

2019

First Class Pre-K Parent Survey Report



I. Sample

Respondents

The survey was distributed in electronic format to First Class Pre-K parents or caregivers in spring 2018. Of these, 4,099 answered the survey for a response rate of 35% (for valid, unduplicated email addresses).

Surveys emailed	15,235
Emails bounced	581
Duplicates	111
Total distribution	15,927
Completed and partially completed survey responses	5,113
First Class Pre-K Parent Survey response rate	32.1

Responses were categorized according to Pre-K regions based on the county of residence identified by the respondent. The largest number of responses came from Region 2 in the northeast corner of the state, followed by Region 4 in central Alabama.

Region	Number of Counties in Region	Number of Responses	Percent of Total Responses
1	7	449	11.3
2	4	577	14.5
3	14	512	12.8
4	3	552	13.8
5	11	425	10.7
6	8	388	9.7
7	7	549	13.8
8	13	532	13.3



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

First Class Pre K Regional Map

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		
Male	2048	50.0
Female	2045	50.0
Race/Ethnicity (check all that apply)		
White	2515	57.7
Black/African American	1529	35.1
Asian	61	1.4
American Indian/Alaska Native	58	1.3
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	22	0.5
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	171	3.9
English as first language		
Yes	3987	97.8
No	89	2.2
Received Early Intervention Program for children with developmental delays or special needs		
Yes	293	7.2
No	3688	90.2
I'm not sure	107	2.6
Received services through a Home Visiting Program other than Early Intervention (Parents As Teachers/PAT, HIPPY, First Teacher, Nurse-Family Partnership)		
Yes	217	5.3
No	3790	92.8
I'm not sure	78	1.9
Currently has an IEP (Individualized Education Program)		
Yes	375	9.2
No	3571	87.3
I'm not sure	144	3.5

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	2078	40.8
Internet website	546	10.7
Email	111	2.2
Social Media	871	17.1
Brochure/Flier	256	5.0
Newspaper	71	1.4
TV	26	0.5
Other (Please specify)	1131	22.2

**Other included: Previous/current connection with school or Pre-K/Had another child in Pre-K; Employment in Education; School website; Daycare; General awareness/word of mouth; Personal research; Family; Doctor or other health professional; Head Start; 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. More than half of the respondents said that their child being in the program had influenced their ability to work. **More than 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 (53.7%), and an additional 28.8% 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, 72% 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	2261	54.1
No	1915	45.9
If No,		
I already work and haven't made any changes to my schedule or hours	1309	72.0
I do not work and am not planning to go to work or look for a job right now	509	28.0
If Yes,		
I am now able to look for a job	185	9.0
I have increased my work hours and/or days at a job I already had	592	28.8
I have been able to go to work or go back to work full time	824	40.1
I have been able to go to work or go back to work part time	279	13.6
I have reduced my work hours and/or days at a job I already had	174	8.5

Respondents were provided a space to share their thoughts on whether their child being in the First Class Pre-K program influenced their ability to work. A sample of quotes are included below:

“I was able to complete my bachelor’s degree while she was enrolled in the PK program.”

“I was fortunate enough to be able to leave my job to go get her at 230. It would be great if prek students could attend after school.”

“I already worked full-time, but this program allowed all my children to be at the same school campus which allowed me to save money from daycare and they are all on the same schedule.”

III. Results

Respondents were asked about their level of agreement with the following statements:

Teacher, child, and family interactions:

