



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF

Early Childhood Education



2021

ANNUAL REPORT

ISSUED: JULY 1, 2022

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR



STATE CAPITOL
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STATE OF ALABAMA

July 1, 2022

Dear Friends,

I am proud to serve as Alabama's 54th Governor and lead our great state. One of the areas of state government that I am most proud of is the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE). This annual report highlights progress made with many of the Department's programs.

The Strong Start, Strong Finish initiative continues to support many educators in our state. Through the Pre-K – 3rd Grade Integrated Approach to Early Learning, we can provide more tools for teachers and school leaders so they can continue to support student outcomes in the critical early years.

The programs administered by the ADECE are critical components of our workforce development system. I want to do everything possible to make sure that our citizens can enter the workforce prepared for 21st-century jobs. With volumes of research which prove that 95% of brain development occurs by age 5, the programs of the ADECE are valuable investments in our state's future.

Alabama continues to set the nationwide bar through our success with the Alabama First Class Pre-K program. In April 2022, we welcomed the news that Alabama continues to be a national leader in pre-k for the 16th consecutive year.

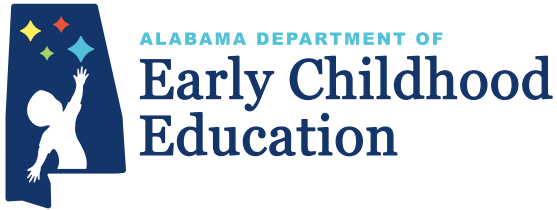
Alabama's future for children and families is bright because of you! I encourage you to join us to improve access to the Department's valuable programs so that all children in our state can flourish.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kay Ivey".

Kay Ivey
Governor





Honorable Kay Ivey, Governor
Barbara J. Cooper, Ph.D., Secretary

Dear Friends,

The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE), prioritizes ensuring that all of our programs are of the highest quality and improve life for Alabama’s children and families. This year the ADECE celebrated **16 years** of the First Class Pre-K program meeting the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) benchmarks for the highest quality while providing access to more children. One of the values that drives my work is ensuring a high-quality, equitable education for all young children. My team remains accountable for making the ADECE better and stronger through optimal learning opportunities for all.

Before a child enters pre-k, social connections and important brain-building work is happening between caregivers and parents of young children. The pandemic made clear the need for supporting families as their child’s first teacher through our early learning programs. Our partnership with the Department of Human Resources administering the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is allowing us to work together to improve the quality of childcare in our state.

When children aren’t afforded positive early experiences, gaps begin to emerge. By nine months of age, children from low-income families can already be several months behind in language development and other milestone indicators. These gaps continue to widen, leaving children from disadvantaged circumstances up to two years behind by age 5. The most productive way to close achievement gaps is to proactively keep them from occurring by providing high-quality early childhood programs. The achievement gap neither originates, nor can it be closed by schools alone. After all that we have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, earlier support for families and children is even more critical.

The investments Alabama provides to the ADECE support our work to prevent disparities by working with families to provide a strong early start for children. The programs we administer provide everything needed for both a strong family foundation as well as the education Alabama’s children need to enter the K-12 school system ready to learn.

The ADECE continues to implement evidence-based, nationally researched programs for parents and children, which data show are effective at increasing school readiness and improving child and family outcomes. We also realize that a child’s early education does not end in pre-k. Through Governor Ivey’s Strong Start, Strong Finish Initiative, we are intentional in our partnering with local school systems and others in our mixed delivery system to ensure what is learned in early childhood continues through the child’s third-grade year and beyond. Our work is made possible through our highly qualified early care and education team.

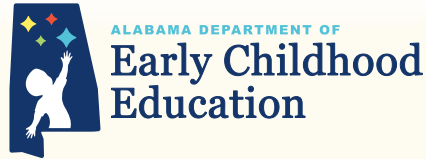
This report serves as an update of where we are focusing our efforts and identifies how we are moving forward. Thank you to my outstanding team and to everyone who has contributed to the ADECE’s success. Our strategic plan will be released in the coming months and will chart our course for the next three years. I look forward to reporting our progress as our staff and supporters continue to make the ADECE a national leader in early childhood education and a key to the success of Alabama’s future.

Educationally,

Dr. Barbara Cooper, Secretary
Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education



About THE DEPARTMENT



The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) is an executive, cabinet-level state Department, established to enable the governor to effectively and efficiently coordinate efforts and programs to provide young children throughout the state high-quality care and education.

The Department is the state designee for the federally mandated Early Childhood Advisory Council (designated as the Alabama Children's Policy Council in 2015), home of the Alabama Head Start Collaboration Office, administrator of the Children First Trust Fund, the lead Department for early learning and home visiting programs, and developer and operator of the nationally-recognized Alabama First Class Pre-K program. The Department receives and disburses any funds appropriated by state and federal sources for the establishment, operation, and administration of its programs.

The ADECE was created in 2015 to expand upon the duties of the former Department of Children's Affairs to include the development of a cohesive and comprehensive system of high-quality early learning and care experiences for Alabama's children from birth to age 8. The Department has several key programs to support our duties, including Alabama First Class Pre-K, Alabama Pre-K- 3rd Grade Integrated Approach to Early Learning, First Teacher Home Visiting, Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, Head Start Collaboration, Office of Early Childhood Development and Professional Support, the Children's Policy Councils and Children First Trust Fund, and Alabama Family Central.

Highlights of FISCAL YEAR 2021

Quality Rating and Improvement System

In February of 2021, the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) partnered with the ADECE to revise the QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement System). This system awards STAR levels to early childhood care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards that are comprised of standardized, research-based criteria. By participating in this program, early care and education providers will embark on a path of



continuous quality and improvement. Alabama Quality STARS is committed to recognizing a program's strength while providing support to develop a plan for improvement. Programs have to meet a minimum score requirement on both the Best Practice Rubric and CLASS Scoring model in order to meet different STAR levels.

