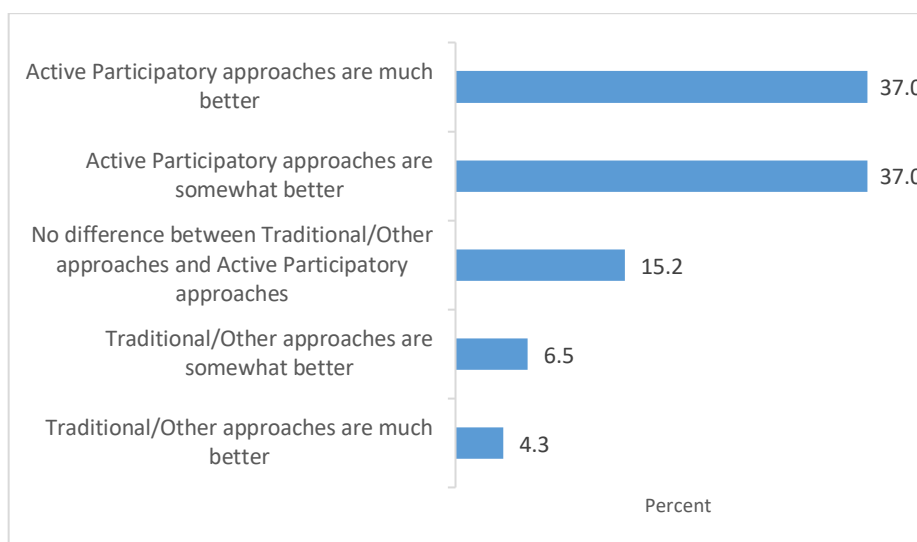
- All but one parent who indicated that their child had attended school in the previous year reported their child did about the same or better compared to past school years. Of those, 78.3% reported somewhat or much better performance.

Parent perception of school performance compared to previous years



- Among parents who indicated that they had other children who had been in classrooms where the teacher used traditional/direct learning approaches, a clear trend was noted favoring active participatory learning approaches – 74.0%.

Based on your children's experiences and learning progress, how would you describe your feelings about active participatory learning approaches like those that have been used in your child's classroom this year compared to other types of learning approaches use for your other child/children?



III. Conclusions

By all measures, the Alabama Preschool to Third Grade initiative (P-3) pilot project has been a success. P-3 has expanded significantly in pilot year 3, serving more children in more schools and classrooms throughout the state – nearly quadrupling the reach compared to pilot year 1. In addition to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant, P-3 efforts have been reinforced through funding from the State Legislature and Governor Kay Ivey’s support as a key pillar of her Strong Start Strong Finish Initiative.

Across the years of the grant, children in all grades showed significant improvements across all areas of development and school readiness when comparing percentages meeting or exceeding widely held expectations for their age at school year entry to those percentages at school year exit based on the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. The quality of teacher-child interactions was similar to national averages based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Alabama average was higher for the important dimension of Concept Development – shown to be associated with later student success in vocabulary, language, and math.¹² P-3 classrooms also improved in quality on average from Fall (pre) to Spring (post) assessments across all domains.

Lower starting percentages of children meeting or exceeding widely held expectations at the higher grades included in the project support the need for a P-3 approach. Consistent exit percentages in excess of 90% of children meeting or exceeding widely held expectations are reassuring and indicate across-grade success. Anecdotal comments from families, teachers, and leaders detail important growth in child academic performance, problem-solving skills, communication, and behavioral/social-emotional regulation along with decreased office referrals. Further, teachers report professional growth in classroom, as well as job satisfaction and excitement in watching children be engaged in learning.

Teacher participants clearly indicated the need for more/enhanced coaching, professional development, and observation opportunities to support the implementation of developmentally appropriate/active participatory learning approaches in the classroom, especially in the higher grades. Also, teachers expressed concerns in aligning state educational standards, grading, and reporting requirements with student-led, participatory approaches. Finally, responses from families indicate overall satisfaction with the program and significant progress for children in P-3 classrooms across multiple knowledge and skills.

Ongoing evaluation activities include planning for the establishment of a method to identify children who received a P-3 experience (including dose response) in State Department of Education data so their future performance on standardized, statewide assessments of reading and math in 3rd grade and beyond can be compared with performance for children who did not receive instruction of this type. Also, the Alabama Literacy Act passed in 2019, including the requirement for standardized assessments of reading in Kindergarten through 3rd grade, offering additional opportunities to examine the impact of a P-3 experience. These longitudinal analyses are based on data availability and include standardized testing in the school setting, as well as retention, absenteeism, and special education referrals/services.



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