But only 9% of four-year-olds in Alabama have access to the program. Invested in high-quality pre-k now saves taxpayers up to in the future.

Alabama’s First Class Pre-K has been ranked #1 in the country for quality. For 7 years in a row, students surpass national expectations in vocabulary assessments (Alabama Department of Children’s Affairs, 2011). Last year, 100% of Alabama third graders that attended First Class Pre-K scored proficient in reading (Governor Robert Bentley, State of the State Address, 2014).

Recommendations for the Expansion of First Class Pre-K in Alabama

As part of its Pre-K Task Force’s goal to ensure that all families have access to high-quality, voluntary pre-k within the next ten years, the Alabama School Readiness Alliance recommends increasing state investments in First Class by $12.8 million. This would bring total First Class Pre-K investments to $41.3 million for FY15.

Additional research has shown that children that attend high-quality pre-k programs are:

+ more likely to graduate
+ more likely to attend college
+ more likely to succeed in the workforce
– less likely to commit a crime
– less likely to rely on social welfare programs

First Class Pre-K closes the achievement gap for lower income students by an average of 25% and by as much as 29%.

Recommendations for the 2017 Expansion of First Class Pre-K in Alabama
Welcome to the

Pre-K Task Force Recommendations for the Expansion of First Class Pre-K in Alabama

Developed in 2012. Revised for the 2017 Legislative Session

In 2011, the Alabama School Readiness Alliance formed a statewide Pre-K Task Force to grow connections among pre-k champions and identify short- and long-term strategies to increase investments in high-quality, voluntary pre-k in Alabama. Members of the task force came together to study pre-k research, best practices and cost estimates.

The Pre-K Task Force’s recommendations outline a vision for expanding Alabama’s high-quality, voluntary First Class pre-k program so that all families have the opportunity to enroll their four-year-olds. To accomplish this goal, the Pre-K Task Force has recommended increasing the total level of state investments in First Class Pre-K by $125 million over a ten-year period, beginning in 2013-2014 and culminating in 2022-2023.

“Knowing what we know about the positive and lasting effects of quality pre-k, it is easy to see why expanding First Class is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do.”

- Mike Luce, Vice Chairman of Harbert Management and a co-chair of the Alabama School Readiness Alliance’s Pre-K Task Force.
For 10 years in a row, Alabama’s First Class Pre-K has been ranked #1 in the country for quality. But only 25% of four-year-olds in Alabama have access to the program.

2017 Recommendation
The Pre-K Task Force recommends that leaders increase state investments in First Class Pre-K by $20 million during the 2017 Legislative Session. This would bring total First Class Pre-K investments to $84.5 million for FY 2018. If appropriated, this increase would keep the state on track to meet the Pre-K Task Force’s decade-long vision for fully funding First Class Pre-K.

A $20 million increase would...
- add approximately 160 new classrooms
- help enroll approximately 2,880 additional four-year-olds

Total includes classrooms that will be added with funding from year 3 of Alabama’s 4-year federal Preschool Development Grant.
There is no doubt that high-quality pre-k works and that it is a critical part in making our students and the state competitive on a long-term basis. We cannot afford not to invest in high-quality, voluntary pre-k.

- Bob Powers, president of The Eufaula Agency, chair of the Education & Workforce Committee of the Business Council of Alabama, and a co-chair of the Alabama School Readiness Alliance’s Pre-K Task Force pictured here with Co-Chair Mike Luce (left), Vice Chairman, Harbert Management.
Pre-K Task Force Co-Chairs
Mike Luce  
Vice Chairman, Harbert Management
Bob Powers  
President, The Eufaula Agency

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*Director of Governmental Relations, Alabama Association of School Boards*

Leila Watson  
*Attorney, Cory, Watson, Crowder & DeGaris*

James C. Wiley, MD, FAAP  
*Founder of FOCUS Pediatric Clinic, Mobile*
Four-year-olds in Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program are developing the early skills that will help them read proficiently by the third grade, graduate from high school, and become successful in the workforce. More importantly, they will develop a love of learning and an excitement for school that will stay with them throughout their lives.

- Representative Bill Poole, chairman of the Alabama House Ways and Means Education Committee
We recommend expanding Alabama’s high-quality, voluntary First Class pre-k program so that all families have the opportunity to enroll their four-year-olds. To accomplish this goal, we recommend increasing the total level of state investments in First Class Pre-K by approximately $125 million incrementally over a ten-year period between 2013-2023.

2017 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: Increase First Class Pre-K Investments by $20 Million

In order to stay on track to accomplish our goal, the Pre-K Task Force recommends that leaders increase state investments in First Class Pre-K by $20 million during the 2017 Legislative Session.

We recommend that additional state investments in First Class Pre-K:

✓ prioritize expanding access to students at-risk of school failure;
✓ encourage and leverage the use of local and private matching funds;
✓ are sustainable and based on the true costs of a high-quality program; and
✓ are guided by data from a statewide school readiness assessment.

We support the continued use of a “diverse delivery” grant structure for First Class Pre-K that creates high-quality, state-funded pre-k classrooms in public schools, Head Start and community-based settings (such as child care and faith-based centers). We recommend revised strategies and policies that result in more First Class Pre-K programs being placed in community-based settings.
Every day in Alabama a high school student will drop out. Too many were behind from the first day they entered school and were never able to catch up. Alabama’s high-quality, voluntary First Class Pre-K program is closing the readiness gap. Its graduates are entering Kindergarten ready and excited to learn.