The Department's partnership with DHR to administer QRIS has produced 62 childcare facilities rated STAR 2 or higher, including 11 Star 5 status. More than 250 facilities have expressed interest in the enhancement program. The enhancement program option allows providers to receive technical assistance from an assigned specialist with the goal to improve the quality in their childcare facilities by at least one star level. For more information on Alabama Quality STARS, visit the alabamqualitystars.org website.

Strengths-Based Coaching Model

The ADECE developed a succinct department-wide early childhood birth to age 8 Coaching Framework to strategically map coaching efforts and create alignments to measure progress and achieve coaching goals. The Department is committed to implementing systematic coaching practices that ensure all teachers receive equitable, strength-based, reflective coaching support so that all children have the opportunity to benefit from highly effective early learning experiences. A diverse group of early childhood professionals consisting of teachers, coaches, directors, and consultants contributed to the architecture of the framework.

The framework includes the Alabama Early Childhood Coaching Competencies that ensure a consistent and coherent approach to coaching by creating a shared understanding of how to implement strengths-based coaching for early educators. The B-8 tiered coaching framework individualizes support for each teacher based on their current needs. Coaches use a tiered system based on their program to determine the frequency and duration of coaching support provided to their assigned teachers. Coaches review data to

determine if adjustments to coaching support are necessary. The ADECE provides a face-to-face, virtual, or hybrid approach to coaching to best support the classroom teachers.

Alabama Early Childhood Educator Apprenticeship

ADECE is the sponsor of the Alabama ECE Apprenticeship Program. The program design is modeled after the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) ECE Unifying Framework and incorporates the most current NAEYC standards and competencies.

All apprenticeships involve two types of learning—on-the-job learning (OJL) with a mentor and related technical instruction (RTI) with a teacher. OJL can be time-based or competency-based, and ADECE chose to use a competency-based model. The OJL competencies for each level are taken straight from the NAEYC competencies. The RTI for Level I includes earning a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or completing three Child Development (CHD) courses at the community college level. The RTI for Level II ends with an associate degree in General Studies, including 18 hours of CHD electives that articulate to the 4-year institution. The RTI for Level III ends with a bachelor's degree in ECE.

The second goal of Alabama's ECE apprenticeship project is to set a high standard for aligning coursework that will transfer and articulate seamlessly across all three ECE Educator levels. Wallace Community College-Dothan (WCCD) and Troy University became target stakeholders because they had an existing agreement that allowed 18 hours of child development (CHD) classes to articulate to Troy University as ECE level 300 courses.

The Coleman Center for Early Learning is located on the Troy Dothan campus. This site provided an excellent place to pilot Alabama's ECE apprenticeship. With all 3 entities in agreement: employer, community college, and 4-year institution of higher education, we were able to begin the first official apprenticeship in Fall of 2021 with two apprentices.



There is no cost for apprentices to participate and they earn progressive wages as they reach identified levels with OJL and related technical instruction (RTI). To offset the cost of the apprenticeship for the employer, all apprentices apply for FAFSA, TEACH scholarships, Leadership in Childcare Scholarships, and C3 Scholarships. They also work with the Business Service Representative at the local career center to seek additional funding through WIOA and other grants. If there is any remaining cost due, these are covered by employer. For the initial pilot,

the ADECE provided funds to offset any remaining cost.

The next steps include expanding the pilot to other birth to age 5 early learning centers, early care and education employers, and educational partners (high schools, community colleges, and 4-year institutions of higher education). We currently have three stakeholders in the process of establishing

another formal apprenticeship which we anticipate will yield 4 to 8 apprentices. Besides community colleges and 4-year institutions of higher education, we are also speaking with high school career technical education (CTE) programs in order to start the credentialing process for students/potential apprentices through

CTEs and dual enrollment opportunities. Next steps also include identifying additional funding streams to help offset costs for participating stakeholders, especially focused on the early care and education employer.

Apprentices will receive a national apprenticeship credential upon completion of their program.

ADECE Birth to Age 8 Support

Program	Age of Population Served										Workforce Supports				
	Prenatal	Birth	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9-18	Pay Parity	Apprenticeship & CTE	Scholarships	Professional Development
First Class Pre-K						Age 4						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
First Teacher Home Visiting	Prenatal - Age 5													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Nurse Family Partnership Model	Prenatal up to Age 2													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Parents as Teachers Model	Prenatal - Age 5													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
HIPPY Model				Age 2 - Age 5											<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Head Start Collaboration Office		Birth - Age 5													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health		Birth - Age 5													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Office of Early Childhood Development and Professional Support		Birth - Age 8													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Birth to 5 Foundation Sites		Birth - Age 5										<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership		Birth - Age 3													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Family Engagement Project		Birth - Age 5													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Challenging Behaviors Project		Birth - Age 5													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Conscious Discipline Project		Birth - Age 8													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Preschool to Third Grade Integrated Approach						Age 4 - Age 8									<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Children's Policy Council	Prenatal - Age 18													<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	



Alabama

FIRST CLASS PRE-K

The Office of School Readiness (OSR) administers Alabama's voluntary state pre-kindergarten program known as Alabama First Class Pre-K (FCPK). OSR, originally established in the 2000 legislative session provides leadership for the enhancement of school readiness for Alabama's

through the 2022 school year, the program has grown from 217 classrooms to 1,385 classrooms in a diverse delivery system, including public schools, charter schools, Head Start centers, private childcare centers, faith-based child care centers, and university child care centers. Alabama's voluntary

pre-kindergarten program served approximately 42% of the state's population of 4-year-old children and their families in the 2021-2022 school year.

First Class Pre-K also serves as a workforce development initiative of the state. Each classroom funded by the OSR employs two teachers – a lead and an auxiliary teacher – each of whom is required to be credentialed in early childhood education and/or child development. The lead teacher is required to have at least a bachelor's degree, while the auxiliary teacher must have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or comparable education.

The workforce development efforts do not end with qualifications. ADECE Pre-K programs are funded at levels to pay the teachers comparable wages to K-12 teachers and paraprofessionals. The education and compensation efforts are an intentional strategy to ensure continuity, expertise, and the highest quality learning for participating children.

