



# 2023 PDGB5 STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT UPDATE

Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education

## Abstract

This report captures outcomes of the PDGB5 Statewide Needs Assessment Update (Activity 1) for the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, which took place between March and December of 2023.

DRAFT: December 20, 2023

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# I. Executive Summary

## A. Background

In December 2018, the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) was awarded a Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDGB5) from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. Efforts supported by the initial award, as well as subsequent grant renewals and awards, have supported achievement of the vision for ADECE that, “Every young child in Alabama will have a strong early learning foundation for healthy growth and development.”

Efforts supported by PDGB5 grants have included an ongoing process to understand needs related to early childhood education across the state (needs assessments) and use that understanding to develop strategies to advance early childhood education across the state (strategic planning). Through a 2023 PDGB5 Grant, ADECE has had the opportunity to conduct the following activities, among others:

Activity 1: Statewide Needs Assessment Update

Activity 2: Department Strategic Plan Update

ADECE is pleased to submit this statewide needs assessment update report which concludes Activity One of its 2023 PDGB5 Grant. The report summarizes the activities and outcomes of Activity 1: Statewide Needs Assessment Update and will be used to inform Activity 2: Department Strategic Plan Update.

## B. Summary of the Statewide Needs Assessment Update

The needs assessment update is based on a comprehensive review of 10 existing studies, reports, and datasets and findings from a qualitative data collection process that engaged 58 key informants through interviews and focus groups, including families, providers, agency and nonprofit partners, and ADECE leadership and staff.

The 2023 PDGB5 Grant outlined a focus on three domains for the statewide needs assessment update. These three domains were identified as key areas of focus in previous PDGB5 needs assessments, strategic plans, and the ADECE departmental strategic plan:

- Family engagement
- High quality programs and services
- Workforce support

The impact of COVID-19 on each of the domains was also explored in the needs assessment process but was not elevated as one of the key domains. Data collection and analysis efforts for the needs assessment focused on two key areas for each domain:

- Statewide strengths supporting the domain
- Statewide needs, opportunities, and priorities related to the domain

Activity 1 of the 2023 PDGB5 Grant was guided by ADECE leadership. ADECE appreciates the opportunity this grant has afforded to comprehensively review strengths and priorities for supporting Alabama’s children and looks forward to using this needs assessment to inform its strategic plan.

## II. Statewide Needs Assessment Process

### A. Project Planning

ADECE began its needs assessment process in spring of 2023. With guidance and assistance from ADECE leadership and staff, the project team participated in a series of planning meetings to explore and confirm goals of the needs assessment update, identify key informants and sources of data to be included, and developed question guides to direct interview and focus group conversations. While some of these tasks were completed early in the process, others evolved over time as new resources and opportunities were identified throughout the life of the project.

Acknowledging the environment in which ADECE can change rapidly, and having experienced an executive leadership change early in the life of the project, the project team held adaptability and inclusive participation as key values. This helped the project team remain focused on a clear set of goals, while being able to adapt as needed throughout the life of the project. A list of ADECE leadership who participated in the needs assessment process is included in Attachment A.

### B. Stakeholder Engagement

ADECE leadership identified key stakeholder groups to engage in the needs assessment process, including families, providers, agency and nonprofit partners, and ADECE leadership and staff. ADECE designed and implemented a stakeholder engagement initiative designed to collect feedback from these groups. A total of 58 stakeholders were engaged through 8 interviews and 6 focus groups. Interviews and focus groups were held between June and November of 2023. Interviews and focus groups were structured using question guides covering three key domains of the needs assessment: Family Engagement, Quality Programs and Services, and Workforce Support. Each interview and focus group only included questions about the domain or domains relevant to that group. An overview of the stakeholder engagement process is included in Attachment B.

### C. Existing Studies, Reports, and Datasets

The review of existing data and reports included ten sources. In total, approximately 9,000 stakeholders are represented in the existing data and reports, as well as a statewide assessment based on input from all 67 counties in Alabama. Seven of the ten sources are internal to ADECE. The remaining three include data and reports from the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR), Early Learning Policy Group (on behalf of the Alabama Childcare Roadmap Workgroup), and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). An overview of the ten sources is included in Attachment C.

One of the sources included in the dataset included raw survey data that had not yet been analyzed by ADECE. The needs assessment process included preliminary analysis of that data. The preliminary analysis is included in Attachment D.

### D. Overview of Data Analysis

The data and feedback collected via the needs assessment process was wide-ranging and complex, which is reflective of the range of stakeholders engaged, their experience and intersection with the early childhood education system, and the complexity of the system itself due to different types of programs,

types of centers, and geographic locations. To support thoroughness, consistency, and clarity for the needs assessment, analysis focused on identifying key strengths and key needs, opportunities, and priorities in each domain.

The needs assessment process included two distinct data sets outlined above: (1) Stakeholder Engagement, and (2) Existing Data, Studies, and Reports. Because the nature of the two datasets varied, this report outlines findings from each separately yet in parallel formats that allow for ease of comparison of information across the datasets.

## E. Key Observations

Across the PDGB5 Needs Assessment, a few key observations create important context for the data, analysis, and findings.

### **1. Early Childhood Education Strengths & Building Blocks**

Across the needs assessment process, it was clear that ADECE, as well as the early childhood education system overall, has solid building blocks and frameworks from which to grow, expand, and develop. This will be important, as it was also clear that pathways and the policy landscape seem to be evolving and shifting currently and are anticipated to continue to do so in the future.

### **2. Rapid Growth of the Early Childhood Education System in Alabama**

Growth of the early childhood education system seems to be outpacing thoughtful organization of programs, systems, and structures both internally at ADECE and externally among partner agencies and programs. As a result, the language used by stakeholders lacks continuity and consistency, creating challenges in understanding some of the nuance of the data.

### **3. Interconnection of Family Engagement, High Quality Programs & Services and Workforce Support**

All three of the domains that were a focus of the needs assessment are interrelated, with the connection between quality and workforce support being especially pronounced. As a result, there are overlap and redundancy in some themes and findings across domains, which ultimately makes a strong case for how ADECE can support the system going forward.

### **4. Importance of ADECE Alignment & Effectiveness**

Opportunities to support organizational health and effectiveness of ADECE emerged in multiple domains from internal ADECE stakeholders. These themes suggest strong understanding that ADECE's work and effectiveness is vital to the success of early childhood education in the state and is a worthy investment of ADECE focus and resources.

## III. Key Findings by Domain

### A. Family Engagement

#### ADECE Goal for Family Engagement

Partner with families to support, advocate for, and be involved in their children's early care and education needs to create lifelong learners

#### Key Findings from Stakeholder Engagement

##### **Current Strengths Supporting Successful Family Engagement**

- Stakeholders elevated successful models for family engagement in Alabama, including First Class Pre-K (FCPK), Head Start and Early Head Start, and the Quality Rating Information System (QRIS).
- Stakeholders identified programs and resources that support families well include Born Ready, First Teacher Home Visiting, Help Me Grow, and the Office of School Readiness mental health resources.
- Stakeholders highlighted that ADECE provides critical resources to support family engagement including trainings and workshops for teachers, coaching, and materials and resources provided to centers that can be passed on to families.
- Stakeholders identified a range of best practices for family engagement, including tailoring methods of communication, focusing on strengths, providing translation services, and encouraging participation in a range of avenues for engagement.

##### **Needs, Opportunities, and Priorities for Strengthening Family Engagement**

- Stakeholders said the greatest opportunities and priorities for strengthening family engagement are to expand capacity and awareness at the statewide, center, and program levels.
- At the state level, stakeholders suggested ADECE could provide more capacity through family engagement specialists, training and education for teachers and administrators, and access to resources and providers for mental health.
- At the center level, stakeholders suggested centers could establish more partnerships to expand access to resources, increase access to bilingual professionals, engage all caregivers (including mothers and fathers), and continue to build trust between providers and families.
- At the program level, stakeholders identified a need to expand programs that are working well, with a focus on First Teacher Home Visiting, Help Me Grow, and ReadyRosie.
- Stakeholders also identified a critical need to improve statewide awareness about the importance of early childhood development, including through educational opportunities for families, advocacy training for families and providers, and promotion of early screening and evaluation.
- Stakeholders identified an urgent need to support families by increasing resources and support for behavior, mental health, speech, and special education needs. They emphasized these needs have greatly increased in the wake of COVID-19.

- Stakeholders acknowledged two important considerations for addressing family engagement, including the impacts of COVID-19 on family engagement and children, and the importance of building and maintaining trust and respect with families.

#### Key Findings from Existing Data and Reports

- Across ADECE programs and services, communication and engagement with families are cited as strengths by administrators, teachers, providers, and parents. Overall, it is apparent to all stakeholders that family engagement is centric to programs and services.
- Stakeholders communicate frequently through multiple channels. Suggestions to improve communication and engagement opportunities were varied, indicating a need to continually assess and tailor strategies to different programs and locations; however, a common theme was improving access for non-English speaking families.
- There is appreciation for the robust screening and referral processes, and overall connection to community services. Families report understanding the difference that supportive services make in their children’s long-term development, which can extend to frustration when referral processes are slow.
- In response to the need to both ensure students are school-ready and the rising mental health and substance use issues reported by providers and Children’s Policy Councils, prioritization of partnerships that support stakeholders’ overall success and well-being are more important than ever.

## B. High Quality Programs & Services

### ADECE Goal for High Quality Programs & Services

Provide accessible, equitable, high-quality early learning and development programs and services to promote school readiness and life-long success

#### Key Findings from Stakeholder Engagement

##### **Current Strengths Supporting High-Quality Programs and Services**

- Stakeholders said Alabama has strong, consistent commitment to early childhood education from statewide leadership, as well as significant capacity in terms of the ADECE workforce, levels of funding, and statewide partnerships.
- In addition, stakeholders said programs, centers, and providers have access to resources that advance quality, including Alabama Quality STARS, ADECE support for First Class Pre-K, and ADECE support for continuous quality improvement. Stakeholders highlighted that teachers have access to a range of resources that support quality, such as professional development opportunities and coaching and monitoring.
- Stakeholders highlighted that statewide assessment tools, curriculum, and standards promote quality and consistency. Lastly and importantly, stakeholders emphasized that teacher commitment to students and creation of safe and engaging learning environments supports quality, which connects directly to the importance of workforce.

## **Needs, Opportunities, and Priorities for Strengthening High-Quality Programs and Services**

- Stakeholders said Alabama has a need to maintain and increase levels of funding and financial resources for early childhood education, including for pay and benefits for teachers, advancing quality across all programs, investing in infant and toddler programs, and First Class Pre-K grants.
- Stakeholders had a particular focus on the need for financial resources to support recruitment and retention of the early childhood education, including for competitive pay and benefits, noting there is a direct connection between high quality teaching staff and quality programs and services. In addition, expanded mentoring, coaching, and professional development opportunities for teaching staff and center directors are desired to support quality.
- Stakeholders emphasized the importance of parent engagement and support to quality early childhood education.
- Opportunities to advance Alabama Quality STARS include promoting participation and advancement in the program, encouraging directors to engage with the program before opening centers, and continuous training for quality specialists.
- Stakeholders said Alabama has a need to continue focus on seamless and aligned pathways, including alignment with K12 system and ensuring potential gaps in early childhood education are addressed for certain age groups.
- ADECE internal stakeholders identified organizational health at the department level – including through communication, trust, transparency, resources, and consistency – as a priority to support quality across the state.

## **Key Findings from Existing Data and Reports**

- ADECE’s emphasis on high-quality programs and services is recognized by administrators, teachers, providers, and parents, as well as nationally recognized leaders in early childhood education, such as the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).
- The emphasis on data collection, evaluation, and standardization provides metrics by which all stakeholders can feel confident that their efforts are yielding results that promote school readiness and life-long success for children and families of all backgrounds.
- Administrators, teachers, and providers report that implementing best practices in their respective programs is attainable due to ADECE’s professional development, coaching, and support. Ease of accessing these services may vary based on the program site’s size and geographic location (e.g., rural), indicating the importance of tailoring access opportunities to diverse needs.
- Generally, the importance of coordination across key agencies (i.e., Human Resources, Education) is apparent as ADECE continues to improve data collection, evaluation, and access to its programs and services across the state.
- Finally, across the data and reports, stakeholders connect workforce challenges to maintaining high-quality programs and services.