- Senator Arthur Orr, chairman of the Alabama Senate Finance & Taxation Education Committee and chairman of the Alabama Select Commission on High School Dropouts
The Department of Early Childhood Education should continue to improve coordination with other state departments in order to ensure that resources are used efficiently and that First Class Pre-K is aligned with child care improvement efforts; other early childhood and family programs; and K-12 learning standards, data systems, accountability and assessment. This collaboration should be supported and enhanced by Alabama’s Children’s Policy Council, the statewide body that coordinates services for young children across state agencies.

As the Department of Early Childhood Education expands access to First Class Pre-K, it should maintain the ten quality benchmarks measured annually by the National Institute for Early Education Research. All First Class providers must adhere to the program’s quality standards and coordinate with families and schools to facilitate children’s smooth transition into kindergarten.

We recognize that parents are their children’s first and most important teachers. With that in mind, we recommend that First Class Pre-K continue to incorporate evidence-based best practices for meaningfully engaging and strengthening families.

We recommend that the Department of Early Childhood Education continue efforts to enhance and measure the quality of First Class Pre-K. The quality of teaching should be regularly observed and student outcomes should be tracked over time through a high-quality, longitudinal program evaluation. This should include a plan to continue progress toward a statewide kindergarten readiness assessment in all systems.

While the state expands access to First Class Pre-K, we support local governments, private companies, charitable organizations, and other state partners in their work to address school readiness gaps by investing in high-quality pre-k and other evidence-based programs that improve the outcomes of children pre-birth to age five, and their families.
Our children are our most precious resource, and it is our responsibility to ensure their success. The way we help them achieve that success is by every child having access to a Pre-K education.

- Senate Minority Leader Quinton Ross
High-Quality Pre-K Works

An abundance of research has shown that the academic “achievement gap” begins as a school readiness gap.\(^1\) Moreover, brain science tells us that the first five years of a child’s life establish either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for everything that follows—and getting things right the first time is easier and less expensive than trying to fix them when a child is older.\(^2\)

High-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten (pre-k) for four-year-olds is an effective early childhood education program that prepares children to succeed socially, emotionally and academically in kindergarten and beyond.

Graduates of a high-quality pre-k program are:\(^3\)

- More likely to be proficient in reading by third grade
- More likely to graduate from high school and attend college
- More likely to succeed in the workplace

Alabama’s First Class Pre-K Program Has Lasting Benefits

A study by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) followed students through sixth grade and found that those who participated in Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program consistently outperformed their peers.\(^4\) First Class Pre-K graduates are also less likely to be chronically absent, repeat a grade, or require special education services.\(^5\)

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5 Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, 2015
Alabama’s First Class Voluntary Pre-K program is one of the best investments we can make to improve the quality of education in Alabama.”

- Robert Bentley, Governor of Alabama
About Alabama’s First Class Pre-K

First Class is Alabama’s state-funded pre-k program. The Office of School Readiness in the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education administers First Class Pre-K by providing and monitoring grants to support high-quality pre-k classrooms in a variety of settings.

For more information, visit http://children.alabama.gov/first-class

Just 25 percent of Alabama’s four-year-olds currently have access to First Class Pre-K due to limited state funding. Here’s how access breaks down by county.

Percentage of four-year-olds enrolled in First Class Pre-K

BY COUNTY

Counts: Counties with less than 25 percent access

Counts: Counties with 25 percent access or more
Alabama’s voluntary pre-k program is the nation’s best and one that others across the country are studying to learn how to prepare their kids for kindergarten and a lifetime of learning.

- Senator Del Marsh, President Pro Tempore of the Alabama Senate
First Class Pre-K Quality Standards

Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program is ranked as the #1 state-funded pre-k program in the country because it meets 10 out of the 10 research-based quality standards recommended by the National Institute for Early Education Research.

Quality Benchmarks

1. Comprehensive early learning standards;
2. Pre-k teachers have a bachelor’s degree;
3. Pre-k teachers have specialized early childhood training;
4. Assistant pre-k teachers have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential;
5. Teachers participate in a substantial number of hours of professional development;
6. Maximum class size is 20 or fewer;
7. Staff to child ratio is 1:10 or less;
8. Children receive screening, referral and support services for vision, hearing, dental, health and other support areas;
9. Children are provided meals and/or snacks;
10. Systems hold individual classrooms accountable and monitor to ensure quality standards are being met.
“I absolutely love pre-k. I wish it was available for all children. I can definitely tell the difference in students that have had pre-k and children that have not.”

- Rosee’ Brown, Kindergarten Teacher, Southlawn Elementary, Montgomery
About the Alabama School Readiness Alliance

The Alabama School Readiness Alliance is a statewide, nonprofit coalition advocating for the expansion of high-quality, voluntary pre-k. ASRA was formed in 2006 as a joint campaign of A+ Education Partnership, Alabama Giving, Alabama Partnership for Children and VOICES for Alabama's Children.

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Some of the companies and organizations represented on the Alabama School Readiness Alliance’s statewide Pre-K Task Force:

Alabama First Class Pre-K

Alabama School Readiness Alliance
PRE-K TASK FORCE

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