The OSR staff provides coaching, monitoring, and professional development for FCPK. The laser focus on classroom quality supported by the OSR staff

youngest residents. The First Class Pre-K program is nationally recognized for quality, and research shows that the positive effects of Alabama FCPK persist through middle school and beyond.

Through partnerships with advocates and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University, Alabama's OSR established a plan to incrementally increase funding for pre-k in Alabama while protecting the quality for which the program is recognized. From 2013



has proven effective in the short term and long term outcomes for First Class Pre-K students. The NIEER benchmarks that Alabama has a long history of meeting are as follows:

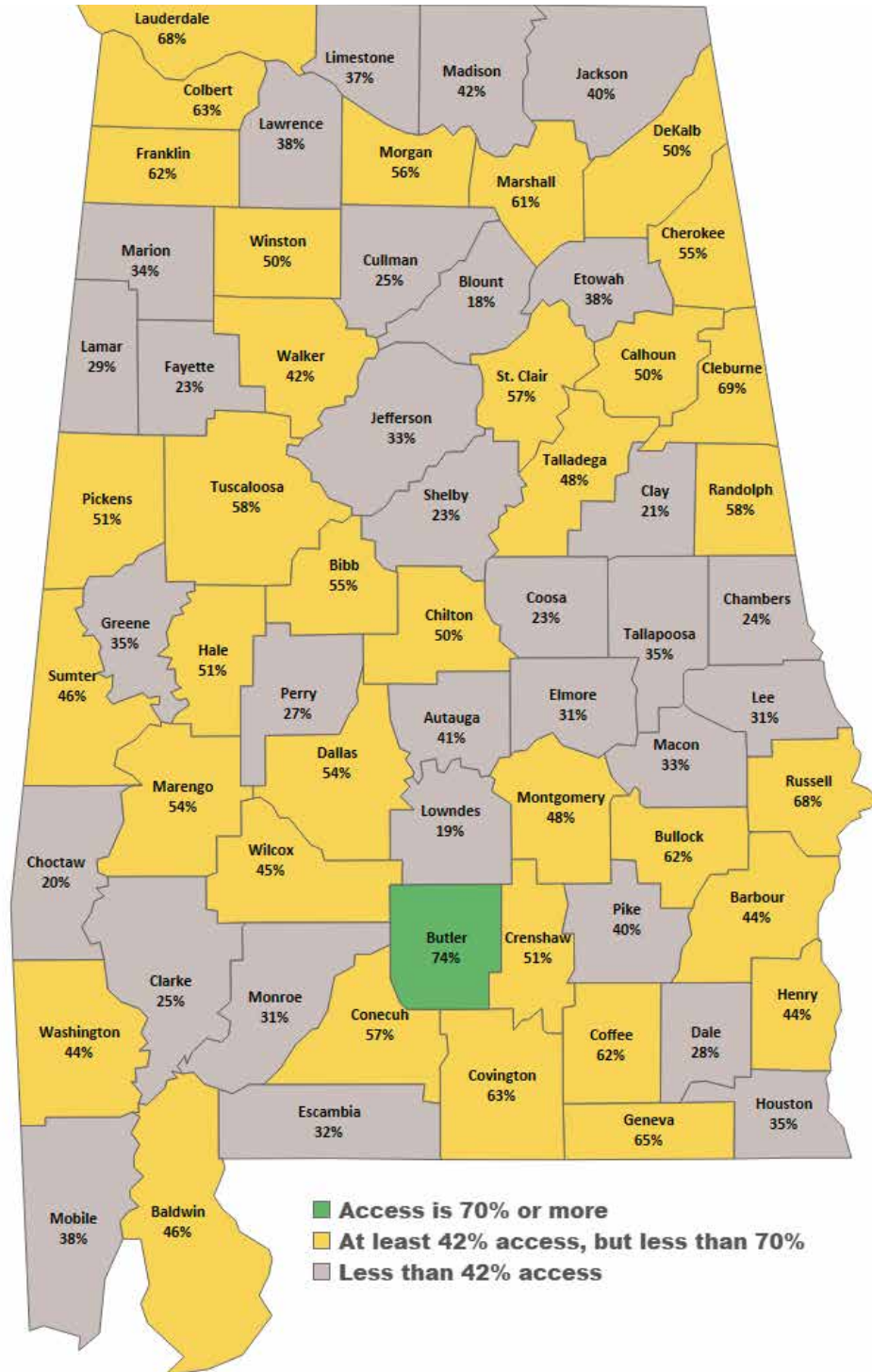
NIEER BENCHMARKS

- Early learning and development standards that are comprehensive, aligned, supported, and culturally sensitive
- Lead teachers have at least a bachelor's degree
- Lead teachers have specialized training in pre-k
- Auxiliary teachers have a CDA or equivalent
- All lead and auxiliary teachers receive research-informed dosage and areas of specialty in professional development as well as individualized job-embedded coaching and professional development plans to support instructional practices
- Limited class size (20 or less)
- Low student-teacher ratios (1:10 or smaller)
- Vision, hearing, and health screenings and referrals
- Implementation of a continuous quality improvement system that includes structured classroom observations and data used for program improvement.

2021 Stats:

- **Alabama First Class Pre-K enrolled 18,906 children in the 2020-2021 academic year.**
- **State funding totaled \$126,450,264 with an additional \$947,813 in federal recovery funds, up \$2,293,314 (2%) adjusted for inflation, since last year.**
- **State spending per child equaled \$6,738 (including federal recovery funds) in 2020-2021, up \$618 from 2019-2020, adjusted for inflation. In addition to the school year program, the ADECE offered a summer learning program for 708 outgoing preschoolers. Alabama First Class Pre-K continued to meet all quality standards benchmarks established by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) as it has every year since 2005.**

Percentage of four-year-olds WITH ACCESS TO FIRST CLASS PRE-K (2021 – 2022)



Alabama Children

BIRTH THROUGH FIVE

The initial Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) was a federally funded effort for states to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment and strategic planning. The ADECE was one of five states and the District of Columbia to receive the largest of the federal awards. This federal grant program, jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education, is designed to support states in creating and implementing a statewide strategic plan for early childhood. The “Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education” PDG B-5 grant lays out a vision that all Alabama children are healthy and emotionally ready to enter kindergarten, particularly low-income and disadvantaged children, and that strong supports are provided to assist families in making informed choices. This vision recognizes that the birth to age five window is a unique time in a child’s development. With more than 95% of brain development occurring before a child’s 6th birthday, it is imperative that all children’s developmental needs are targeted, cognitive as well as social, emotional, and health-related.