	Strongly disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Neutral % (n)	Agree % (n)	Strongly agree % (n)
My child comes home excited about learning	2.1 (99)	1.5 (70)	6.0 (282)	26.9 (1257)	63.5 (2968)
My child comes home and tells me about the things he or she did in Pre-K (what they talked about, books they read, things they learned)	2.0 (93)	2.8 (133)	5.8 (269)	30.9 (1443)	58.5 (2735)
I feel that the teacher takes good care of my child	2.1 (97)	0.9 (41)	2.9 (134)	16.4 (765)	77.8 (3624)
I feel the teacher helps my child learn to get along with others	1.8 (84)	1.2 (54)	3.2 (151)	24.0 (1118)	69.8 (3250)
I feel the teacher has my child's best interests at heart	1.9 (88)	0.8 (36)	3.0 (139)	18.6 (865)	75.8 (3526)
The teacher often shares information about things happening in the program	2.0 (95)	2.3 (106)	4.6 (215)	24.3 (1130)	66.8 (3111)
The teacher wants to know about things my child is doing at home	2.9 (133)	6.1 (281)	16.9 (778)	32.9 (1519)	41.3 (1905)
I am told about my child's progress in a language I understand and in ways that are respectful to me and my family	2.3 (106)	1.9 (88)	3.9 (180)	23.9 (1113)	68.1 (3171)
I feel respected by the program staff and that my contributions are valued	2.1 (96)	1.3 (59)	4.3 (198)	23.5 (1091)	69.0 (3207)

- **Over 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their child comes home excited about learning.**
- **Almost 95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the teacher helps their child 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.**

Family support and preparation for Kindergarten:

	Strongly disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Neutral % (n)	Agree % (n)	Strongly agree % (n)
I feel that the preschool program offered some good parenting workshops that were beneficial to my family.	2.5 (111)	5.1 (222)	22.8 (999)	31.9 (1394)	37.7 (1649)
The program helped me find services and resources in my community to help my family.	3.0 (130)	7.3 (315)	35.6 (1530)	25.7 (1103)	28.3 (1215)
The program has given me good information to help my child make a smooth transition to Kindergarten.	2.3 (103)	3.7 (167)	9.8 (445)	30.8 (1398)	53.5 (2432)
Because my child has been in the preschool program, I believe he or she is better prepared to be successful in school.	1.7 (79)	1.2 (55)	3.6 (166)	24.5 (1114)	69.0 (3142)
Because my child has been in the preschool program, I understand how I can better support my child's learning and future school success.	1.6 (73)	1.2 (56)	7.2 (326)	29.3 (1328)	60.8 (2771)

- **Over 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**
- **Over 93% 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 90% 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**

Child's progress during the preschool year:

	No progress % (n)	Minimal progress % (n)	Moderate progress % (n)	Extensive progress % (n)
Fine Motor Skills: Using small muscles of the hand; drawing, cutting, printing name	1.3 (49)	7.1 (270)	30.5 (1168)	61.1 (2337)
Following directions	1.8 (66)	9.5 (357)	39.8 (1492)	48.9 (1832)
Gross Motor Skills: Moving large muscles; walking, pedaling, climbing, running, jumping, using stairs	1.3 (38)	7.2 (206)	29.1 (826)	62.4 (1773)
Interacting with adults	1.8 (59)	8.1 (270)	36.9 (1234)	53.3 (1784)
Interacting with children	1.3 (43)	6.8 (234)	32.6 (1121)	59.3 (2040)
Language/Communication: Understanding and speaking	0.9 (29)	6.8 (221)	34.7 (1132)	57.7 (1884)
Love of learning, motivation to learn	1.2 (43)	6.7 (244)	36.6 (1334)	55.5 (2025)
Positive ways of dealing with conflict; controlling emotions and behaviors	4.0 (159)	14.8 (594)	40.4 (1622)	40.9 (1641)
Problem-solving and making decisions	1.9 (77)	10.0 (399)	38.5 (1537)	49.6 (1984)
School Readiness - Pre-math skills: Recognizing some shapes and numbers, counting	2.0 (77)	8.0 (313)	30.0 (1168)	60.0 (2336)
School Readiness - Pre-reading skills: Recognizing some letters and sounds, recognizing colors	1.4 (55)	7.3 (284)	27.7 (1083)	63.6 (2482)
Self-Care Skills: Managing clothes and jacket, eating/feeding self, toileting/buttons/zippers	1.2 (39)	8.9 (288)	32.3 (1044)	57.6 (1861)
Wanting to go to school	3.9 (137)	9.3 (325)	33.6 (1171)	53.1 (1847)