## C. Workforce Support

### ADECE Goal for Workforce Support

Build a workforce that is diverse, professionalized, well-trained and ready to meet the demand for high-quality early care and education programs and services

### Key Findings from Stakeholder Engagement

#### Current Strengths Supporting the Workforce

- Stakeholders emphasized that Alabama has quality, nationally recognized programs and a committed workforce, which serve as a strong foundation for the work yet to be done to support the workforce.
- Stakeholders observed that Alabama is increasing focus on and awareness of both the need for accessible, high quality early childhood education and a qualified, well-resourced workforce. They named that awareness about workforce includes acknowledgement that the early childhood education workforce is shrinking, early childhood education is a professional career pathway, and early childhood education impacts the state's ability to succeed in economic and workforce development broadly.
- Stakeholders identified efforts to develop and sustain career pathways in development or in place today, including credentialing and career pathways for the early childhood education workforce, programs to advance pathways such as *ECE Works* and accelerated CDA programs, and strategies to address compensation challenges. Stakeholders highlighted the range and accessibility of training and education opportunities in the state to support entry and advancement in the field, including the availability of support, range of topics, remote learning opportunities, and financial support in some instances.
- Stakeholders highlighted the unique strengths of the structure and workforce of several programs within the mixed delivery system, including family childcare centers, Head Start, and First Class Pre-K.
- ADECE internal stakeholders named the department's focus on workforce and provision of training and professional development for staff as supportive of the state's early childhood education workforce.

#### **Needs, Opportunities, and Priorities for Supporting the Workforce**

- Before identifying needs, opportunities, and priorities for strengthening workforce support, stakeholders often focused on sharing some of the challenges and causes of the current workforce shortage. For many, this "challenge" was expressed in terms of a "crisis," because workforce impacts so many aspects of early childhood education.
- Across stakeholder groups, there was strong consensus that increasing teacher pay and benefits is essential to building and supporting the early childhood education workforce.
- Stakeholders emphasized the importance of developing a seamless system of credentialing and career pathways for early childhood education, building awareness of those pathways and the opportunities they present, and providing continuing and high quality education and professional development aligned with the pathways.

- Stakeholders underscored the importance of recruitment efforts for early childhood education and offered a range of ideas and strategies to support this, such as elevating the profession and recruiting at high schools, colleges, and universities.
- Stakeholders offered opportunities to increase support for teachers including increased staffing levels across the board to reduce burnout, improved training in recognizing and addressing mental health issues even in the youngest children, clear communication about standards and expectations for teachers, improving the Registry, and reintroducing a virtual option for participating in the Early Childhood Conference.
- In addition to opportunities to support teachers in general, stakeholders suggested some opportunities to support the First Class Pre-K workforce in particular.
- Stakeholders focused on the need to increase support for directors through a range of strategies including training and conferences, support and education about management of centers, and one unified software system with a single login.
- Stakeholders emphasized the importance of continuing to build a seamless statewide ECE system through integration and partnership across agencies, addressing funding in a coordinated way, developing a sound business model, and ensuring all aspects of the mixed delivery system receive adequate focus and resources.
- ADECE internal stakeholders emphasized the importance of building a strong, cohesive, and effective team in order to support the state’s early childhood education workforce.

#### Key Findings from Existing Data and Reports

- Although workforce presents the greatest challenges for ADECE and early childhood education generally, it is important to recognize that ADECE’s supportive services, such as professional development and coaching, are considered highly effective to and appreciated by recipients. An opportunity for ADECE to improve its support is to be responsive to the number of teachers struggling to manage their stress post-COVID-19.
- Low pay is a commonly cited challenge, especially among child care providers, which is important to note due to the matriculation of children and overlapping programs and services. Of First-Class Pre-K teachers who reported not planning to continue in the classroom, one-third cited low pay as the reason; however, most (73% of all survey participants) reported not ever planning to leave the classroom.
- Both internal efforts and coordinated efforts across key agencies (Human Resources, Education), such as T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, a professional development registry, Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Apprenticeships, and expanding educational opportunities in high-schools and colleges, are promising opportunities to address workforce challenges.

## IV. Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups

This section of the report includes a full analysis of the data from interviews and focus groups by domain, including more detail related to each key finding outlined in Section III.

### Domain 1: Family Engagement

*Partner with families to support, advocate for, and be involved in their children's early care and education needs to create lifelong learners*

#### A. Current Strengths Supporting Successful Family Engagement

##### 1. Successful Models for Family Engagement

*Stakeholders elevated successful models for family engagement in Alabama, including First Class Pre-K (FCPK), Head Start and Early Head Start, and the Quality Rating Information System (QRIS).*

**First Class Pre-K (FCPK)** guidelines outline that families are responsible for completing twelve participation hours each school year. Stakeholders said this guideline, as well as teachers offering a variety of activities and opportunities for participation, support family engagement. Participants identified an opportunity to expand support from ADECE for family engagement across FCPK to reduce the burden for individual teachers and classrooms. **Head Start and Early Head Start** strengths for family engagement identified by stakeholders include the Parent Leadership Academy, Fatherhood Initiative, and a reading library that families can access to check out a backpack of resources to take home. **Quality Rating Information System (QRIS)** includes family engagement as a component of the program, which stakeholders identified as a strength.

##### 2. Programs and Resources that Support Families

*Stakeholders identified programs and resources that support families well include Born Ready, First Teacher Home Visiting, Help Me Grow, and the Office of School Readiness mental health resources.*

Stakeholders said **Born Ready** is a valued resource and initiative supporting family engagement. Participants noted the app as a particular strength and suggested the initiative holds many opportunities for expansion and therefore has not yet reached its full potential. Stakeholders said **First Teacher Home Visiting** benefits first-time parents through education and support. They suggested families who participate in the program are better prepared to stay engaged in their children's development and success, and families receive support connecting to other services and opportunities offered by ADECE. Particular program strengths identified by families who have participated included:

- Information and ideas about activities to support child development
- Help setting goals, achieving those, and then moving onto the next ones
- Knowledge about developmental milestones provides peace of mind and helps parents know when additional support may be needed
- Regular connection to other families in the program through play dates and events
- Resources available through the program's Facebook page
- Connection to community programs and resources that otherwise would not have been known by families (such as therapy, pediatricians, and scholarship opportunities)

Stakeholders also said **Help Me Grow** and the **Office of School Readiness mental health resources** support family engagement.

### **3. Resources for Centers and Teachers to Support Families**

*Stakeholders highlighted that the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) provides critical resources to support family engagement including trainings and workshops for teachers, coaching, and materials and resources provided to centers that can be passed on to families.*

Stakeholders identified the following **trainings and workshops for teachers** as strengths supporting family engagement: The *Promoting Resilience Workshop* helps teachers expand on an area of their choice and be creative in approaches to family engagement, and the *Strengthening Families* training modules are a solid resource. Further, stakeholders noted that as part of **coaching and support provided by ADECE**, the department encourages teachers to have authentic conversations with families at drop-off and pick-up that emphasize strengths. In addition, stakeholders noted ADECE provides a range of materials and resources to centers and teachers and encourages centers and teachers to share those resources with families. Examples include booklets about behavior that accompany certain assessments, listings of weekly activities for families, and conscious discipline information.

### **4. Best Practices for Family Engagement**

*Stakeholders identified a range of best practices for family engagement, including tailoring methods of communication, focusing on strengths, providing translation services, and encouraging participation in a range of avenues for engagement.* Examples of best practices for family engagement include:

- Tailor methods of communication to family preferences (phone call, text, email, in person, social media, etc.)
- Focus on family and child strengths when communicating with families
- Engage the whole family in goal setting
- Facilitate monthly meetings with families
- Host social and community events for families
- Go to where parents and families are instead of having them come to the school or center
- Provide translation services when language is a barrier to support connection
- Convene parent committees and let parents lead the engagement process
- Add a family service specialist position when possible to ensure family engagement is happening
- Encourage parents to be involved with Children’s Policy Councils, parent committees, substitute teaching, interviewing staff, volunteering in classrooms, and parent trainings
- Survey families annually
- Offer meetings and trainings after work hours and on weekends
- Offer incentives for parent engagement opportunities

## **B. Needs, Opportunities, and Priorities for Strengthening Family Engagement**

### **1. Increase Statewide Capacity for Supporting Family Engagement**

*Stakeholders suggested ADECE could provide more capacity through family engagement specialists, training and education for teachers and administrators, and access to resources and providers for mental health.*

Stakeholders suggested expanding capacity of **family engagement specialists** from ADECE would help strengthen family engagement across the state. In addition, they suggested more **training and education to teachers and administrators** about resources and support that are available to families would help teachers and administrators more effectively and readily share this information with parents. Stakeholders expressed interest in ADECE providing ongoing opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn about family engagement so they can continue to provide welcoming environments and desirable opportunities for family engagement. Stakeholders highlighted a key need statewide to support families is **access to resources and providers for mental health** in response to increasing mental health challenges across the state in both children and adults. Long wait lists, access to providers who will work with children under age five, and family healthcare providers being up-to-date on mental health concerns are all challenges stakeholders identified.

## **2. Increase Center and Program Capacity for Supporting Family Engagement**

*Stakeholders suggested centers and programs could establish more partnerships to expand access to resources, increase access to bilingual professionals, engage all caregivers (including mothers and fathers), and continue to build trust between providers and families.*

Stakeholders identified a need to help centers and programs focus on establishing more **partnerships to expand access to resources** to share with families, especially in rural communities. A specific need to increase access to **bilingual professionals** (including mental health professionals and speech therapists) to support strong family engagement was also highlighted. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of engaging **mothers, fathers, and all caregivers** in family engagement, so all members of the family and caregivers can be actively engaged in their children's education. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of **building trust between child care providers and families** as the foundation of meaningful family engagement and acknowledged that building trust takes time.

## **3. Expand Existing Programs to Reach More Families**

*Stakeholders identified a need to expand programs that are working well, with a focus on First Teacher Home Visiting, Help Me Grow, and ReadyRosie.*

Stakeholders emphasized the opportunity to expand capacity and reach of **First Teacher Home Visiting** so more families could participate than do today. They suggested promoting the program more and increasing consistency of information, outreach, and support across counties. Strengthening integration and communication through First Class Pre-K regions was also identified as an opportunity to get more information about the program in the hands of teachers and families. Specific considerations for expanding the program identified by families who have participated in the program include:

- Encourage **greater participation in First Teacher Home Visiting** so more people have access to the program's resources and can be connected to one another. A barrier to participation may be that families perceive home visits as negative. Strategies for overcoming this barrier include communicating more clearly about the program and having events outside of families' homes

that are welcoming and interesting. Another barrier is reaching first-time parents when so many hospitals with women's services are closing across the state. Increasing and being creative with outreach (resources fairs, pediatricians, partnerships), offering incentives, and word of mouth are important to overcoming this barrier.

- Expand **participation and access to resources in rural areas**, as there are fewer accessible (nearby) resources and fewer families involved in more rural communities, which is a barrier to receiving the full benefit of the program. A "Mom's Day Out" element to the program is also desired in all areas, as these are difficult to find.
- Continue to **ask for families' feedback through written and in-person communication** and seek input regularly in rural areas where fewer families may be involved. Continue to use the Facebook page to provide information about resources and consider expanding use of the page to seek input for families. Consider expanding in-person connection opportunities with and among families in rural areas.

Stakeholders also identified a desire to see capacity and reach of **Help Me Grow** expanded so it can have even more impact and provide more support for families. They suggested coaches and monitors could increase focus on sharing information about Help Me Grow with families. Stakeholders also suggested expansion of **ReadyRosie**, but little detail was provided about the program or how to expand.

#### **4. Strengthen Statewide Awareness about the Importance of Early Childhood Development**

*Stakeholders identified a critical need to improve statewide awareness about the importance of early childhood development, including through educational opportunities for families, advocacy training for families and providers, and promotion of early screening and evaluation.*

Stakeholders emphasized the need to increase **educational opportunities and support for families on parenting** and provide a calendar of family engagement opportunities statewide. They specifically suggested including information about conscious discipline and the importance of parental involvement generally in parent education and training. Stakeholders also highlighted the need for more efforts to get the word out and **educate parents, so they understand the importance of quality** in child care and early childhood education, as well as the Quality STARS system. They agreed keeping a strengths-based, supportive approach to communication with parents is key. Stakeholders also said equipping parents and providers to speak for themselves and those they serve, including providing **advocacy training for families and providers** would support statewide awareness and change. This was driven by stakeholder understanding that lawmakers want to hear the lived experience, and educating parents on advocacy would support this. Lastly, stakeholders said promoting **early screening and evaluations** as much as possible should be a key component of statewide awareness.