The comprehensive needs assessment completed in FY20 through the initial PDG B-5 grant was the product of a review of 59 existing needs assessments and information from more than 450 key informants and stakeholders. The Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Steering Committee developed a comprehensive strategic plan based on the identified strengths and needs of Alabama’s early care and education system.

While Alabama’s First Class Pre-K and First Teacher Home Visiting programs are nationally recognized for quality, a concern was raised in the needs assessment

about the lack of program accessibility statewide. Program delivery of pre-k, as well as all other types of early care and education, are challenges in rural areas throughout Alabama. The greatest needs identified through the needs assessment quantitative and qualitative data collection are as follows:

- **Access to high quality early learning programs, particularly in high poverty and rural areas**
- **Lack of data about children ages birth to three and their participation and needs for early care and education**
- **High cost of childcare**
- **Transportation to early care and education programs and services**
- **Child and family-focused data on programs and services**
- **Agging buildings and physical structures housing ECCE programs and services**
- **Increased funding for programs that have proven successful such as First Teacher Home Visiting, including HIPPI and Parents as Teachers**
- **Coordination and collaboration in the distribution of funding**
- **Transition from ECCE to K-12**
- **Collaborative data systems to measure quality and accountability.**

In response to the needs assessment and as part of the PDG B-5 initiative, the following strategies are underway:

- **Supporting Birth through Five Foundation sites around the state where the Alabama**

Reflective Coaching model is being implemented in infant and toddler classrooms;

- Improving the quality of classrooms through enhancement of the learning environment;
- Increasing the number of teachers with early childhood credentials through professional development opportunities, stipends for teachers, and pay parity with K-12 for degreed teachers;

- Development and launch of the Alabama Family Central Website in partnership with the Alabama Partnership for Children as a centralized resource of programs and services for families state-wide;
- Launch of the Born Ready Initiative, including Born Ready Universities, to raise awareness among parents and to provide resources and information they need to help children learn and be prepared for kindergarten;

Birth to 3

19 First Class Foundations Programs received funding:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • W.C. Handy - Florence
(4 classrooms) | • Precious Seeds - Tarrant
(4 classrooms) |
| • Seymour Bevill - Double Springs
(4 classrooms) | • James Rushton – Birmingham
(9 classrooms) |
| • Little Tigers – Russellville
(5 classrooms) | • Nocalula Academy – Gadsden
(5 classrooms) |
| • Village of Promise – Huntsville
(3 classrooms) | • Nocalula Academy Too – Gadsden
(7 classrooms) |
| • YMCA Downtown – Huntsville
(3 classrooms) | • United Christian – Prattville
(5 classrooms) |
| • YMCA Northwest – Huntsville
(3 classrooms) | • Spot for Tots - Chatom
(4 classrooms) |
| • YMCA Southeast – Huntsville
(3 classrooms) | • DMJ Enterprises – Dothan
(3 classrooms) |
| • Hightown Academy – Tuscaloosa
(8 classrooms) | • Coleman Center – Dothan
(5 classrooms) |
| • First Presbyterian – Tuscaloosa
(10 classrooms) | • Immanuel - Ozark
(4 classrooms) |
| • Little House for Little People - Bessemer
(3 classrooms) | |

The focus of the First Class Foundation Sites is to extend the high-quality framework of the First Class Pre-K program into birth-to-3 classrooms. Programs with an existing FCPK classroom, that also served children from birth to age three, were eligible to apply for additional funding to expand quality practices. The initiative funded 19 programs, serving 92 B-3 classrooms. Funds were used for teacher incentives, salary increases, educational materials, professional development, and indoor and outdoor environmental improvements. In addition to funding, B-5 coaches guided classrooms in developmentally appropriate practices and supported teachers in meeting their professional goals. Programs were strengthened by 15 teachers who were helped to attain their Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate. This nationally-recognized credential is a first step to a career in early childhood education. This year the coaches will become the first team to be trained in a literacy program that targets birth-to-5, Read Right from the Start. This model supports teachers in building a language-rich environment and building a child's vocabulary through intentional teaching.

In 2021, the ADECE supported the development and enhancement of the statewide comprehensive early childhood care and education system by providing on-going technical assistance and support for the implementation of the PDG B-5 strategic plan. Specifically, we worked closely with B-5 project leadership to design and facilitate two meetings of the PDG B-5 Steering Committee to guide the activities of the grant, and two meetings of the PDG B-5 Work Group Co-Chairs, five working groups targeting specific objectives requiring a high level of collaboration. Additional check-ins and updates on strategic plan implementation were provided to



both the PDG B-5 Steering Committee and PDG B-5 Workgroup Co-Chairs during quarters when formal meetings were not convened.

In 2021, the ADECE conducted an updated needs assessment to gather insights and information on the new and emerging needs of children birth to five and their families resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The needs assessment included collecting and reviewing 22 new local, state, and national qualitative and quantitative needs assessments (conducted after mid-2019 when the previous needs assessment was completed), and coordinating and conducting 27 interviews with 33 key stakeholders. The ADECE completed data analysis of the needs assessments and interviews, and then designed and facilitated a presentation of the results to the ADECE Leadership Team, the PDG B-5 Steering Committee, and the PDG B-5 Work Group Co-Chairs. After reviewing the findings with these groups, the final needs assessment report was distributed to internal and external stakeholders. Data from the needs assessment is being used to inform the final year of PDG B-5 strategic plan implementation and the development of a strategic plan for the ADECE to be completed in 2022.