*Families could also select a response for “no need for progress/my child could do this well already”

- **Parents reported their children made progress across all developmental skill areas.**
- **Parents reported the most extensive progress in the following skills: school readiness/pre-reading, gross motor, fine motor, and school readiness/pre-math.**

Developmental Screening and Help Me Grow Alabama

Respondents were asked if their child received a screening of his or her developmental skills as part of the Pre-School program:

	Number	Percent
Yes	3077	72.1
No	104	2.4
I'm not sure	1084	25.4

Respondents were asked if the teacher discussed the child's developmental screening results with them and/or gave or sent them a copy:

	Number	Percent
Yes	2784	90.7
No	90	2.9
I'm not sure	195	6.4

Respondents were asked if the teacher suggested a referral to Help Me Grow Alabama for follow-up information and support:

	Number	Percent
Yes	1037	33.9
No	968	31.6
I'm not sure	1058	34.5

Respondents were asked if they received this referral to Help Me Grow Alabama:

	Number	Percent
Yes	607	59.7
No	146	14.4
I'm not sure	264	26.0

- **Nearly 75% of respondents reported their child had received a developmental screening in the First Class Pre-K program.**
 - **Since First Class Pre-K standards and policies require developmental screening, this is an area for suggested follow-up – it is possible that families are unaware of the screening or that improvements could be made in the percentage screened.**

- **Over 90% of parents who reported their child had a developmental screening said that their child’s teacher had discussed the results with them.**
- **One-third of families said a referral to Help Me Grow was discussed and of those, nearly 60% received this referral.**
 - **This is an area of suggested follow-up with the Help Me Grow program to determine whether there are barriers to referrals and to identify potential solutions to support increased connect to referral when indicated.**

Respondents were provided space to share any additional thoughts they had about their experiences with their child's developmental screening, any discussions with the teacher, and any referral to Help Me Grow Alabama. A sample of quotes are provided below:

I get regular follow up calls from Help Me Grow. I have benefited from the program.

I've appreciated the opportunity to see how he has progressed throughout the year. Our meetings with the teacher about his progress have been helpful understanding the assessment and also in understanding where children his age are supposed to be developmentally. We have a great teacher and my son is very fond of both her and the aide.

My son's screening helped me to know what areas I could work on at home. Through the referral, I was able to pinpoint some of my child's needs.

My daughter speech is unclear sometimes; the speech pathologist at the school gave her a screening and said there was nothing wrong with her language. At this point, I don't know what to do to help her articulation. I can say that my daughter's PreK teacher did initiate the conversation and screening with the IEP team at the school to get her speech services though. However, the school failed to get back with me, so I'll just wait until Kindergarten to try again to receive speech services for her.

IEP Services

Respondents were asked if their child’s teacher suggested a referral for testing for IEP services:

	Number	Percent
Yes	396	13.0
No	2233	73.2
I’m not sure	420	13.8

If yes, respondents were asked if they received this referral for testing for IEP services:

	Number	Percent
Yes	302	77.2

No	33	8.4
I'm not sure	56	14.3

Respondents were asked to share any thoughts you they had about their experiences with referral and testing for IEP services.

I had a great experience talking with the group of educators and professionals about my son. We discussed areas we felt needed to be looked at and came to agreement on referral for specific behaviors and learning needs. I have had an open line of communication with his teacher so discussing the need to referral was not a surprise and did not worry or upset me. I have a very smart little boy, and they see that (which is important to me), they care about him personally, and they just want to make sure that he gets all the avenues of assistance possible as he begins his education. I am VERY thankful for the faculty, and for the system that provides such beneficial services.

It was a very slow start but his teachers were beside us the whole time helping us be able to get him the extra help he need.

My son's teacher suggested that he might need to see the speech therapist, which I wholeheartedly agreed with. He's made SO MUCH progress since seeing the speech therapist and having an IEP in place.