#### **5. Support for Behavior, Mental Health, Speech, and Special Education Needs**

*Stakeholders identified an urgent need to support families by increasing resources and support for behavior, mental health, speech, and special education needs. They emphasized these needs have greatly increased in the wake of COVID-19.*

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of expanding programs and support to address increasing behavior issues emerging in the wake of the pandemic. They said programs and support are also needed

to **educate families and help them understand child development, developmental expectations, and when to be concerned**. Some stakeholders suggested public service announcements and an awareness campaign could support this, and they suggested statewide parenting classes to understand the impact of screen time on brain development is also an opportunity. While stakeholders highlighted the urgent need to expand **access to resources for behavior, mental health, and speech therapy** both to work with kids and to educate parents so they can support kids at home, they also acknowledged there are extreme challenges to access these resources from large public school districts to small private or home based child care providers. As a strategy to relieve the pressure on the shortage of specialists, stakeholders recommended strengthening and expanding partnerships with two-year colleges to **provide two-year behavior specialist degrees** to increase providers in the state by making degrees for specialist positions more attainable.

## **6. Challenges, Context, and Considerations**

*Stakeholders acknowledged two important considerations for addressing family engagement, including the impacts of COVID-19 on family engagement and children, and the importance of building and maintaining trust and respect with families.*

Stakeholders acknowledged the **pandemic had multiple impacts on family engagement**. For example, they said the pandemic set back family engagement, because families could not come into schools. At the same time, they acknowledged the pandemic increased parent curiosity and desire for more information about child development as a result of spending more time with their children during closures and remote learning. Importantly, stakeholders said teachers and providers are seeing a **drastic increase in severe behavior problems among children in the post-covid era**, and this proves frustrating for the child, the parent, and the teacher. Stakeholders also acknowledged that for today's young children, the **remote and virtual environment creates challenges**. For example, teachers and providers reported seeing issues with toileting, fine motor skills (such as buttoning), and coping skills due to lack of interaction. Stakeholders repeatedly acknowledged the importance of **respect for families as essential to family engagement**. First, they said families need to know they are valued as their child's first teacher. Second, they said programs must balance ensuring they let families know about opportunities without overstepping. Lastly, stakeholders acknowledged that **time, energy, and bandwidth are barriers** to family engagement for parents and caregivers in working families.

## **Domain 2: Quality Programs & Services**

*Provide accessible, equitable, high-quality early learning and development programs and services to promote school readiness and life-long success*

### **A. Current Strengths Supporting High-Quality Programs and Services**

#### **1. Statewide Leadership and Capacity**

*Stakeholders said Alabama has strong, consistent commitment to early childhood education from statewide leadership, as well as significant capacity in terms of the ADECE workforce, levels of funding, and statewide partnerships.*

Stakeholders highlighted that **Alabama has strong, consistent commitment from leadership**, including the governor, ADECE leadership, district leadership, and the business community. They agreed collective commitment from leaders translates to consistent goals and frameworks that support quality.

Stakeholders also noted ADECE has **significant capacity in terms of the number of people who for the department and the department's levels of funding**, acknowledging that it takes a lot of people and resources to have quality. Further, stakeholders highlighted that **statewide partnerships among public agencies and nonprofits are supporting quality**, including a more coherent plan among ADECE, ADHR, Alabama Partnership for Children, Voices for Alabama's Children, and others. They agreed partnerships are focused on implementing plans, taking ownership, and following through on ideas.

## **2. Resources and Support for Programs, Centers, and Providers**

*Stakeholders said programs, centers, and providers have access to resources that advance quality, including Alabama Quality STARS, ADECE support for First Class Pre-K, and ADECE support for continuous quality improvement.*

Stakeholders emphasized that **Alabama Quality STARS** supports quality through a mechanism for technical assistance related to quality and by providing significant incentive payments to providers. Stakeholders noted that many centers and providers use those resources to help pay the staff, which helps close the gap for wages, infuses funding into the system, and has a direct impact on quality. They agreed the program also raises awareness that there are high-quality programs that may not have as many resources as First Class Pre-K. Stakeholders praised **ADECE support for First Class Pre-K** as a key contributor to quality. They highlighted that the program includes aligning services with early childhood education research, supporting quality control to help programs stay consistent with developmentally appropriate strategies, providing support directly to center directors through open communication and collaboration, and keeping the focus on the kids. Stakeholders also noted that **ADECE focuses on continuous quality improvement for providers**. They said the department seeks to meet providers where they are in terms of quality while also helping them progress along a quality improvement process.

## **3. Resources for Teachers (Professional Development, Coaching, Monitoring)**

*Stakeholders highlighted that teachers have access to a range of resources that support quality, such as professional development opportunities, coaching, and monitoring.*

Stakeholders spoke to resources and support for teachers that are connected to specific programs. Stakeholders shared that **professional development opportunities** available to Head Start, Early Head Start, and family childcare programs impact quality by providing continuous training and guidance on how to effectively implement curriculum and best practices. Similarly, stakeholders shared that professional development opportunities for First Class Pre-K lead and auxiliary teachers supports continuous learning and growth for educators and includes topics ranging from classroom set-up and circle time to developmentally appropriate strategies. In addition, **coaching and monitoring** as a service, as well as the knowledge of the individual coaches and monitors, supports quality for First Class Pre-K and Head Start.



Stakeholders also spoke to resources and support for teachers more broadly from ADECE. They said **regional support from the department supports quality**, including the region directors themselves and regional new teacher development support. Stakeholders also named the **Alabama Early Childhood Education Conference** as a strength that supports quality, and they highlighted that the **Conscious Discipline Program** includes support every other week in a classroom as a chance to model hands-on what quality looks like (model a lesson, be there in the moment if there is a challenge, use the best language, etc.). Lastly, stakeholders named **early childhood education apprenticeships** as promoting high quality, appropriate education for teachers.

#### **4. Assessment Tools, Curriculum, and Standards**

*Stakeholders highlighted that statewide assessment tools, curriculum, and standards promote quality and consistency.*

Stakeholders emphasized that **access to strong assessment tools is a strength**. They said assessment tools like GOLD allow for assessment of each child for their own developmental progress and a basis to tailor strategies to where children's progress. In addition, stakeholders acknowledged that **access to strong curriculum helps generate quality**. They noted curriculum is used in the classroom and is also designed to be something children and families can use everywhere. Stakeholders named some **particular curriculum strengths for Head Start and Early Start**, including the following: Early Head Start provides evidence-based curriculums for providers. The bilingual Head Start program provides customized lesson plans and culturally sensitive curriculum based on the needs and interests of the community, and Head Start also has a home visitor who is bilingual.

Stakeholders emphasized that **standards for operational and structural requirements** are set and all programs are expected to meet standards, which translates to quality. For example, stakeholders described that First Teacher Home Visiting and Head Start have standards and guidelines, which translate to consistency. They also appreciated that there is a balance and flexibility with QRIS standards to support creation of a safe space for asking for support on some of the indicators. Stakeholders noted some particular strengths with **First Class Pre-K policies, procedures, and approach to start-up**, which acknowledge that start-up is different from ongoing operations. They also noted the streamlined and data-focused registration process for First Class Pre-K is a strength.

#### **5. Teacher Commitment & Positive Learning Environments**

*Stakeholders emphasized that teacher commitment to students and creation of safe and engaging learning environments supports quality, which connects directly to the importance of workforce.*

Stakeholders across the board noted the **quality of teachers and home visitors is exceptional**, noting they provide services that are needed for each child based on that individual child's needs, and that any teachers live where they serve. Stakeholders also highlighted that many **center leaders and principals collaborate**, noting that many principals have gone through leadership training which has equipped them with deep understanding of what is developmentally appropriate and helps bridge from Pre-K to Kindergarten. Stakeholders also noted that **quality programs have an environment that is conducive to learning**, including environments that are safe, set up to support the curriculum, and engage children in developmentally appropriate activities.

## B. Needs, Opportunities, and Priorities for Strengthening High-Quality Programs and Services

### 1. Funding and Financial Resources

*Stakeholders emphasized that Alabama must maintain and increase levels of funding and financial resources for early childhood education to support quality, including for pay and benefits for teachers, advancing quality across all programs, investing in infant and toddler programs, and expanding First Class Pre-K grants.*

Stakeholders acknowledged incentives for the workforce as a strength and underscored the importance of **maintaining levels of incentives to support the workforce** and provide **more financial resources to support compensation and benefits** for all early childhood education professionals. To support this, stakeholders noted the importance of **continuing to elevate the lens of quality to advocate for more resources and support for early childcare education**. Some suggested considering framing childcare as small business and/or community infrastructure (similar to hospitals and first responders) to support this. They noted that putting a monetary value on early childcare services (which is high) comes into conflict with what families can afford.

Stakeholders noted some particular age groups and programs for which funding and financial resources are especially critical. They emphasized the importance of **adequate funding for infant and toddler programs**. They noted that infant and toddler care is more expensive than preschool and that funding for infant and toddler programs is a need around the country. Stakeholders also identified a need to **increase funding and accessibility for 3-year-olds and Early Head Start services**, as well as to **ensure First Class Pre-K grant amounts and process are accessible and adequate to cover needs**. Stakeholders noted some First Class Pre-K centers struggle to come up with the match and therefore struggle to expand and meet the needs of all families while staying true to quality. Others observed the grant amounts have been cut back and are not enough to cover all the center needs. A specific example included that the playground enhancement grants are not enough to cover the cost of playground today, but examples extended to salaries for lead and auxiliary teachers and beyond.

### 2. ECE Workforce Recruitment and Retention

*Stakeholders expressed there is a particular need for financial resources to support recruitment and retention of the early childhood education workforce, including for competitive pay and benefits. They made a direct connection between high quality teaching staff and quality programs and services.*

Stakeholders identified a great need to **support centers and programs in finding and retaining high quality teaching staff and substitutes, which has a significant impact on quality**. They shared that many centers identify finding and retaining quality staff and substitutes as the biggest challenge impacting quality, and noted that staffing each classroom with two teachers would supporter higher quality and time for professional development and planning.

Stakeholders emphasized the need to **address the shortage of early childhood professionals** generally but noted that recruiting teachers to a private program in a small market is especially difficult, in part due to competition with public schools. They acknowledged private providers also have difficulty finding

retirement plans, meeting the salary scale (even though they know it is well-deserved), and supplementing compensation in same ways the public system can. Specific to First Class Pre-K, stakeholders noted that **schools have a hard time keeping Pre-K teachers in place** because they can jump to kindergarten and make as much as \$20,000 more in salary. While they acknowledged ADECE has tried to help with pay discrepancies and narrow that gap, there is still an urgent need to retain teachers so there is more stability (“not a revolving door”).

### **3. Mentoring, Coaching, and Professional Development**

*Stakeholders said expanded mentoring, coaching, and professional development opportunities for teaching staff and center directors are needed to support quality.*

Stakeholders emphasized that coaching directly impacts quality and expressed a desired to see **strengthened coaching statewide by hiring more coaches, paying coaches a competitive salary, investing in coaches through quality professional development and trainings, and providing more resources to coaches (such as transportation)**. They noted challenges to strengthening coaching, including coaches having high caseloads, leaving coaching to go to higher paying jobs in the classroom, and monitoring roles being perceived as easier and having more autonomy. Beyond coaching for teachers, stakeholders desire to see **mentoring and coaching opportunities for center and program directors**, noting that opportunities for peer director relationships would be beneficial. Beyond mentoring and coaching, stakeholders emphasized the importance of **increasing skills, training, and professional development for the early childhood education workforce**, particularly for home-based centers, **providing childcare center directors with training on human resources and management of people** so that issues are not elevated to ADECE, and **ensuring time and capacity for teachers to access available training opportunities**.

### **4. Parent Engagement and Support**

*Stakeholders emphasized the importance of parent engagement and support to quality early childhood education.*

Stakeholders expressed a desire to **support increased understanding of quality early childhood education** not only for center owners, directors, and teachers, but also by parents and the general public. Further, stakeholders desire to see the state **work toward a range of strategies for parent support**, such as paid parental leave to support infants and their families, as parent support impacts quality.

### **5. Alabama Quality STARS**

*While Alabama Quality STARS is a strength, stakeholders identified opportunities to advance and expand Alabama Quality STARS including promoting participation and advancement in the program, encouraging directors to engage with the program before opening centers, and continuous training for quality specialists.*

Stakeholders identified an opportunity to **provide continuous training for QRIS quality specialists** so they can provide the best support possible to teachers and children, especially providers who are new, and work in partnership with providers to help programs meet standards. Further, stakeholders want to

**expand participation and center progression in Quality STARS.** Stakeholders acknowledged strategies to increase participation, such as offering one star to any center that was willing to become accredited, and progress in programs increasing from two stars to five. They noted, however, that opportunities still exist to expand participation, particularly for programs in harder to reach areas across the state and family childcare. Stakeholders also identified an opportunity to **encourage potential childcare owners/directors to engage with QRIS before they open a center** to receive support and training about quality, standards, and the value of early childhood care and education.