Strong Start Strong Finish – P-3

Governor Kay Ivey’s education initiative, “Strong Start, Strong Finish,” was launched in July 2017 to support a comprehensive approach of collaboration that improves education from birth to the workforce. This initiative focuses on and prioritizes three critical stages of education: early childhood education, computer science in middle and high school, and workforce preparedness. Through Strong Start Strong Finish, the ADECE using Alabama’s nationally recognized First-Class Pre-K model as a bridge to develop and expand a birth to 8 continuum, creating

an alignment spanning Pre-K to 3rd grade (“P-3”) and prenatal to age 3.

The Alabama Pre-K- 3rd Grade Integrated Approach to Early Learning is a partnership with the ADECE and the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE). The Departments are working together to align instructional practices, assessment, and leadership from pre-k through 3rd grade (P-3). This collaborative partnership for the P-3 project will develop and implement a strong teaching and learning continuum unique to the needs and expectations of Alabama children and families.

Alabama Pre-K through 3rd Grade (P-3) **INTEGRATED APPROACH TO EARLY LEARNING**



Alabama P-3 Leadership Academy

The first collaborative initiative of its kind in the nation, the P-3 Leadership Academy is provided in partnership with the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). This high-quality professional learning and resource program meets the needs of elementary principals to lead P-3 learning communities. By partnering together, the ADECE provides a high-quality professional learning and resource program to meet the needs of

elementary principals and pre-k directors serving young children in their most critical age groups. The year-long program cumulates in a Capstone Project that provides participants with an opportunity to apply what they have learned in their current setting. This is the first program offered through a collaborative partnership with a national principal’s organization, and the only such program that participants, upon successful completion of the program, receive a national certification credential. In June 2018, the first-ever such cohort in the country to complete this national pilot program received their Alabama P-3 Leadership Credential. The 2020-2021 cohort consisted of 23 school leaders from across the state.

“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 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 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 believe that students are better at problem solving and managing behavior as a result of P3.”

“P-3 has created new learning opportunities for our students through play-based, social interactions that provide developmentally appropriate means of teaching and learning.”

— Jami Rainey, Ed.D., Principal, Carbon Hill

First Teacher **HOME VISITING**

The ADECE is the governor designated lead state department for home visiting in Alabama. The ADECE provides access to home visiting in all 67 counties utilizing the following funding sources: federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funds from HRSA, the Alabama Medicaid Agency, the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR), the Alabama Department of Public Health as part of Governor Kay Ivey’s Infant Mortality Reduction Initiative, and the state Education Trust Fund.

First Teacher Home Visiting focuses on 6 priority areas:

- **Improving maternal physical and mental health**
- **Reducing physical abuse**
- **Improving treatment of children (including health and nutrition)**

- **Promoting economic self-sufficiency for families**
- **Educating families on how to use the resources that are available to them in their area**
- **Promoting school readiness**

Home visiting in Alabama has improved the coordination of services with other local agencies, advisory boards, and children’s policy councils. The models used are: Parents as Teachers (PAT), Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI). Programs have been successful in improving breastfeeding rates, increasing school readiness, and enhancing the ability to address mental health and behavioral needs of families utilizing the infant and early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) program. Some models allow enrollment of pregnant women and continue to serve the



Goodwill Gulf Coast Parents as Teachers Home Visiting, The Cornelio Family

including cell phones and iPads. This alternative way of “visiting” with parents was especially beneficial for safety due to COVID-19. During the pandemic, First Teacher Home Visiting was able to continue services for families and continue connecting families with the resources available in their community.

family until the child enters kindergarten. Through regular visits, trained home visitors screen families’ mental and physical health, children’s development, and social support needs and make referrals to services available in their area, while also providing education and support to promote positive health and social outcomes during the home visits.

While the home is the primary setting for service delivery, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, First Teacher Home Visiting programs pivoted to provide remote visits utilizing technology,

In 2020-2021 the First Teacher Home Visiting Program served over 4,500 children and conducted almost 59,000 virtual and in-person home visits throughout Alabama. First Teacher serves some of Alabama’s most vulnerable families. Nearly two-thirds meet the federal definition for poverty and the majority of those are in extreme poverty, 50% or less of the poverty threshold. Alabama has enhanced the quality of home visiting services to mothers and families through Continuous Quality Improvement

ANA WAS WORRIED AND AFRAID. Her daughter Perla, weighing just one pound after being born weeks early, needed more help than Ana knew, and Ana didn’t know how to get it. Ana and her husband had emigrated from Mexico in 2005, and they didn’t speak English. Ana turned to the First Teacher Program at Goodwill Gulf Coast.

Once she discovered Goodwill, Ana’s eyes were opened to the many programs available to support the needs of her family. Perla began receiving Early Intervention services, working with therapists to help improve her development. When Perla turned 3, Goodwill Gulf Coast continued to be there for Ana, using Parents as Teachers (PAT), a home-based program adding resources for early learning and school readiness. Through goal setting with her parent educator, Ana was able to learn budgeting skills, save

for the purchase of a home, and meet other family goals. As their family grew, each child benefited from being enrolled in the First Teacher program, and the early learning skills Ana was gaining. Now Axel, age 2, is in the First Teacher program and enjoying his learning time. “He waits by the door on the days his parent educator is coming,” Ana laughs.

Today, Ana, her husband, and three beautiful children know how much more stable their lives have become as a result of their participation in a First Teacher program. Ana credits Goodwill Gulf Coast, “You gave me the assistance that has enabled me to learn more about what my family needs, and the help I needed to meet those needs,” she stated. “We were looking for a better life here, and thanks to Goodwill Gulf Coast, we found it.”

(CQI). CQI is defined as a systematic approach to improving processes and outcomes through regular data collection, examination of performance relative to pre-determined targets, review of practices that promote or impede improvements, and application of changes in practice that may lead to improvements

in performance. Since 2014, the Alabama First Teacher Program has participated in CQI to improve measures related to priority topics in home visiting, such as tobacco cessation, increasing well-child visits, maternal depression and staff recruitment and retention.

Infant and Early Childhood **MENTAL HEALTH**

The ADECE and the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) work collaboratively to support a comprehensive Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) system of care.