It was suggested but no one told me how to go about getting the service

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, patience, and feelings of safety in leaving children in the new setting.

- *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. Some respondents expressed the cost of the program was more than some families could afford.

- *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 decrease 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. food allergies, 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-four 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.

	Number	Percent
Yes	3981	94.3
Maybe	184	4.4
No	55	1.3

Sample of Open-Ended Comments

Absolutely! This has been an amazing experience for our child! I'm so impressed with the material she has learned and I love to see her use that information correctly and appropriately. I know it is because of her teacher's knowledge of age appropriate content and their commitment to consistency. I am beyond thrilled with their relentless efforts!

Children need quality care and teaching before entering kindergarten and higher grade levels. Pre- k is an excellent source of providing what children are not getting from other places.

Despite the potential drawback of not being at the school they are zoned for (and thus having to say goodbye), the program has more benefits than risks. It is a good stepping stone between no school at all and kindergarten. The classroom design is fun and playful. The class size is just right to

introduce a child to new kids. The program's learning objectives and curricula are well researched and based on sound developmental benchmarks. The children are getting all the benefits and fun of a learning environment without the demands or expectations of K-12, i.e grades, homework, studying.

I would absolutely recommend the program. I have two children and moved around quite a bit. This program is by far the best that my children have been to. One of the things that I think is so important is the staff. They have stayed with the program for so many years. They work well together. They care about one another, or at least appear to, and it is both a warm place and a rigorous place for children to be in terms of their education and readiness skills. I have peace of mind when my children are there knowing that there is no better place that they could be. As a parent, there is nothing more important than that.

Initially, I was very hesitant to enroll my son in PreK. He was already ahead in many areas academically. Within a week or so into the school year, he came home talking about things he learned that I never even considered teaching him ... he knew the days of the week and months of the year! I had taught him adding and subtraction but forgot so many important things! Their teaching methods through play and activity really stick and I was impressed how much my son has learned! I am now a believer in the program and urge every parent to enroll their children in this program! The teachers are top notch!!

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:

I am so blessed that my child was able to be a part of this program. She has learned so much and feel it has set her up for a long journey of learning.

She has the most amazing teachers. They really care for the needs of each child. I have had the privilege to sit in and watch and they do an exceptional job.

I would just like to thank whoever put this program together. It is affordable, and super helpful to help families get back on their feet and being able to provide for their family. Also, it helps the children (especially with older siblings who already go to school) feel special and get to do the things the older siblings do. They feel important also. My son absolutely loves going to school and learning. He always wants to stay longer and always has something to tell me about his day.

I think the Pre-K program is a great program, that prepares kids for Kindergarten. Both of my children have been through this program. I was happy with the program both times.

Developmentally appropriate approaches to learning:

He has shown progress through practicing writing his name, letters and sounds, and counting. He really enjoys the blocks center and he loves his teachers.

I am so thankful that my child's natural curiosity has been encouraged. She associates school and learning with fun!

My son started Pre- kindergarten knowing his letters and the sounds they make. One day he comes home and reads me his library book. He is also able to do addition and subtraction. He builds on these skills at school. I'm very grateful for his teachers because I know they keep up with his progress and encourage him to continue learning. I have spoken to other parents who dislikes their child's teachers and it really does affect the child. Any person can be given material to teach; it takes a true teacher to instill a love for learning in a child.

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

My child learned to speak Cebuano prior to being adopted at the age of 4. She is now extremely conversational in English.

The language she speaks at home is Spanish, but we are very happy that she has learned English very quickly and also can communicate with children and adults in English.

Impact on the family:

It has been a wonderful experience for my child because she wasn't around other children very much. She has learned to share, wait her turn, etc. Things that are hard to teach at home when there are no other children her age.

My child LOVES the home parent involvement projects and asked me weekly what type of homework we get to do for the week. He loves it so much that I've started buying the kindergarten workbooks and letting him "do homework" with me in the evening when he doesn't want to go outside and play.