## **6. Seamless and Aligned Pathways for Early Childhood Education**

*Stakeholders also identified a need for Alabama to continue focus on seamless and aligned pathways for early childhood education, including alignment with K12 system and ensuring potential gaps in early childhood education are addressed for certain age groups. They also emphasized the importance of elevating research, evaluation, and exploration of new or re-envisioned models of a seamless and high-quality early childhood care and education continuum.*

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of **building stronger alignment of expectations across the early childhood education continuum** from birth through the K12 system, allowing partners at all levels to have a common understanding and goals. In addition, stakeholders identified a need to **address gaps in services for children in certain age groups**. An example included children who exit Early Head Start when they turn three, but don't have another place until they turn four (if there isn't Head Start or First Class Pre-K in their area). Stakeholders noted the patchwork for certain age groups impacts quality.

Thinking statewide, stakeholders identified a need to continue to **elevate research and evaluation to be used to strengthen the political will required to raise quality**, especially for infants and toddlers. Stakeholders also suggested **exploring models and re-visioning what a quality B5 program should look like** by convening people across the state to develop a new set of standards for B5 to raise quality and connect to First Class Pre-K and considering staffing patterns, qualifications, ratios, what to keep, what to change, and what could be done completely differently.

## **7. ADECE Organizational Health & Effectiveness**

*ADECE internal stakeholders identified organizational health at the department level – including communication, trust, transparency, resources, and consistency – as a priority to support quality across the state.*

ADECE stakeholders focused on First Class Pre-K expressed a desire to **improve communication, trust, and transparency** between the department and First Class Pre-K programs. As one participant noted, we “need trust through communication to move this program to excellence.” They identified barriers to this including fragmented information, uncertainty about how things will be received by others, and silos. They emphasized the importance of bridging together and collaborating to improve the program and quality. These stakeholders also said more resources at the Region Director level would support quality. Finally, these stakeholders want to **increase quality through more consistency and organizational health at the department level**, including having clear roles and responsibilities at the department. As one participant noted, “Quality and family engagement all start with the [ADECE] team working together.”

## Domain 3: Workforce Support

*Build a workforce that is diverse, professionalized, well-trained and ready to meet the demand for high-quality early care and education programs and services*

### A. Current Strengths Support the Workforce

#### **1. Foundation of Quality, Nationally Recognized Programs and a Committed Workforce**

*Stakeholders emphasized that Alabama has quality, nationally recognized programs and a committed workforce, which serve as a strong foundation for the work yet to be done to support the workforce.*

Stakeholders acknowledged Alabama's **quality, nationally recognized programs that are evidence-based and scalable**, including First Class Pre-K, Help Me Grow, First Five Alabama, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Alabama, and others. Stakeholders also highlighted that Alabama Quality STARS is an objective management of quality and includes competencies and education levels. They noted Alabama Quality STARS also gives family daycares the opportunity to grow and increases access. Stakeholders also praised the **committed and passionate early childhood education workforce**, noting that the workforce is accountable to age and grade appropriate teaching, teaches what they are trained to be successful in, and has alignment about what early childhood education should be.

#### **2. Awareness of the Importance of ECE Quality & Urgency of ECE Workforce Crisis**

*Stakeholders observed that Alabama is increasing focus on and awareness of both the need for accessible, high quality early childhood education and a qualified, well-resourced workforce. They named that awareness about workforce includes acknowledgement that the early childhood education workforce is shrinking, early childhood education is a professional career pathway, and early childhood education impacts the state's ability to succeed in economic and workforce development broadly.*

Stakeholders observed that Alabama is **increasing focus on and awareness about the need for accessible and quality early childcare education** programs and opportunities and acknowledged advocacy efforts across the state and at multiple levels are advancing awareness efforts. Similarly, stakeholders observed a growing **awareness about the urgency of the workforce crisis in early childhood education**. They said this awareness includes acknowledgement that the workforce is shrinking, solutions must be forged through collaboration across the system, early childhood education is a professional career pathway, and early childhood education impacts the state's ability to succeed in economic and workforce development broadly. As one stakeholder noted, "We are getting some traction in the acknowledgement that the workforce is shrinking, including a lot of folks moving from childcare to Pre-K. We are having a conversation about it for the first time... If the Department of Commerce is going to grow our state, we have to care for employees and their families. Waving the red flags is the thing that's going well right now."

#### **3. Initiatives to Develop & Sustain Career Pathways**

*Stakeholders identified efforts to develop and sustain career pathways in development or in place today, including credentialing and career pathways for the early childhood education workforce, programs to advance pathways such as ECE Works and accelerated CDA programs, and strategies to address compensation challenges.*

Stakeholders were aware of and excited about plans that are underway for **developing credentialing and career pathways for the early childhood education workforce**, although they acknowledge more work, formalization, documentation is needed to bring these plans to fruition. Stakeholders identified several **new initiatives that are advancing career pathways** for the workforce including *ECE Works* (a new initiative promoting early childhood education apprenticeships) and accelerated programs and scholarships for Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials. As one stakeholder noted, “We need more people to enter the profession and the CDA credential is a step in that direction.” Stakeholders also acknowledged **strategies to address compensation** that are positively impacting the workforce, including pay parity for First Class Pre-K with the K12 system which was established in 2015 and includes Head Start and private childcare, as well as employee bonuses which helped stabilize the workforce during and after pandemic. Stakeholders did acknowledge those particular incentives have ended which will create challenges for centers.

#### **4. Access to Training and Education Opportunities**

*Stakeholders highlighted the range and accessibility of training and education opportunities in the state to support entry and advancement in the field, including the availability of support, range of topics, remote learning opportunities, and financial support in some instances.*

At a high level, stakeholders acknowledged the **availability of resources, knowledge, and professional support** to help advance the educational goals and credentialing of persons willing to pursue careers in early childhood education is a strength. Within this support, stakeholders acknowledged the **wide range of training opportunities** available which allow teachers to learn about topics beyond what is specifically in a job description and provide a broader and richer perspective. Stakeholders highlighted that Alabama is offering **increasing access to training and education opportunities through remote learning programs** (so a teacher does not have to choose between work and school) that also support field experiences and application. Stakeholders noted these opportunities support entry into the field as well as promotion within the field. Lastly, stakeholders named **financial aid for developing and growing teachers** available through First Class Pre-K as a strength.

#### **5. Strengths Supporting the Workforce within Particular Programs**

*Stakeholders highlighted the unique strengths of the structure and workforce of several programs within the mixed delivery system, including family childcare centers, Head Start, and First Class Pre-K.*

**Family Childcare Centers:** Stakeholders highlighted that building family childcare centers organically is a strength, and noted the strong commitment to quality demonstrated once a family childcare center is connected to Alabama Quality STARS. They noted that business models, including unique generational business models, for family childcare are emerging, which is a strength. They also acknowledged the excellent continuity of care that family childcare centers provide to children and families.

**Head Start:** Stakeholders named a range of strategies utilized by Head Start that are supporting the workforce, including teacher well-being. Strategies shared by stakeholders include the following: In addition to professional development opportunities overall, Head Start works to meet teachers where they are with support through an equity lens to promote effectiveness, well-being, and emotional

stability. Head Start also focuses on intentionally bringing teachers together regularly to increase connections and support a stable and strong workforce. Head Start is implementing a 30-60-90-day initial training period to evaluate how teachers are doing before providing more training and support where needed. Head Start places a significant focus on mental health and well-being, including by using mental health consultation to support teachers and staff in each classroom to support teachers, providing videos and information about mental wellness and stress to teachers, implementing an Wellness of the Workforce (WOW) initiative, and providing tap-out opportunities for staff needing breaks. Head Start also works to offer competitive salaries and benefits and provide financial support for tuition and books for those seeking to increase education goals.

**First Class Pre-K:** Stakeholders noted that the First Class Pre-K workforce includes many veteran teachers who are committed to providing the highest quality teaching to children. Stakeholders also said that First Class Pre-K currently is finding that teachers want to move into First Class Pre-K programs. Stakeholders named strengths supporting the workforce as offering professional development support and supporting more manageable classrooms by maintaining small class size and multiple teachers in a classroom when possible. Stakeholders named additional strengths of First Class Pre-K including offering a service that is greatly needed (as demonstrated recently by influx of students following closures of private centers) and building the state's future workforce by helping kids develop executive skills, doing thematic work, thinking critically, working collaboratively, and bringing business and industry representatives into the classroom.

## **6. ADECE Departmental Focus on Workforce**

*ADECE internal stakeholders named the department's focus on workforce and provision of training and professional development for staff as supportive of the state's early childhood education workforce.*

ADECE stakeholders named the department's workforce division as a strength and demonstration of a clear focus on supporting the early childhood education workforce. They agreed ADECE has good workforce supports in the department, but acknowledged not everyone within the department has the all the right information to share in the field. Strong workforce supports at ADECE include focusing on training ADECE staff well before they go out into the field so they can provide effective support to the workforce, providing a lot of professional development opportunities to prepare staff, and staff having a passion for the work which helps to buffer against burnout.

## **B. Needs, Opportunities, and Priorities for Strengthening Workforce Support**

### **1. The Challenge & Crisis of a Shrinking Workforce**

*Before identifying needs, opportunities, and priorities for strengthening workforce support, stakeholders often focused on sharing some of the challenges and causes of the current workforce shortage. For many, this "challenge" was expressed in terms of a "crisis," because workforce impacts so many aspects of early childhood education.*

Stakeholders across the board named a **lack of pool of qualified teachers as the greatest challenge in early childhood education today**. As one stakeholder noted, "The biggest problem right now is there are

not enough bodies. We have the *knowledge* to do what we know we need to do, but *we just don't have anyone to do it*. I have no pool to pull from. We have a crisis.”

Stakeholders identified some root causes of this shortage including retirements, attrition due to COVID-19, and competition with the K12 system. Stakeholders noted that the **early childhood education workforce is aging** and the system as a whole is experiencing a lot of retirements but not recruiting newer and younger folks into the field to fill in the gaps. They noted that baby boomers retiring is especially difficult for family daycare. Some strategies to mitigate the challenge suggested by stakeholders included geography-based recruiting and looking at demographic data about the field. Stakeholders also acknowledged that **many teachers and providers left the field during COVID-19**, and replacing the number of teachers who left is proving very difficult. Stakeholders said this dynamic is present at all levels of education and attempts are being made to change hiring rules “just to get warm bodies in the classroom.”

Stakeholders also noted that more **competitive salaries and benefits in the K12 system attract teachers away from early childhood education**. They said this is particularly difficult when efforts have been made to train and pour into early childhood education teachers, only to have them leave with the training and experience developed in early childhood. Competition with K12 was named specifically as a challenge for Head Start, private providers, and First Class Pre-K.

## **2. Increase Teacher Pay and Benefits**

*Across stakeholder groups, there was strong consensus that increasing teacher pay and benefits is essential to building and supporting the early childhood education workforce.*

Stakeholders were clear in their **emphasis on higher and fair pay and benefits in the early childhood education field as essential and foundational**. The message was simple, and here are a few stakeholder comments about pay and benefits **in their own words**:

- “The financial piece has to be there. When you don’t pay teachers more, giving them free education doesn’t work.”
- “We need to make sure that everyone is aware of the need for higher pay in the field, especially government officials. Folks with credentials and Child Development Associate (CDA) are not getting paid fairly.”
- “We are a true profession. We need common language, common pay scale with livable wages while staying affordable for families especially single mothers.”
- “Most of the people in the field of early education care deeply about the profession, but they have to feed their families. We really have a role model now in our state because First Class Pre-K is paying their teachers a livable wage. We need to build on that with the rest of the early education workforce.”
- “We need to make sure we raise wages of the average boots-on-the-ground early childhood provider, whether it’s family childcare or in a center. They need to pay a living wage. We need a floor for pay and a table for compensation that keeps people in the field.”
- “The most significant [need] is pay and pay equity. The teachers are trying to figure out how to pay their light bills, which makes it difficult for them to focus and deal with the challenges the



children and families are facing... Our salaries are so low, we really can't compete with Walmart or other less demanding jobs."

