

2018

First Class Pre-K Parent Survey Report



Child Demographic Characteristics

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

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Gender	1723	48.1
Male		
Female	1859	51.9
Race/Ethnicity		
White	2255	59.4
Black/African American	1302	34.3
Asian	48	1.3
American Indian/Alaska Native	37	1.0
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	12	0.3
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	141	3.7
Received Early Intervention Program for children with developmental delays or special needs		
Yes	272	7.6
No	3248	90.9
I'm not sure	54	1.5
Received services through a Home Visiting Program other than Early Intervention (Parents As Teachers/PAT, HIPPPY, First Teacher, Nurse-Family Partnership)		
Yes	189	5.3
No	3333	93.3
I'm not sure	50	1.4
Currently has an IEP (Individualized Education Program)		
Yes	296	8.3
No	3185	89.0
I'm not sure	97	2.7

Finding Out About the First Class Pre-K Program

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

Information Sources/ How families found out about the program	Number	Percent
Friend	1788	41.3
Other*	1008	23.3
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	665	15.4
Internet website	404	9.3
Brochure/Flier	259	6.0
Newspaper	83	1.9
Email	88	2.0
TV	30	0.7

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

II. Impact on Caregiver Ability to Work

Respondents were asked whether their child being in the First Class Pre-K program had influenced their ability to work at a job. About half of the respondents said that their child being in the program had allowed them to make a change in their job status. Nearly half of all respondents who did report an influence on their job said they were able to go back to work, either part time or full time (47%), and an additional 28.5% were able to increase hours or days at a job they already had. Among respondents who said their child being in the program had not influenced their ability to work, more than 75% reported that they were already working and had not made any changes to their schedule or hours.

Responses	Number	Percent
Child being in the preschool program influenced parent/caregiver ability to work a job		
Yes	1882	52.5
No	1702	47.5
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If No,		
I already work and haven't made any changes to my schedule or hours	1243	75.4
I do not work and am not planning to go to work or look for a job right now	406	24.6
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If Yes,		
I am now able to look for a job	156	9.0
I have increased my work hours and/or days at a job I already had	493	28.5
I have been able to go to work or go back to work full time	677	39.1
I have been able to go to work or go back to work part time	136	7.9

III. Results

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

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

Teacher, Respect, Communicating Progress, Excited about Learning, Sharing Information

Statements of Agreement	Strongly Disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Neither Agree nor Disagree % (n)	Agree % (n)	Strongly Agree % (n)
I feel that the teacher takes good care of my child, helps my child learn to get along with others, and has my child's best interest at heart.	2.9 (113)	0.9 (34)	2.8 (107)	15.8 (615)	77.7 (3019)
I feel respected by the program staff and that my contributions are valued.	2.7 (105)	1.4 (54)	3.8 (146)	21.5 (836)	70.6 (3883)
I am told about my child's progress in a language I understand and in ways that are respectful to me and my family.	2.8 (110)	4.0 (155)	8.1 (316)	28.4 (1106)	56.0 (2181)
My child comes home excited about learning and tells me about the things he or she did in Pre-K (what they talked about, books they read, things they learned).	3.1 (122)	2.3 (88)	5.3 (207)	25.6 (999)	63.7 (2485)
The teacher often shares information about things happening in the program and wants to know about things my child is doing at home.	3.4 (134)	4.0 (155)	8.1 (316)	28.4 (1106)	56.0 (2181)

- **Over 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher takes good care of their child, has his or her best interest at heart, and helps them learn to get along with others**
- **Over 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt respected by the program staff and that their contributions were valued**
- **Over 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their child comes home excited about learning and tells them about things he/she did in Pre-K.**

Statements of Agreement	Strongly Disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Neither	Agree % (n)	Strongly Agree % (n)
			Agree nor Disagree % (n)		
Because my child has been in the preschool program, I believe he or she is better prepared to be successful in school.	2.6 (98)	1.8 (70)	3.4 (130)	20.3 (775)	71.9 (2750)
Because my child has been in the preschool program, I understand how I can better support my child's learning and future school success.	2.3 (87)	2.2 (83)	6.3 (242)	27.4 (1045)	61.8 (2360)
The program has given me good information to help my child make a smooth transition to Kindergarten.	3.2 (121)	3.6 (136)	9.3 (353)	27.8 (1053)	56.1 (2128)
I feel that the preschool program offered some good parenting workshops that were beneficial to my family.	4.6 (163)	8.3 (194)	29.0 (1028)	26.0 (926)	32.2 (1145)
The program helped me find services and resources in my community to help my family.	4.1 (144)	9.5 (337)	39.1 (1382)	22.4 (793)	24.9 (881)