This system of care is designed to create pathways to equitable access of mental health resources for children birth to age 8 and their families. The IECMH State Coordinator, housed at the ADECE, serves as part of the core leadership team working to sustain a culturally sensitive, relationship-focused system that promotes positive early experiences through collaborative partnerships, empowering families, and building capacity across communities. Supporting the Governor's Strong Start Strong Finish initiative, the IECMH State Coordinator works closely with state, local, and federal stakeholders to leverage funding sources to increase awareness and training opportunities supporting all disciplines working with children and families.

IECMH policy development that addresses the mental health needs of infants, young children, and families leading to improved overall wellbeing, academic success, and a healthier Alabama.

As a founding partner of First 5 Alabama, Alabama's

IECMH association, the ADECE shares in the vision and mission for the children and families in Alabama by maintaining a seat on the Board of Directors along with representatives from eight state agencies, higher education, non-profits, community mental health, and home visiting. This dynamic group has changed the way we think about the delivery of professional development activities supporting the overall objective of sustainment of an

This system of care is designed to create pathways to equitable access of mental health resources for children birth to age 8 and their families.

effective IECMH workforce through endorsement and reflective supervision/consultation.

Mental health continues to be a top issue identified in the 67 counties through the Children's Policy Council Needs Assessment. Throughout this year we continued to press onward and march forward for a better tomorrow – together. We remain committed to putting an end to mental health stigma and encouraging access to quality care for the families in Alabama.

Addressing the Mental Health Crisis in Alabama with:

- **Crisis Response Comfort Kits** were first created in 2018 as a response to the tornado outbreak in Lee County, Alabama. We continue to distribute kits stuffed with comfort items that promote healing and well-being to families in the face of natural disasters or other extreme adversity;
- **Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC)** in First Class Pre-K was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic and has expanded to include two Early Intervention pilots and the Aletheia House Special Women's Substance Use Disorder Program. Since 2015, IECMHC has grown from **one consultant** serving Tuscaloosa County to **over 25 consultants** serving families across six early childhood program types in 2021;
- The Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Counselor Graduate Certificate graduated the first cohort in 2020 and is working toward completion of the second cohort of professionals from multiple disciplines in 2022. The graduate certificate program is the first in the state of Alabama and one of the few in the country and is modeled after the IECMH program of Wayne State University.
- The ADECE is a founding partner of First 5 Alabama supporting Endorsement® for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health as a multidisciplinary group of professionals with a total of **93 endorsees** representing:
 - The Alabama Early Intervention System
 - Early Care & Education
 - First Teacher Home Visiting
 - The Alabama Department of Mental Health
 - Institutions of Higher Education
 - State Policy Leaders
- The Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) Learning Collaborative 2 boasts the first regional training cohort in the history of CPP programming. Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina will add **specially trained mental health clinicians** to rural areas increasing access to trauma-based mental health care for children and families;
- **213 professionals** across disciplines have been trained in infant mental health theory and diversity informed practices;
- **4 additional teams** have been established to support sustainability of the IECMH infrastructure:
 - **FAN** – Facilitating Attuned iNteractions
 - **DC:0-5** – Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood
 - **Mothers and Babies** – for pregnant women and new parents to help manage stress and prevent postpartum depression
 - **Foundations in Core Curriculum** – Infant Mental Health theory and practice
- **Reflective Supervision/Consultation** is a core component of the IECMH work and continues to be a priority in professional development sustainability across disciplines as we work with the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health to increase provider capacity.

Early Head Start Childcare Partnership **EXPANDED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**



During FY 2021, the Early Head Start Childcare Partnership expanded mental health services, tailored professional development opportunities to specific teacher needs, started a director's network and increased coaching. The expansion of mental health services is a direct result of the overwhelming numbers of teacher referrals and outcomes from multiple screening tools. A second mental health support staff member was added to provide services throughout the state. Professional Development was personalized to meet teachers where they indicated the most need, based on surveys, coaching data and the annual School Readiness Report. From the responses to the directors' survey, and discussions with Quality Specialists, it was determined that directors needed more support and understanding of the

classroom expectations. As a result, the Directors' Network was created. Monthly training sessions are available on a virtual platform, and the topics

The expansion of mental health services is a direct result of the overwhelming numbers of teacher referrals and outcomes from multiple screening tools.

cover specific expectations based on the Head Start Performance Standards. Coaching slots were expanded from 13 to 15 statewide to provide more intensive support using the tiered coaching model, and to implement individualized collaboration with program partners and teachers for children beginning the referral for evaluation process.

Office of Early Childhood Development AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Challenging Behaviors Project

In partnership with the Department of Human Recourses, the ADECE team provides support for childcare sites to help with prevention and intervention as needed for teachers who have children that exhibit challenging behaviors. A main focus is social and emotional well-being with an adult-first approach. For the January to June 2021 coaching cycle, the ADECE team supported 54 childcare sites in 20 counties. The July to December cycle consisted of 46 sites, covering 17 counties. During these cycles, data indicated growth in the total protective factors that are measured for building resiliency in children and adults. Classroom environments also showed improvements with enhancements that provided social and emotional materials for children.

Total Participants in 2021

100

childcare site served in 2021 in 20 counties

1,165

1,165 Total Technical Visit Hours

3,412

Consultations, emails, calls, texts

Professional Development data

13

Total Session

26

Credit Hours

133

Total Participants

14

Directors participating



Penny's Playhouse Early Head Start Academy Program Testimonial

“One of the greatest impacts for Penny’s Playhouse Early Head Start Academy in the 2020-21 year was working with our coach, Mary Beth Frazer on Conscious Discipline. During some of her visits she was able to participate in our Morning Greetings, Brain Smart Start, We Wish You Well and School Family activities. Mary Beth had the opportunity to spend time with one of our children Mahzi. Mahzi liked to walk around the room while we did our activities and on some of the days that Mary Beth was with us, she walked around the room, softly talked to Mahzi and re-joined the group when Mazhi was ready. On one of her visits she asked me if it would be okay if she bought a Conscious Discipline Master Instructor by the name of Elizabeth Montero-Cefalo to observe Conscious Discipline.”