### **3. Clarify & Build Awareness about ECE Career Pathways and Opportunities**

*Stakeholders emphasized the importance of developing a seamless system of credentialing and career pathways for early childhood education, building awareness of those pathways and the opportunities they present, and providing continuing and high quality education and professional development aligned with the pathways.*

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of developing a **seamless system of credentialing and career pathways** that include all levels of education and training and that are used consistently across the state. Stakeholders acknowledged parts of this are underway but it will be important to focus on follow-through to put initiatives into practice and build awareness about them. Stakeholders want to see this organized into a clear matrix that is accessible to all. Some particular areas of effort stakeholders identified as needing focus include:

- Break down silos surround the Child Development Associate (CDA), including high school, 2-year colleges, and others
- Develop articulation among 2-year institutions
- Ensure 4-year institutions moving toward a preschool add-on to the elementary education degrees understand the full complexity and philosophy of early childhood education
- Avoid any potential requirements that would suggest that that all positions in the early childhood education field require a 4-year degree

Stakeholders focused on continuing to build **awareness of resources and availability of early childhood education pathways in the state**. Stakeholders said this should include ensuring training and education entities understand (and are sharing with students) accurate information about the early childhood education field, including pathways, pay, and availability of entry level opportunities. There was also acknowledgement that the field must focus on quality, not just quantity, of workforce.

Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of facilitating **continuing education and professional development of the workforce to help individuals advance along pathways and careers in early childhood education careers**. An idea raised by a stakeholder to support this included a statewide database of early childhood education resources that are accessible to teachers and directors. Stakeholders also focused on the importance of having quality instruction in professional development in everything from classroom management to special education.

### **4. Strengthen Recruitment Efforts into the ECE Field**

*Stakeholders underscored the importance of recruitment efforts for early childhood education and offered a range of ideas and strategies to support this, such as elevating the profession and recruiting at high schools, colleges, and universities.* Recruitment strategies identified by stakeholders included:

- Elevate early childhood education as a profession
- Elevate the importance of relative and family and home-based childcare as a critical part of the workforce
- Continue to work with partners to encourage young people to go into the field

- Encourage directors to recruit at colleges and universities
- Create programs to connect with and expose high school students to the profession
- Create programs to offer experience to high school students in the profession
- Find teachers who have a passion for early childhood education and invest in them
- Find opportunities to bring men into the field
- Increase salaries in the field

### **5. Increase Support for Teachers (General)**

*Stakeholders offered opportunities to increase support for teachers including increased staffing levels across the board to reduce burnout, improved training in recognizing and addressing mental health issues even in the youngest children, clear communication about standards and expectations for teachers, improving the Registry, and reintroducing a virtual option for participating in the Early Childhood Conference.*

Stakeholders emphasized that **increased staffing levels across the board would support teachers by reducing burnout**. They acknowledged this would require a lot of funding and the state and center level but would provide much-needed support to teachers. Stakeholders suggested another strategy for addressing burnout is **improved training for teachers in recognizing and addressing mental health issues even in the youngest children**. Stakeholders noted that what providers are dealing with now vs. pre-covid in terms of mental health is very different, and teachers need support in this area.

Stakeholders noted the need for **clear communication about standards and expectations for teachers**. Examples included needing updated information to provide to teachers about Alabama Standards for Early Learning (ASELS), clear and written expectations about Alabama Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS®), and also finding a balance between enough and too many requirements.

Stakeholders suggested **improving the Registry is an opportunity** that would support teachers. Examples of outcomes desired from improvements included requirements being more consistently aligned to position needs, the system being easy and efficient to use, teachers not being penalized when they move positions, ability for state personnel to understand and use the system, and strategies to ensure pay is equitable for new a long-time teachers.

Stakeholders praised the Early Childhood Conference as supportive of the workforce, but a number of stakeholders expressed interest in **reintroducing a virtual option for participating in the Early Childhood Conference**. Stakeholders noted that time, travel, and cost are barriers to attending in person, and that in-person sessions fill to capacity quickly often eliminating opportunities to attend desired sessions. Stakeholder named strengths of the virtual conference including unlimited capacity in virtual sessions; eliminating the need to close schools for directors, teachers, and staff to attend; and removing travel cost barriers.

## 6. Strengthen Support for the Workforce in First Class Pre-K

*In addition to opportunities to support teachers in general, stakeholders suggested some opportunities to support the First Class Pre-K workforce in particular. (Some of these may extend to teachers in general but were offered in the context of First Class Pre-K.)*

Stakeholders highlighted that recruiting and retaining auxiliary teachers is a significant challenge for First Class Pre-K, and they identified an opportunity to **increase support for auxiliary teachers by increasing pay and reducing or adjusting training and education requirements**. Stakeholders noted that pay does not reflect the large amount of work that auxiliary teachers do and that the 9-hour training requirement is too much of a burden for the salary they are paid. Stakeholders often noted that auxiliary teachers often do not have the means to go to the Early Childhood Conference, which is one opportunity to attain those hours. Stakeholders suggested that perhaps ADECE could pay for the 9 hours of training, conduct the training free of charge, work with 2-year colleges to adjust costs, and/or apply on-the-job training toward the 9-hour requirement.

Stakeholders suggested **extending the hours of First Class Pre-K through the end of the day** would address several challenges. First, stakeholders suggested this would support working families who currently have to find care for the hours after First Class Pre-K ends. Secondly, stakeholders said extended hours would help First Class Pre-K programs who currently struggle to find people to fill in before school or after school for extended day programs. They said it would also help with recruitment of teachers who seek to work a full day and children whose families would like them to have a full-day experience. Stakeholders said an extended day would eliminate the need to coordinate after school care, eliminate the wage and hour issue for auxiliary teachers willing to work after hours, and reduce the need to coordinate pickups with programs who do provide care after program hours end.

Stakeholders suggested that **strengthening the consistency of coaches** would support the First Class Pre-K workforce. They noted that while coaching services are very helpful, they differ from teacher to teacher which can create challenges. They noted that excellent guidelines and accountability hedge against the inconsistency in coaches, and they acknowledged the department and staff are very good at listening to center and program needs and responding in helpful ways.

There was also a desire to **ensure First Class Pre-K helps advance the whole system, rather than provide competition**. Stakeholders noted that First Class Pre-K is often at advantage by offering higher salaries on a nine-month work schedule, having the summer and holidays off, requiring less paperwork, and focusing on smaller, regional areas for support staff.

## 7. Increase Support for Directors

*Stakeholders focused on the need to increase support for directors through a range of strategies including training and conferences, support and education about management of centers, and one unified software system with a single login.*

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of **making sure that directors have the support and training they need**. As one stakeholder said, “Whatever conversation we have about teacher support, we need to have about director support so they can better serve their teachers.” Specific ideas suggested included

training for directors, online training for directors, conferences, and greater access to training available through partners. Stakeholders also identified **support and education around management of centers** would be helpful, including resources for support staff such as accounting, meal service, and janitorial. Lastly, stakeholders suggested **shifting to one, unified software system with a single login** would be very helpful. They said that currently there are time-consuming redundancies including for budgeting and monitoring.

## **8. Build a Seamless Statewide ECE System**

*Stakeholders emphasized the importance of continuing to build a seamless statewide ECE system through integration and partnership across agencies, addressing funding in a coordinated way, developing a sound business model, and ensuring all aspects of the mixed delivery system receive adequate focus and resources.*

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of continuing to **build a true statewide system for early childhood education that integrates the Department of Early Childhood Education, Department of Human Resources, and the State Department of Education**. While stakeholders acknowledged there have been improvements to this in the last five to seven years, significant gaps still exist in the system. For example, one stakeholder noted that parents who cannot get into a First Class Pre-K program may not have another high quality option in their area, especially if they are in a rural area. Another example shared to demonstrate the importance of a statewide system was how special education is addressed across the system. A stakeholder noted that the need for special education at all levels have increased, but the system has not yet caught up with the need for services. Overall the emphasis was on the importance of access to quality options across the state.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of **addressing funding for early childhood education in a coordinated way and on a statewide scale**. At a very practical level, stakeholders noted that increased funding is needed to support early childhood education in general and more pre-k programs and classrooms in particular. At a more strategic level, stakeholders explored and asked questions about how funding for early childhood education should be funded, for example, as a private industry vs. a public good or public infrastructure. Both frameworks would have strong implications for funding and how subsidies are handled.

Further, stakeholders noted that the **nature of funding for early childhood education (some called it a “business model”) is broken**. They noted that childcare owners are trying very hard to keep the doors open just to pay teachers a basic hourly wage, but are also met with extremely high expectations from families because they are paying so much for care. As one stakeholder noted, “That is a formula for conflict. It has a built-in antagonism. Infusing more funding into the system would help. We have about 60,000 babies in Alabama, so let’s plan for them. A high-quality safe place for the children is our responsibility if we want parents to be in the workforce.”

Stakeholders also noted that so **many resources for early childhood education are going to First Class Pre-K, while there is still a great need for funding in other programs and private centers**. They observed that many private centers are closing and going out of business, which will create even more pressure and demand. As one stakeholder noted, “Alabama’s challenge is to find a way to leverage the First Class

Pre-K model so that it can be a help for the overall workforce and not be something that happens at the expense of those outside of Pre-K... [First Class Pre-K] is a wonderful opportunity for state's kids, but I worry about an over focus on First Class Pre-K to the exclusion of other types of early education." An additional opportunity brought forward was to address childcare in partnership with employers.

### **9. Invest in ADECE Organizational Structure and Effectiveness**

*ADECE internal stakeholders emphasized the importance of building a strong, cohesive, and effective team in order to support the state's early childhood education workforce.* Examples of ideas suggested by ADECE stakeholders included:

- Establish a professional development team under workforce to support teachers to expand capacity beyond coaches and monitors
- Ensure everyone in the department knows what the department has in place to offer to teachers and providers for development or career advancement and who to contact about workforce supports and programs
- Support ADECE internal workforce to increase stability, consistency, follow-through, responsiveness to calls and emails, honesty, trust, and transparency
- Support ADECE internal workforce to increase knowledge of others' roles (especially new roles and hires) and establish an organizational chart that supports a functional and effective department
- Strengthen teams within the department, including OECD and FCPK teams

## V. Findings from Existing Data and Reports

This section of the report presents detailed findings from the review and analysis of existing data and reports. It is organized by report or data source, and findings from each report or data source are organized by domain. It provides a more detailed analysis of the findings presented in Section III.

### 1. First Class Pre-K Director Survey Report

*Report Description: Completed in May 2022, the survey assesses opportunities to provide better services to children enrolled in First Class Pre-K (FCPK) by surveying 281 FCPK program directors across all (8) regions. The survey report was prepared for ADECE by the University of Alabama at Birmingham: Applied Evaluation and Assessment Collaborative.*

#### Domain 1: Family Engagement

**Key Findings:** Within their programs, directors employ a wide variety of strategies to regularly engage families, indicating a commitment to family engagement. Additional funding to support these efforts is suggested, as well as access improvements like addressing language barriers.

- Directors emphasized ongoing communication through many channels increases engagement; however, language barriers prevented many families from participating in activities.
- Key strategies to support or increase parent involvement included both virtual (e.g., apps, social media, calendar invitations) and written communication (e.g., bulletin boards). The majority of respondents (91.1%) reported that their classroom(s) send home a weekly newsletter or email.
- The area in which the most respondents reported good parental participation was special events, and the area with the fewest respondents reporting good parental participation was workshops. Volunteering had good parental participation as well.

#### Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

**Key Findings:** Most respondents noted that the FCPK program is great for communities and ensures children are ready for kindergarten. There is a perception of positive effects on adjacent non-FCPK classrooms and teachers, but it is not universally true for all program sites. COVID-19 related workforce challenges negatively impacted quality during the 2021-2022 school year.

- Most noted that the impact of the FCPK program has been huge. It is great for communities and ensures children are ready for kindergarten, as indicated by agreement with FCPK classrooms being in high demand and waiting lists and parent attendance on enrollment day.
- Many agree that the presence of FCPK classrooms has positively impacted non-FCPK classrooms and teachers, but one-third neither agree nor disagree.
- COVID-19 was noted as one of the biggest challenges to providing high quality Pre-K this year (2021-2022), with workforce challenges as a driver (see Domain 3: Workforce).

#### Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

**Key Findings:** FCPK directors report that they employ teachers with degrees in early childhood education, and that their professionalism is enhanced by ADECE support through coaching and professional development. Ongoing investment in high quality, frequent support through these channels is desired. This support is well received in the context of significant workforce challenges exacerbated by

COVID-19—limited substitute coverage, lack of funding and capacity to hire and train teachers, and strain on teachers’ ability to manage stress.

- The majority of respondents have degrees in early childhood education/special education or another related area of study, such as elementary education.
- The majority of respondents reported that they agree or strongly agree with the positive impacts of (1) professional development (i.e., teachers have received valuable training, professional development provided is effective in sharing best practices, and directors have a clear understanding regarding OSR professional development expectations) and (2) coaching (i.e., the Office of School Readiness (OSR) coaching is effective in supporting FCPK teachers’ use of evidence-based teaching practices, and FCPK teachers benefit from OSR coaches).