- **Over 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their child is better prepared to be successful in school because he or she was in the First Class Pre-K Program**
- **Over 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understand how they can better support their child's learning and future school success because he or she was in the First Class Pre-K Program**
- **84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the First Class Pre-K Program gave them good information to help their child make a smooth transition to Kindergarten**

Progress by Developmental Skill Area

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

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

Developmental Skill Areas	No Progress % (n)	Minimal Progress /A Little Progress % (n)	Moderate Progress/ Some Progress % (n)	Extensive Progress/ A Lot of Progress % (n)	Mean
School Readiness Skills: Recognizing colors, printing name, recognizing letters of the alphabet	1.0 (36)	4.0 (149)	14.6 (541)	80.4 (2975)	3.74
Fine Motor Skills: Using small muscles of the hand; drawing, cutting, lacing	0.6 (22)	3.5 (129)	19.9 (733)	76.1 (2808)	3.71
Interacting socially with other children and adults	0.9 (32)	2.7 (99)	22.4 (824)	74.0 (2718)	3.70
Gross Motor Skills: Moving large muscles; walking, pedaling, climbing, running, jumping, using stairs	1.2 (41)	3.3 (116)	21.1 (747)	74.5 (2638)	3.69
Language/Communication: Understanding and speaking	0.7 (25)	3.4 (121)	25.2 (910)	70.7 (2551)	3.66
Self-Care Skills: Dressing, eating, toileting	1.4 (48)	3.2 (113)	24.6 (878)	70.9 (2808)	3.65
Positive problem-solving and dealing with conflict; controlling emotions and behaviors	1.7 (63)	6.2 (229)	37.5 (1376)	54.5 (2001)	3.45

- **Respondents indicated that the developmental skill areas where children made the most extensive progress were school readiness, fine motor, and interacting socially with other children and adults.**

IV. Strengths of the First Class Pre-K Program

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

➤ *Teachers and staff:*

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

➤ *Progress made/readiness for Kindergarten:*

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

➤ *Social skills, behavior, and independence:*

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

➤ *Approach to learning:*

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

➤ *Parent involvement:*

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

➤ *Communication from teacher to caregiver:*

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

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

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

➤ *Diverse peer group:*

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

➤ *Cost of participation:*

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

➤ *Field trips and experiences:*

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

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

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

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

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

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

This theme included comments related to reading, writing name, math, letters, numbers, homework, worksheets, more structured classroom, more advanced learning, less child-directed play, etc. (though

some wanted more hands-on learning and fewer worksheets). This may reflect a lack of awareness of developmentally appropriate, play-based learning approaches. Approach to learning was also discussed in the strengths of First Class Pre-K section, perhaps representing an opportunity for greater caregiver education about this model of learning for preschool children.

➤ *Approaches to discipline and challenging behaviors:*

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

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

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

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

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

➤ *Food offerings:*

This theme included comments about the lack of meals and snacks, special dietary concerns i.e. gluten free, short meal times, poor quality of meals and snacks, and unhealthy food offerings.

➤ *Naptime:*

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

➤ *Cost of participation:*

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

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

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

VI. Recommending First Class Pre-K to Others

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

Would you recommend this preschool program to other families? Respondents asked if they would recommend their preschool program to other families.

Yes – 93.8%

Maybe - 4.5%

No – 1.7%

Sample of Open-Ended Comments

“I teach Kindergarten and see a significant difference between students that attend this PreK program and students that don't. These students are very prepared for Kindergarten academically, emotionally, and socially.”

“I would highly recommend this program to friends/family because the kids are treated like kids and are able to explore and learn age appropriate skills and lessons. While they are directed with their learning, they are encouraged to explore and learn independently as well. The classroom is fun and engaging, and the teachers are positive and supportive. The kids in this program will be better prepared for kindergarten.”