—Facethia Hogue, Director/owner, Penny’s Playhouse EHS Academy

566 Children Slots

649 Children served between October 1, 2020, and September 1, 2021

45 Centers supported

36 Family/Group Homes supported

SNAPSHOT

Trauma-Infused Approach to Early Learning

The Conscious Discipline (CD) approach is a nationally recognized and evidence-directed program that provides structures and strategies to support children and adults through a trauma-informed lens. This approach facilitates the social emotional learning for children, provides classroom management support for teachers and offers problem-solving strategies for families. This research-based method was delivered virtually and in-person throughout 2021 to teachers, administrators, coaches, and families.

There were 1,388 Alabama First Class Pre-K classrooms statewide in FY 2021. 47 of those classrooms participated in the Conscious Discipline Action Team (CDAT) during 2021, where they received virtual coaching and virtual professional development.

Conscious Discipline is a social emotional focus in the 77 classrooms in the Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP). In addition, Early Head Start teachers from 20 classrooms participated in CDAT, where they received virtual and in-person coaching throughout the year.

Training in Conscious Discipline was provided to coaches for the First Class Foundation sites, birth to age 5 (B-5), and P3 (kindergarten – third grade).

Over 450 classrooms across the ADECE chose to participate actively in Conscious Discipline training throughout FY 2021.

“Conscious Discipline connected our classroom (students, parents, and teachers) as we went in and out of being virtual. It allowed our children, the majority having experienced poverty or trauma,

47 First Class Pre-K classrooms served in CDAT
94 teachers **846** potential children

77 EHS classrooms practiced CD strategies
43 centers and **34** homes **681** children served

98 B-5 classrooms
B-5 Coaches supported through training

232 P3 classrooms
P3 Coaches supported through training

to feel safe and loved at school regardless of the uncertainty that occurred outside. We were able to connect, see a decrease in behaviors, and an increase in academics as a result of having an intentionally-built class family.”

—Hillary Spratlin, *Madison County Elementary School*

First Class Pre-K Classroom Implementing Conscious Discipline



Madison County custodian receives a kindness flower from a preschool student for keeping our school safe.

Head Start Collaboration Office

Alabama’s Head Start programs provide comprehensive, high-quality early childhood education, health, and nutrition services to children from low-income households. This federally funded program promotes school readiness and success by fostering parental engagement and involvement in their children’s education. Head Start uniquely

strengthens families by connecting them to the community-based resources they need to improve the family’s overall well-being and quality of life.

The Head Start Collaboration office is located within the ADECE and is federally funded to support local Head Start grantees as they partner with other early childhood education agencies and organizations to deliver services that focus on childcare, school readiness, transitions, physical and mental health, education, welfare, disabilities, teacher development, homelessness, community and family engagement, and literacy.



Macon County Schools Head Start – Notasulga, Al (left). Tuskegee-Macon County Head Start – Notasulga, Al (right).



Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

In February 2021, the Department of Human Resources entered into an interagency agreement with the ADECE to reimagine the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Named Alabama Quality Stars, the system awards star ratings based on programmatic quality elements being implemented by providers and the quality of teacher-child interactions in the classrooms. The Department of Human Resources has increased

DHR has increased the incentives for the QRIS STAR rating by an average of 1,380%, allowing programs to enter at one STAR level, and use the incentive dollars to move to the next STAR level.

the incentives for the QRIS STAR rating by an average of 1,380%. Programs may use incentive dollars to increase staff salaries or provide program enhancements that will help them advance to a higher STAR level. This system encourages providers to invest in the quality of their programs for children birth-to-five and allows families to make informed decisions regarding childcare.

An Advisory Council was created to guide the development of the QRIS. The Council is composed of representatives from the center-based childcare field, family/home-based childcare field, advocates, quality contractors, and Head Start. The Advisory Council meets

monthly to steer and give feedback on the tools being developed and to share thoughts on next steps. In addition, a partnership with the University of Alabama ensures the tools developed for the project are grounded in research as to what factors truly impact quality. The tools created for the system target areas such as curriculum, assessment, family engagement, program design and environment. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool is also used to measure the quality of the interactions between teacher and child. For young children, the quality of their interactions with adults is the most important factor in predicting positive impacts on brain development. The more engaged and positive the relationships and instruction are with the child, the more optimal the brain development.

Alabama Quality Stars is a system in which providers can measure the quality of their program implementation and identify areas for improvement to gain higher Star ratings.

Parents can also LOOK FOR THE STARS to see how their chosen providers are building quality and know that a Star 2-5 rating means that programs are striving for excellence.

You don't need to wish on a star to become one...



(334)-604-6260
P.O. Box 302755
Montgomery, AL 36130
alabamaqualitystars.org



Children's Policy Councils & **CHILDREN FIRST TRUST FUND**

The state and local Children's Policy Councils (CPC) are vehicles for collaboration throughout the state. The work of the Children's Policy Council system is to address community needs by facilitating children and family service providers' collaborations to develop a comprehensive service plan that focuses on health, early care and education, parent/family engagement, safety, and economic security needs of children from birth to 19. The ADECE supports the work through grant funding and staff involvement in collecting data, facilitating meetings, and supporting efforts to address community needs.

Each year, the local CPCs conduct a needs assessment of their counties, and those needs assessments inform the work of the state's Children's Policy Council which serves as the state's Early Childhood Advisory Council. The ADECE CPC staff assemble the local needs assessment, analyze the data, and work to create a report of the unmet needs of children across the state. This report is presented each year to the state Children's Policy Council to inform the work of the Children First Trust Fund. In recent years, the state Children's Policy Council and the local Children's Policy Councils have met together to share resources and facilitate communication about needs and plans. The most recent meeting was a virtual event in October of 2020, that brought together 800 members of local CPCs and community members as well as members and representatives of the State CPC.



This annual conference was the result of county CPC needs assessments that indicated a desire to bring state and local resources together once a year for sharing ideas and collaboration to address needs at the state and local levels.

Program Highlights

Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is part of Governor Ivey's Strong Start Strong Finish initiative. The ADECE collaborated with Children's Policy Councils in Jefferson, Macon, Marshall, Monroe, and Randolph counties as a pilot program to develop strategies to improve third grade reading proficiency. The program is created around five pillars: Birth to 8 systems, Family Engagement, Health and Wellness, Learning Outside of the Classroom, and Supports for struggling readers,

children with special needs, and English Language Learners.