COVID-19 was noted as one of the biggest challenges to providing high quality Pre-K this year (2021-2022). Workforce is a recurring theme—from not enough funding to hire qualified teachers, onboarding teachers, training more seasoned teachers, and coverage for teachers to plan or have substitutes. Additionally, teachers’ ability to manage stress has been negatively impacted.

## 2. First Class Pre-K Family Survey Report

*Report Description: Completed in May 2022, the survey assesses opportunities to provide better services to children enrolled in First Class Pre-K (FCPK) by surveying 5,669 FCPK families across all (8) regions. The survey report was prepared for ADECE by the University of Alabama at Birmingham: Applied Evaluation and Assessment Collaborative.*

### Domain 1: Family Engagement

Key Findings: Families felt they were consistently engaged with their child’s education process and provided support, described as “one big happy family learning together.” Most teachers communicate with parents three or more times a week. Areas of opportunity include engaging parents more on what their child is doing at home, assisting parents with finding services and resources in their community, and speeding up the screening and referral processes for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Help Me Grow. Only one-third of respondents were aware of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program, with only seven percent participating. While only up to half of respondents were aware of supplementary programs, this may be descriptive of prevalence of need for supplementary programs.

- The majority of respondents noted satisfaction with the FCPK program and stated it has been beneficial for their children. Parents listed strengths as high-quality teachers, classroom size, free or low-cost, diversity of classroom, routines, evidence-based curriculum, and an educational environment that children enjoy. Families felt they were consistently engaged with their child’s education process and provided support, described as “one big happy family learning together.”
- Teachers regularly communicate with respondents in a variety of ways (3+ times a week, emails, via apps, scheduling or informal meetings). The majority of respondents are satisfied with the program and communication, although diverse suggestions to improve indicate varying parental preferences.
- Respondents reported that their child shares what they did at school, teachers provide a developmentally appropriate environment, teachers share updates, and progress and

communication are provided respectfully. The lowest agreement (77.2%) was that the teacher wants to know about things my child is doing at home.

- Most respondents agree that FCPK enhanced their parenting and child's school readiness, but only a little over half agreed that FCPK helped them find services and resources in their community to help my family, which may be descriptive of whether they needed additional services.
- The percentage of respondents that reported engaging with the teacher on their child's ASQ-3 results (55.6%) corresponds with the percentage that engaged with Help Me Grow (55%), indicating a sound referral process. Respondents reported satisfaction that the program provides screening and referral and with outcomes after the referral but reported that the referral process was slow. Similarly, while some reported gratitude for the Individualized Education Program (IEP) referral process and services, others commented on the process being slow, resulting in lost learning time, as well as not knowing updates regularly or until the last minute.
- Only one-third of respondents were aware of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program, with Born Ready having the highest awareness (45%). The majority of survey respondents (93.7%) reported they did not receive support from an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health consultant in the 2021-2022 school year. Of the respondents who did, most reported satisfaction with the experience.

#### Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

Key Findings: FCPK's reputation as a high-quality program is a key consideration when parents choose a Pre-K program.

- When choosing a Pre-K program for their child, respondents listed a reputation of high quality and proximity to home or work as very or somewhat important. Extended day services and knowing other families with children in the program were the least important items.

#### Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

This domain was not addressed in this data and/or report.

### 3. First Class Pre-K Teacher Survey Report

*Report Description: Completed in May 2022, the survey assesses opportunities to provide better services to children enrolled in First Class Pre-K (FCPK) by surveying 2,045 FCPK teachers across all (8) regions. The survey report was prepared for ADECE by the University of Alabama at Birmingham: Applied Evaluation and Assessment Collaborative.*

#### Domain 1: Family Engagement

Key Findings: Teachers report being satisfied with the support provided by ADECE to engage parents. Less than half are utilizing the Teaching Strategies Cloud resource for engaging parents. One-third report referring six or more parents to the Help Me Grow program, indicating the developmental support needed in a single classroom. Suggestions for how ADECE engages with families included support to communicate with non-English speaking parents, using media, and sending general information about developmental milestones.



- When asked to share their suggestions on ways ADECE agency leadership can strengthen communication with families, the majority of respondents noted satisfaction with how ADECE communicates with families. Additional suggestions included support to communicate with non-English speaking parents, using media, and sending general information about developmental milestones.
- Less than half of respondents (46.5%) reported that they used the Teaching Strategies Cloud resource for engaging parents.
- More than half of respondents (59.3%) reported that they did not have discussions with any parents about referring their child to Help Me Grow Alabama after completing the ASQ-3 Developmental Screeners because the screening produced no concerns, or the child was already engaged in services.
- When asked to share any recommendations or suggestions for strengthening family engagement, the majority of respondents reported that this was not applicable, there was not anything that would better support them, or they are pleased with the support they already receive.

## Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

Key Findings: Respondents affirm that FCPK develops children of all backgrounds socially, emotionally, and academically. Teachers report completing recommended activities on a daily basis. They feel supported in using developmentally appropriate, evidence-based instructional practices, and a majority report that Pre-K services impact the quality of other non-First Class Pre-K classrooms in the facility.

- Teachers report daily engagement with the following activities (listed highest to lowest): Free-choice centers, whole group activities, asking open ended questions, outdoor play, conducting GOLD observations, literary content-specific instruction, working with children individually or groups of 2-3, math content-specific instruction, and recording GOLD observations.
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73.7%) reported that their coach provided support in implementation of the Cloud resource, and almost all reported that the Teaching Strategies Cloud resource is helpful.
- The majority of respondents strongly agree or agree that Pre-K services impact the quality of other non-First Class Pre-K classrooms (72%) in the facility.
- Children develop social-emotional skills, relationships with others, and the ability to express themselves, solve problems, and resolve conflict, more so than if they did not attend FCPK. Parents of all backgrounds can send their children to receive high-quality education in a safe place at little to no cost.
- When asked what additional resources from the Office of School Readiness (OSR) would help teachers provide high-quality Pre-K services, the majority of respondents reported that this was not applicable, there was not anything that would better support them, or they are pleased with the support they already receive.

## Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

Key Findings: Most teachers reported not ever planning to leave the classroom, while one-third of respondents who said they plan to leave cited low pay as the reason for not continuing in the classroom. Half of teachers reported difficulty managing stress, which is almost double the prevalence pre-

pandemic. On a positive note, the pandemic provided lasting lessons such as appreciating the power of in-person learning and the importance of connection with families. As a result of Office of School Readiness (OSR) support, teachers see improvements in their classroom management skills and are equipped to provide higher quality care and instruction, and classrooms are more developmentally appropriate.

- The majority of respondents (72.8%) reported that they do not ever plan to leave the classroom. Of the respondents who indicated that they are not sure they continue in the classroom, nearly one-third of respondents (30.7%) reported that they are not planning to continue in the classroom because the pay is too low.
- More respondents reported that they have extreme, much, or moderate difficulty managing stress since the coronavirus pandemic (48.1%) than prior to the coronavirus pandemic (23.1%).
- Lessons learned from COVID-19 that will continue to impact respondents' work includes learning effective virtual teaching and appreciating in-person learning even more, ability to be flexible and resilient, and understanding importance of more compassion for and connection with families.
- The majority of participants (65%-72%) reported that they experienced significant growth in the following areas: classroom management, teacher/child interactions, teacher/parent interactions, lead/auxiliary teacher interactions, instructional planning, knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice. The only exception was instructional approaches for special populations, which only 48.7% of participants reporting significant growth in this area.
- The majority of participants reported that they are very satisfied with the following OSR-provided services: Professional development, coaching, and monitoring. Commonly suggested changes are equitable pay for auxiliary teachers and tailoring frequency, types of visits, and training options to teachers' needs.

When asked what would better support teachers in using developmentally appropriate, evidence-based instructional practices, the majority of respondents reported that this was not applicable, there was not anything that would better support them, or they are pleased with the support they already receive.

#### 4. Alabama First Class Pre-K Program, Outcomes and Impacts: A Summary of Results

*Report Description: Completed in 2023, the presentation demonstrates overall impacts of First Class Pre-K. Its findings affirm positive outcomes for Alabama's First Class Pre-K (more likely to be kindergarten ready, proficient in reading, and proficient in math; less likely to be retained in grade, chronically absent; less likely to need special education and have disciplinary issues). The presentation was prepared by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education External Research & Evaluation Team.*

##### Domain 1: Family Engagement

Key Findings: First Class Pre-K (FCPK) is successfully engaging and supporting families in their children's early care and education as evidenced by persisting decreases of chronic absenteeism for children in poverty who participated in FCPK. Additionally, children who received FCPK were less likely to have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), which could be related to FCPK emphasis on early screening, referral, and support.

- There are large differences in chronic absenteeism for children in poverty and those who are not. Students who received FCPK are less likely to be chronically absent compared to children who

did not receive FCPK. The differences are larger for children in poverty. This effect persists for students up to grade 11 who participated in FCPK.

- Overall, children who received First Class Pre-K were less likely to have IEPs when they advanced from kindergarten through grade 7 as compared to those who did not receive First Class Pre-K.

#### Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

Key Findings: The Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment allows for a standard evaluation of whether children are Kindergarten Ready. Evaluations indicate that a majority of First Class Pre-K children are Kindergarten Ready in all domains, even after summer learning loss.

- By the end of the year, the majority of children in First Class Pre-K were Kindergarten Ready in each domain based on the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. Kindergarten Ready is based on a subset of objectives within each domain.
- Despite some summer learning loss, most children who were Kindergarten Ready when they left FCPK in the spring continued to show readiness when they started Kindergarten that fall.

#### Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

This domain was not addressed in this data and/or report.

### 5. Born Ready University Surveys

*Report Description: 2023 Born Ready University participants completed surveys throughout the statewide four-week program. Born Ready University is an initiative from the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) focused on raising awareness among Alabama parents of the importance of early brain development and high-quality early care and education. Using a data report created in May 2023, Clarus analyzed 515 survey responses representing 19 of 28 program locations, and an estimated 125 individual participants.*

#### Domain 1: Family Engagement

Key Findings: Participants, most of which identify as their child's parent/guardian, report positive experiences with and outcomes because of Born Ready University (BRU). Participants most commonly heard about BRU through their daycare & Head Start, school, and parenting programs. Meals and/or snacks, day and time, location, and provided childcare were all highly rated. Participants valued the holistic approach, including education and connection with other parents. In summary, the program's success lies in its holistic approach, covering a wide range of relevant topics, providing practical advice, fostering community connections, and addressing both child development and parenting skills.

- Most participants (86%) identified as a Parent/Guardian of young child(ren). A little over half reported having one child, one-third reported having two children, and 15% had three or more children. Most participants (67%) were aged 26-40, with the next highest being 40 and above (16%).
- Participants heard about BRU through three main sources: their daycare & Head Start, school, including Pre-K registration and attendance, and parenting programs, like HIPPY, and other community programs.
- Meals and/or snacks, day and time of the session and location were rated at an average of 4.83 (and higher) out of 5. All responses affirmed that the childcare offered met participants' needs.

All comments submitted were positive. By the end of the program, 76% used the provided childcare and 6% sometimes used it.

- Over four weeks of evaluations, 18% of responses listed “everything” or “all” as what was helpful, with others emphasizing specific topics. About 17% identified Child Development as their favorite. Other favorites (around 10% each) were Conscious Discipline, Health and Safety, School Readiness, and Social and Emotional.
- The majority of participants report having met other parents they can call on, having a greater sense of community with other parents, increased knowledge of community organizations they can contact for additional support, and an overall greater awareness of the community as a result of the sessions.

## Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

Key Findings: Participants of Born Ready University (BRU) reported satisfaction with the program presenters and structure, with most (87%) reporting no suggestions about how the program could be improved.

- Over all four weeks of evaluations, almost all participants strongly agree or agree that presenters communicated effectively, provided applicable information, and built confidence, with only a handful neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statements.
- Weeks 2 and 3 participants rated the weekly challenges an average of 4.82 (out of 5) in terms of helpfulness, usefulness, and likelihood to continue using them. Weeks 4 participants rated these statements an average of 4.8+ (out of 5).
- Eighty-seven percent of the 326 responses submitted over the four weeks had no suggestions about how the program could be improved.

## Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

This domain was not addressed in this data and/or report.