“It has been wonderful for my daughter. She was shy and very closed off in the beginning and she has grown and blossomed by leaps and bounds this year because of this program!”

“I would because my child, who was attached at my hip permanently, got to being excited about going to school and was able to learn so much more than I was able to try and teach him at home. Plus the social skills it gets him ready for which he needed with his speech being behind and he got help with that too.”

“My child enjoyed it from the beginning to end. She enjoyed her teachers and classmates, and I can tell a difference in the way she speaks and plays with other children, and in the things she has learned throughout the year. It was a great experience overall.”

“I would recommend this program because it helps prepare children for elementary, helps them get into the routine of school work, responsibility in turning in work, social skills, understanding boundaries, understanding cause and effect.”

VII. Additional Comments

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

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

"Our experience has been absolutely amazing. I am sad he is having to leave the amazing teachers who have cared for him like their own. But they have done a wonderful job of preparing him to enter kindergarten. I full believe he is ready. He is already recognizing and reading words. Wonderful program, I could not say enough great thing about it! I am very excited this is offered I know it will help many children in the future."

"This program is the best and most affordable. I am a single mom with 3 kids and I didn't know how I would pay for her to go to preschool with my income. Thanks to this program she can actually go to school and I can also keep all my children at the same school together. She has also learned a great deal also because she has a wonderful teacher."

"I am very thankful for the dedicated teachers, staff and support personnel that have made this a very positive experience for my daughter. Even the community response through the local police department is amazing. Everyone has gone above and beyond at (School Name) County Elementary School to make this preschool program a success for all children involved. Special thanks to the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education for developing and implementing this awesome program."

"This program has helped enhanced what we have been trying to teach our child. As parents it is sometimes hard to get children to understand what you are trying to teach them, but the teachers and a classroom setting can make a big difference in the kids learning ability."

"My family really appreciated the family involvement activities together. My child was very excited to have things to do at home and take them back to school and be proud that we did them together. It was a program that gave my child good exposure to a variety of learning new things. The teachers were all very nice and responsive to my needs."

"Grateful for this program. Really wish EVERY child could have this experience. As an elementary teacher, I see more and more children who have no educational or social experiences before coming to school. I think it would be very beneficial to our children to be exposed to the fun learning and socialization that takes place in this preschool program."

"My child seems completely independent now and I think that's due to the confidence this program has given her. She gets herself ready for school in the morning and ready for bed at night without help. She can play independently when needed and tries to teach her younger sibling everything she knows."

"(xxxx) at (School Name) Elementary school are two of God's gifts to students. My daughter struggled before this program with her social skills, anger control and problem solving skills. Within mere months, (xxxx) were able to make a huge difference in my child. I could not have asked for better teachers, role models and caregivers for her."

“ I am so very impressed by this program. I wish I had known about it with my daughter. I can't wait to have the opportunity with my younger child. Thank you for continuing to provide outstanding teachers and resources for this program.”

Developmentally appropriate approaches to learning:

“I have been so pleased with my daughter's experience in PreK! I feel like she has learned so much, and it has all been developmentally appropriate. This play-based program has proven that young children can be taught and assessed without treating them as guinea pigs or just test subjects for data as I have seen in early childhood stages in the past and in other systems.”

“I really enjoyed how they experienced learning through play!”

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

“Through this program my child has started an OT and PT program at school. She was going to therapy prior to starting school but once school started we were unable to keep it up. Thanks to our teachers, counselor and ladies in the special needs program our daughter is getting the physical attention she needs. Her delays have all been physical at this point and we are hoping with her visits at school she will continue to improve.”

“My child has a speech IEP and is excelling since she started the First Class Pre-k Program!”

Impact on the family:

“We’ve thoroughly enjoyed the K-4 program, the teachers, projects, and the ability the program has created to develop relationships with other K4 parents as well.”

“ This program has been a God-send for my family. I save a large amount of money every month in daycare costs AND my kids are learning and preparing for "big" school every day.”

“Please consider expanding the program. It has so far been a wonderful experience and the teachers and staff made it an enjoyable experience for my whole family. My only wish would’ve been for him to start at the beginning of the year instead of November, however I am very grateful for being selected when we did. It has help be gain more hours at work and provide better for my family.”