The ADECE collaborated with UAB to develop Data tools specific to each county and awarded a one-time \$20,000 grant to each of the pilot counties to fund Campaign for Grade-Level Reading projects that strengthen, innovate, and boost third grade reading proficiency. The pilot CPC have made great progress and implemented the following literacy strategies.

Some examples of CPC projects include: Jefferson CPC awarded technical assistance grants to organizations for the development of language access plans to improve limited English proficiency in child-serving programs.

Marshall CPC collaborated with a faith-based mobile reading program to expand services to more children



Macon CPC refurbished three school buses into bookmobiles. The bookmobiles visit communities in Macon County distributing books and literacy resources to children and families.

in the county and provided reading support for children in foster care.

Monroe CPC had 20 portable lending libraries boxes built and placed them in 7 communities in Monroe County to boost reading and improve access. They have also distributed free books to children at community events i.e., high school homecoming and Christmas parades and Halloween events.

Randolph CPC formed a Parent Project parenting program to improve school attendance for students 1st to 3rd grade. They have donated books to schools for a book of the month where all first graders are reading the same book and discussing it. They have had community books drives, Literacy Day, and partnered with their local technical college for Adult Education and Family Literacy opportunities for parents.

Reach Out and Read -Alabama

On July 1, 2021, the ADECE, Alabama Medicaid, and the Alabama Department of Public Health collaborated to expand Reach Out and Read -Alabama. These state agencies provided funding to Reach Out and Read-Alabama to expand services to children living in Jefferson, Macon, Marshall, Monroe, and Randolph counties. Through the Reach Out and Read program, children in the pilot areas will receive new books from their pediatrician at each well-child visit.



Pictured: (L-R) Dr. Marsha Raulerson, Medical Director for Reach Out and Read-Alabama, Judge Jay Mastin (Marshall County CPC), Judge Deborah Biggers (Macon County CPC), Liletta Jenkins (State Children's Policy Council Manager), ADECE Secretary Dr. Barbara Cooper, Amy Crosby & Linda Lee of the American Academy of Pediatrics-Alabama Chapter

Alabama FAMILY CENTRAL.ORG

AlabamaFamilyCentral.org is a free, comprehensive, easy-to-use website that offers parents, family members, caregivers, and teachers a one-stop connection to hundreds of programs, tools, services, and supports to raise strong, healthy children. Alabama Family Central makes finding education, healthcare, children's services, and family resources fast and easy.



In 2021 the site had:

409 service listings

30,000 users

TOP 3 Searches:

Autism, Mental Health, and COVID

Outreach

- Distributed AFC marketing materials to attendees at seven conferences, Medicaid offices, T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients, Health Departments, Regional Child Advocacy Centers, and more.
- Partnered with the Alabama State Department of Education to provide 87 schools with 21,154 AFC bags and reading materials.
- Partnered with A+ Education to update parent resources to meet the need of virtual users.

Marketing efforts included:





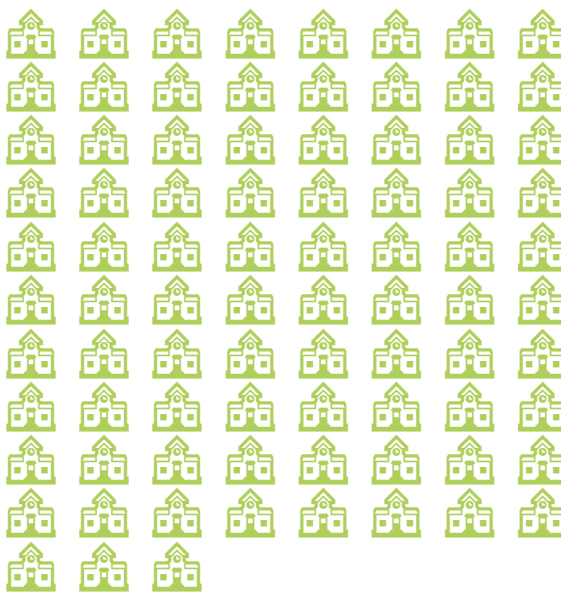
- More than 3 million billboard impressions
- 87,500 readership distributions in parenting magazines
- More than 7.5 million radio impressions
- 1.1 million social media impressions

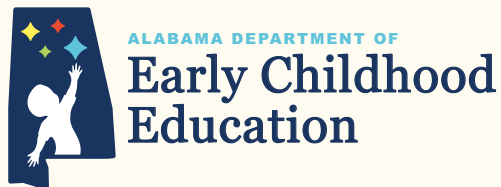
AlabamaFamilyCentral.ORG

2021 Financials

ADECE USES OF FUNDS, FY 2021

	STATE EXPENDITURES		FEDERAL & OTHER EXPENDITURES		TOTAL EXPENDITURES	
	Amount	Percentage	Amount	Percentage	Amount	Percentage
Personnel Costs & Employee Benefits	\$11,815,092	8.9%	\$2,454,631	14.8%	\$14,269,723	9.6%
Operations	\$1,063,737	0.8%	\$183,146	1.1%	\$1,246,883	0.8%
Services	\$3,755,894	2.8%	\$1,711,365	10.3%	\$5,467,259	3.7%
Supplies & Materials	\$3,725,840	2.8%	\$387,718	2.3%	\$4,113,558	2.8%
Program Funding	\$112,264,982	84.6%	\$11,871,521	71.5%	\$124,136,503	83.2%
TOTALS	\$132,625,545	100%	\$16,608,380	100%	\$149,233,925	100%

	Amount	Percentage	
Personnel Costs & Employee Benefits	\$14,269,722	9.6%	
Operations	\$1,246,883	1%	
Services	\$5,467,259	3.7%	
Supplies & Materials	\$4,126,984	2.8%	
Program Funding	\$124,136,503	83%	
Total	\$149,233,925	100%	



Dr. Barbara J. Cooper, Secretary

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