## 6. Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) Evaluation

*Report Description: Completed in 2022, the report evaluates EHS-CCP program implementation and how it benefits children, families, and early care and education programs and staff. The evaluation analyzes 152 responses across the following stakeholder groups (administrators, teachers, child care providers, parents and policy council members, EHS program partners, and governing committee members). The Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) supports the Department of Human Resources (DHR) in the implementation of the federally funded EHS-CCP grant. ADECE support includes overseeing Education and Child Development Services offered through EHS-CCP (e.g., providing coaches, curriculum support, etc.). The report was prepared by Alison Hooper, PhD, University of Alabama College of Education on behalf of DHR Child Care Services Division.*

### Domain 1: Family Engagement

Key Findings: Overall, stakeholders report that the processes and strategies provided by EHS-CCP to engage families are effective. As a result of joining EHS-CCP, stakeholders report that they are able to offer and participate in more supportive programming for families. Parents report receiving regular communication; however, there may be opportunities to enhance use of the Daily Note app. Overall

family engagement has stayed flat or increased since enrolling in the EHS-CCP, and despite dips in volunteering during COVID-19, parents report having opportunities to participate.

- Overall, the enrollment process continues to be a strength of the program. Parents reported the process was straightforward and that they had found assistance when needed. Most child care partners reported implementing strategies to support attendance and said that these strategies had been helpful. Some child care partners indicated that they wanted more support in talking with families about EHS-CCP policies and procedures and helping families follow policies like those around attendance.
- Many parents reported receiving support related to transition out of EHS-CCP, such as getting connected to other child care, Head Start, or Pre-K programs in the community. Generally, parents acknowledged the program helped prepare their child for a successful transition to another setting when it was time. Some families indicated that their child care program had not yet spoken to them regarding the transition out of the program or that they wanted more support with the transition, with a small number expressing frustration.
- EHS-CCP offers many supports for families, which was a strength of the program across stakeholder groups. Many of the child care partners reported not offering supports like home visiting prior to joining EHS-CCP. Overall, respondents who had used Care Coordination services through the Alabama Department of Public Health found these beneficial. Based on stakeholder feedback, evaluators recommend continued and expanded support for child care partners related to mental health consultation and reflective consultation.
- Most parents reported receiving regular communication from their child's teacher, often through multiple methods. Those that use the Daily Note app were reasonably satisfied with it. Based on parents' responses, it seems that some child care partners may not be using the Daily Note app consistently and that there may be challenges related to the app or its use.
- Child care partners reported family engagement had generally increased or stayed the same since enrolling in the EHS-CCP program. Parents reported having opportunities to participate in the program in various ways, such as through the Parent Committee. Reported parent rates of volunteering in the program remain lower than they were before COVID-19.

## Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

**Key Findings:** Stakeholder groups report confidence in the support they receive and their ability to deliver high quality, impactful programming. Some report challenges related to the administrative burden, which is felt even more so by family child care (FCC) partners. Some partners connected the ability to use subsidy funds to enhance wages as an important tool in providing high quality care.

- Child care partners reported feeling included and supported by EHS partners and EHS-CCP program staff. Across stakeholder groups, respondents expressed high satisfaction with the support they received, the positive impact the program has had on children and families, and their connection to EHS-CCP goals. Stakeholders across groups noted the effectiveness of EHS-CCP in supporting families, children's development, and the quality of child care programs.
- Child care and Head Start partners noted some challenges related to the administrative burden of participating in EHS-CCP. This was especially true among FCC partners. Some FCC partners also said the amount of support staff visiting their program could be burdensome.

- FCC partners noted satisfaction with policy change related to accessing subsidy funds, and most cited specific ways they had used their additional funds to tangibly support high quality care, especially through higher wages for assistants and improvements to their environment.

### Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

Key Findings: Stakeholder groups are satisfied with the support, coaching, and training they receive through EHS-CCP. Additional support for behavior management is wanted to improve teacher effectiveness and retention. This support, along with additional strategies like wage enhancements, are especially important as classroom teacher turnover persists as an issue, although slightly less so than in the prior year evaluation (2020-2021).

- EHS program partners, child care administrators, center-based teachers, and FCC partners all reported satisfaction with the training, coaching, and support they received through EHS-CCP. Policy council and governing committee members reported satisfaction with their training as well.
- Child care administrators, EHS program partners, FCC partners, and teachers noted some areas where they would like additional training opportunities, including behavior management and program policies and procedures. Evaluators note that continued and expanded support for child care partners related to mental health consultation and reflective consultation may help with teacher retention and dealing with challenging behaviors.

Although less prevalent than in last year's (2020-2021) survey, another challenge related to continuity arose about classroom teacher turnover. Turnover and staffing challenges are prevalent in early care and education programs of all types and not unique to EHS-CCP, but changing teachers and trying to train new hires arose as a challenge across stakeholder groups. Evaluators recommend connecting child care partners to existing scholarships, wage enhancements, and other opportunities to continue to encourage staff retention.

## 7. Children's Policy Council (CPC) Needs Assessment

*Report Description: Completed in 2023, the report identifies statewide needs based on input from Children's Policy Councils across all 67 of Alabama's counties. County-level CPCs are designed to support providers of children's services as they work collaboratively in developing community service plans to address the needs of children ages 0-19 and their families and inform state policy. The report was prepared by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) on behalf of the CPC.*

### Domain 1: Family Engagement

Key Findings: CPC reports significant mental health needs and substance use risk of both children and adults in Alabama, which should inform how programs engage families to be able to support, advocate for, and be involved in their children's early care and education needs.

- Mental health for children ages 9 to 17, followed by adults 18 to 54, and in third, children ages birth to 8, have the greatest mental health needs in Alabama. Interrelated is an increase in juvenile delinquency cases for drug and substance violations, which presents an opportunity to engage families on how to prevent substance use and intervene when needed.
- There are not enough foster care placements for children in Alabama, meaning there is a major opportunity to increase family support that will prevent the need for foster care. Interrelated is



an increasing number of children removed from their homes due to parent drug use.

#### Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

Key Findings: Addressing and engaging with the reported significant mental health needs of both children and adults will be important for administrators and teachers to effectively administer programs, manage classrooms, and support children in school readiness.

- Mental health for children ages 9 to 17, followed by adults 18 to 54, and in third, children ages birth to 8, have the greatest mental health needs in Alabama.

#### Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

This domain was not addressed in this data and/or report.

### 8. Alabama Head Start State Collaboration Office, Non-competing Continuation Grant Application

*Report Description: Completed in 2022, the grant application reports long-term goals, progress toward achieving goals, and next steps for Head Start and Early Head Start. Long-term goals include the following: Partner with state childcare systems, work with state efforts to collect data, support for expansion of and access to high quality workforce, collaboration with Quality Rating & Improvement System, and work with state systems on kindergarten entry. The Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO). The application was written by ADECE HSSCO.*

#### Domain 1: Family Engagement

Key Findings: The HSSCO prioritizes family engagement by participating in partnerships that support kindergarten readiness, connect foster families with Head Start, and integrate a standard family engagement model into Head Start programs.

- In 2021-22, the HSSCO served on a committee within ADECE that facilitated the development and release of the Alabama Transition to Kindergarten Toolkit.
- In 2022-23, the HSSCO planned to collaborate with the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to connect foster families to local Head Start programs.
- In 2022-23, the HSSCO planned to secure training for Head Start programs on various family engagement models, and link activities of family engagement models with Head Start caregivers. The expected outcome of full implementation of the model is that Head Start programs will engage over 80% of their families in program activities.

#### Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

Key Findings: The HSSCO enhances outcomes across unique but overlapping early childhood programs in Alabama. Through the Department of Human Resources (DHR) Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP), Alabama Quality STARS, student data tracking, assessment tools, and data dissemination, HSSCO is a connectors for DHR, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), and ADECE as they develop systems and tools to ensure and validate that Alabama children participate in high-quality programs and services and are well-supported as they transition through the system.

- EHS-CCP represents six Head Start programs that partner with six private child-care centers through the DHR EHS-CCP grant. These programs serve a total of 566 children. These programs receive instructional support from ADECE.
- In 2021, 147 Head Start programs were star rated in Alabama Quality STARS (Alabama’s Quality Rating and Improvement System), an increase of 258% from 2019. In 2022-23, the HSSCO planned to encourage Head Start programs to achieve higher ratings in Alabama Quality STARS.
- In 2021-2022, a total of 142 Head Start classrooms received state Pre-K funds (up from 82 the prior year), totaling \$5,023,316 plus an additional \$55,000 in supplemental grants (up from \$3,489,913 the prior year). HSSCO plans to continue efforts to include Head Start programs in the Pre-K initiative.
- Currently, only Blended Head Start/First Class Pre-K classrooms are part of the state student database and children of those classrooms have received student ID numbers that will follow them into public school. Because of this, the overall percentage of Alabama Head Start children with student ID numbers is 14% (1,872 Blended Head Start/First Class; 13,378 Head Start). The overall percentage of Alabama Head Start children with ID numbers increased by 3% from 2019 due to increased enrollment of Head Start children in First Class Pre-K.
- In 2021, 68% of Alabama Head Start programs used Teaching Strategies GOLD, an increase of 8% from 2019. From the first to end of 2020-21 and 2021-22, children enrolled in blended Head Start/First Class Pre-K classrooms showed significant improvements in social-emotional, physical, cognitive development, language, literacy, and mathematics. HSSCO plans to expand this assessment beyond 68% of Head Start programs to all Alabama Head Start programs.
- The HSSCO works with ADECE and ALSDE to disseminate data from the Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) so that it may be used by Head Start programs to inform program and teacher professional development decisions. HSSCO will collaborate with law enforcement agencies and ADECE in the analysis of KEA data to help determine parallels and/or inconsistencies with Teaching Strategies GOLD, CLASS, and other Head Start assessment data.

### Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

Key Findings: The HSSCO prioritizes workforce development strategies that are relevant across early childhood education. The T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, a professional development registry, Early Childhood Education (ECE) Apprenticeship, and expansion of educational opportunities across high school (Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials), two- and four-year-colleges (coursework, transferrable credits) represent workforce development strategies that can support all of early childhood education, and are recommended more broadly in Report #9 of this needs assessment, Transforming Child Care in Alabama. Implementing effective educational attainment strategies, like those listed above, is the greatest challenge.

- One hundred and twenty seven (n=127) teachers in the DHR EHS-CCP program (65%) have received a CDA or higher credential. Center-based teachers have an infant/toddler CDA and family child-care providers have a family child-care CDA.
- Early/Head Start teachers in Alabama have access to T.E.A.C.H. scholarships (provided through the Alabama Partnership for Children). After a drop in program participation in 2020-21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participation increased again in 2021-22: T.E.A.C.H. scholarships were awarded to 107 Head Start teachers, 52 received CDA scholarships, 41 teachers received Associate degree scholarships, and 36 received bachelor’s degree scholarships (a slight



decrease). (Report #9, Transforming Child Care in Alabama recommends investment in this workforce development strategy.)

- The statewide professional development registry was expected to be launched on August 1, 2022. HSSCO stated plans to promote implementation of the state professional development registry in partnership with DHR. (Report #9, Transforming Child Care in Alabama recommends investment in this workforce development strategy.)
- The HSSCO is partnering with ADECE to help high schools develop programs that offer CDA credentials to high school graduates.
- Alabama has an extensive community college system consisting of 31 institutions located throughout the state. Within this system, 19 community colleges offer either a certificate in Child Development and/or an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree in Child Development. All 19 community colleges offer three (3) child development courses that meet the training requirement for a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

There are minimal efforts to increase infant/toddler coursework in Alabama institutions of higher education due to the low number of articulation agreements that exists between 2-year colleges and 4-year universities. Students that graduate from 2- year colleges are not able to get credit for many of their infant/toddler courses at 4-year institutions. Increased participation in the ECE Apprenticeship program may increase the number of articulation agreements that exist between 2-year colleges and 4-year universities. National efforts may also be needed to support growth and workforce preparation in the field of infant and toddler development. (Report #9, Transforming Child Care in Alabama recommends investment in this workforce development strategy.)

## 9. Transforming Child Care in Alabama: A Roadmap to Support Alabama’s Parents, Children, Employers and Economy

*Report Description: Completed in 2023, the report details current challenges and recommends short- and long-term actionable steps to transform child care in Alabama to a system that works for parents, employers, and communities. In addition to national research, the report is informed by 14 provider and parent listening sessions and responses to online survey to send to parents (330 responses) and child care providers (240 responses). Recommendations pertain to the child care business model, child care workforce, child care affordability & healthy child development, partnerships with employers, and accountability for investments. The report was prepared by the Early Learning Policy Group on behalf of the Alabama Child Care Roadmap Workgroup.*

### Domain 1: Family Engagement

This domain was not addressed in this data and/or report.

### Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

**Key Findings:** Expanding access to programs and services like First Class Pre-K and Head Start may be helped or hindered by anticipated decreases in the capacity of Alabama’s child care system. The current system is estimated to meet 60% of demand, with concerns for further shortages, especially in rural areas, which would limit potential locations for ADECE’s programs and services.

- The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) estimates that in Alabama, the child care supply gap for children under age six at 40%, meaning that available capacity in all early childhood programs

met only 60% of the potential need for children under age six in working families. Among 35 states, the average gap was 32%. Capacity gaps are greatest south of Birmingham and north of Mobile.

- Decreases in availability of home-based care, which is viable in rural areas where centers are not, is particularly concerning since 55 of Alabama’s 67 counties are considered rural.
- As it stands, Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program cannot expand to reach the state’s goal of 70% of 4-year-olds unless more child care programs participate as providers in the state-funded grant program. Plus 85% of brain development occurs before the age of four, when children become eligible for First Class Pre-K.

### Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

Key Findings: Workforce includes significant challenges and promising possibilities. While staffing challenges persist, there is an opportunity to continue growing partnerships with the Department of Human Resources because of ADECE’s overlapping interests in workforce development (e.g., Alabama Quality STARS, Alabama Pathways, T.E.A.C.H. program, Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Apprenticeship).

- More than 90% of child care provider comments were related to staffing challenges. Providers recommend additional funding for recruitment and retention purposes. Creation of a substitute pool, or some solution to substitute shortages, is cited as a need.
- As the child care industry considers recommendations to recruit and retain workforce, there may be opportunities for alignment that leverage existing and forthcoming resources that can enhance the child care and education workforce across Alabama. This is a promising opportunity considering DHR and ADECE have demonstrated their ability to work collaboratively.
- Alabama Pathways to Quality Care Education (Alabama Pathways) is cited as an existing framework that provides a path to support and advance best practices of those who care for and teach children from birth through 12 years. It’s a framework for a comprehensive professional development system that includes core knowledge areas, qualifications and credentials, and resources to support quality, as well as resources for financial assistance. A new website has been launched through DHR, and supports ADECE’s goal of harnessing data that tracks characteristics of the workforce.
- The T.E.A.C.H. program is also cited as an existing program to expand as it supports growth among the childhood care and education workforce in a way that would develop transferable skills from child care to a FCPK classroom.

The report also cites ADECE’s current Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Apprenticeship that partners with community colleges and universities for participants to get on-the-job learning and earn credentials, certification, and degrees.

## 10. The State of Preschool 2022: State Preschool Yearbook

*Report Description: Completed in 2023, the report assesses investment and enrollment in state-funded preschools, adherence to quality standards, and other key metrics, nationally and state-by-state. The report was prepared by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), whose priority areas are access, quality, and funding.*

### Domain 1: Family Engagement

This domain was not addressed in this data and/or report.

### Domain 2: High-Quality Programs and Services

**Key Findings:** The enrollment in and quality of Alabama First Class Pre-K is recognized as an example nationally, with additional policy options that could further enhance or challenge its efforts (e.g., universal Pre-K state legislation and funding, Head Start scale back). Alabama's priority of quality aligns with NIEER's recommendation to prioritize quality along with and amidst enrollment increase.

- Alabama and Rhode Island are cited as two states making progress enrolling more children in preschool without a legislative mandate to offer universal preschool but with an emphasis on quality. (Alabama satisfies all 10 of NIEER's quality standard benchmarks.)
- Nationwide recommendations are as follows: (1) States conduct an audit of access, quality standards, and funding adequacy for preschool education and (2) Federal support to help states advance their preschool programs by providing technical support and additional funding.
- When Head Start reduces services to 3- and 4-year-olds in response to state preschool expansion this may undercut both the number of children served and quality, especially for the children Head Start serves. Ensuring policy coordination with federal and state partners can mitigate gaps in services. (Note: Report #8. Alabama Head Start State Collaboration Office, Non-competing Continuation Grant Application cites activities in 2021 forward that encourage more Head Start programs to apply for EHS conversation grants in order to address decreases in Head Start enrollments and increases in state funded Pre-K.)

### Domain 3: Workforce & COVID-19 Impacts

**Key Findings:** Workforce challenges experienced in Alabama are similar across the country. While few programs have utilized incentives for recruitment and retention, more teachers than ever received waivers to education and training requirements, introducing a challenge and opportunity to advance those individuals to be part of a professionalized, well-trained workforce.

- Most programs report a shortage of qualified lead preschool teachers during the 2021-2022 school year. More teachers than in previous years received waivers for the education and specialized training requirements.
- Despite widespread reports of shortages, only 17 programs reported offering incentives for recruitment and retention of teachers in state-funded preschools.

## VI. Conclusions and Next Steps

Across the broad and diverse data and perspectives consulted in the needs assessment process, it is clear the early childhood education system in Alabama has many exceptional strengths to build on as it works toward more effectively engaging families, achieving quality, and support the early childhood workforce. It is also clear that in each of those areas, the state has many needs and opportunities to work even more collaboratively and effectively to achieve results.

The task for leadership of ADECE going forward will be to use the data presented in the needs assessment to identify and prioritize the most important strategies and resources the department can bring to bear on the opportunities identified, while acknowledging solutions will require the efforts and investment of partners across disciplines and sectors.

To this end, ADECE leadership convened on December 11, 2023, to collectively work to understand the breadth and depth of data and findings collected through the needs assessment. Leadership will use the findings to identify the greatest opportunities for ADECE to support the statewide early childhood system, and ultimately update its departmental strategic plan to guide its work beginning in 2024.

## VII. Attachments

### A. ADECE Leadership Supporting PDGB5 Activity 1

Below is a list of ADECE leadership and staff who participated in project planning, project support, and/or review of the statewide needs assessment findings for PDGB5 Activity 1.

1. Sam Adams
2. Jeannie Allen
3. Katrina Bowling
4. Amy Brakenhoff
5. Trellis Calloway
6. Barbara Cooper
7. Milanda Dean
8. Tammy Gibson
9. Kellie Holcomb
10. Jan Hume
11. Liletta Jenkins
12. Dallas Rabig
13. Amanda Sanford
14. Melissa Scarpate
15. LaTonya Sibley
16. Tara Skiles
17. Kathryn Stabler
18. Pamela Truelove-Walker
19. Kesha Whitehead
20. Joy Winchester

## B. Overview of Stakeholder Engagement

Organization	Participants	Workforce support	Quality	Family engagement	Needs assessment
<b>Interviews (9 participants)</b>					
Alabama School Readiness Alliance	1				X
University of Alabama College of Education	1				x
Shelton State Community College	1	X			
Jefferson State Community College	1	X			
Auburn University	1	X			
Alabama Partnership for Children	1	X			
NIEER	1		X		
Alabama Department of Human Resources	2	X	X	X	
<b>Focus Groups (49 participants)</b>					
ADECE: Region Directors	8	X	X	X	
ADECE: OECD Admins	9	X	X	X	
Alabama Head Start Association Board of Directors	8	X	X	X	
Parents as Teachers Home Visiting	2			X	
QRIS Advisory Council	12	X	X	X	
Pre-K Directors	10				
<b>Total participants</b>	<b>58 total</b>				

### C. Overview of Existing Data and Reports

Summary Table: Existing Data and Reports						
#	Title	Source	Focus and Content	Assessment Priorities and Identified Needs	Year	Locations Assessed
1	First Class Pre-K Director Survey Report	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education	Assesses opportunities to provide better services to children enrolled in First Class Pre-K	No clear priorities or needs are identified in the report	2022	Alabama
2	First Class Pre-K Family Survey Report	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education	Assesses opportunities to provide better services to children enrolled in First Class Pre-K	No clear priorities or needs are identified in the report	2022	Alabama
3	First Class Pre-K Teacher Survey Report	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education	Assesses opportunities to provide better services to children enrolled in First Class Pre-K	No clear priorities or needs are identified in the report	2022	Alabama
4	Alabama First Class Pre-K Program, Outcomes and Impacts: A Summary of Results	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education	Presents overall impacts of First Class Pre-K	Affirms positive outcomes for Alabama's First Class Pre-K (more likely to be kindergarten ready, proficient in reading, and proficient in math; less likely to be retained in grade, chronically absent; less likely to need special education and have disciplinary issues)	2023	Alabama
5	Born Ready University Surveys	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education	Surveys participants to evaluate four-week program delivered statewide	No clear priorities or needs are identified in the report	2023	19 Program Sites in Alabama

**Summary Table: Existing Data and Reports**

#	Title	Source	Focus and Content	Assessment Priorities and Identified Needs	Year	Locations Assessed
6	Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) Evaluation	Alabama Department of Human Resources	Assesses EHC-CCP program implementation and how it is benefitting children, families, and early care and education programs and staff	Recommended priority areas are training and professional development, enrollment and continuity, supports for families, and program operations	2023	Alabama
7	Children's Policy Council (CPC) Needs Assessment	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education	Assesses statewide needs based on county-level CPC needs assessments	Urgent needs identified are mental health (children and adults), parental involvement & family engagement (strained foster care), and substance use (children and adults)	2023	Alabama
8	Alabama Head Start State Collaboration Office, Non-competing Continuation Grant Application	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education	Reports Head Start and Early Head Start long-term goals, progress toward achieving goals, and future plans	Continue efforts to achieve long-term goals: Partnering with state child care systems, working with state efforts to collect data, support for expansion of and access to high quality workforce, collaboration with QRIS, and work with state systems on kindergarten entry	2022	Alabama
9	Transforming Child Care in Alabama: A Roadmap to Support Alabama's Parents, Children, Employers and Economy	Early Learning Policy Group on behalf of Alabama Child Care Roadmap Workgroup	Details current challenges and recommends short- and long-term actionable steps to transform child care in Alabama to a system that works for parents, employers, and communities	Short-term and long-term recommendations pertain to child care business model, child care workforce, child care affordability & healthy child development, partnerships with employers, and accountability for investments	2023	Alabama



**Summary Table: Existing Data and Reports**

#	Title	Source	Focus and Content	Assessment Priorities and Identified Needs	Year	Locations Assessed
10	The State of Preschool 2022: State Preschool Yearbook	National Institute for Early Education Research	Assesses investment and enrollment in state-funded preschool nationally and state-by-state	Nationwide: (1) States conduct an audit of access, quality standards, and funding adequacy for preschool education and (2) Federal support to help states advance their preschool programs by providing technical support and additional funding; Alabama: No clear priorities or needs are identified in the report	2022	Nationwide and Alabama

## D. Born Ready University Evaluation Survey: Preliminary Analysis Report (10-10-2023)

### Overview

- Born Ready University is an initiative from the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) focused on raising awareness among Alabama parents of the importance of early brain development and high-quality early care and education.
- Session topics covered over the four-week program include Social & Emotional, School Readiness, Child Development, and Health & Safety.
- The evaluation surveys indicate that the program was provided in communities throughout the state in 2023, with varying start times ranging from February to July. The provided report was created on May 19, 2023, meaning the evaluation data are not complete.

### Analysis Notes

- Analysis in this report was completed by Clarus Consulting Group, Inc. in October 2023 as part of a needs assessment process. Analysis that may or may not have been pertinent to the needs assessment is included in this report should it be useful, but this should not be considered an official evaluation of the effectiveness of the Born Ready University program.
- The evaluation surveys are labeled Week 1 (n=121), Weeks 2 and 3 (n=262), and Week 4 (n=128). It is not clear why the Weeks 2 and 3 survey has a higher response. It is possible that participants were asked to complete the same survey after Week 2 and again after Week 3.
- Given demographic data is limited to one survey (Week 1) and data collection methods are unknown, demographic data (program location, age, role, and number of dependent children) are presented as descriptive statistics but are not cross tabulated to responses or used to inform conclusions.
- Finally, responses to repeat questions across all three surveys are analyzed together.

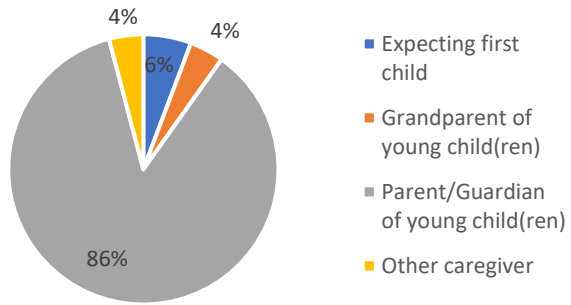
### Born Ready University (BRU) Participant Demographics

- Program Locations (as of 05/19/2023): Nineteen locations are represented in the survey responses.
- Participant’s Role (Figure 1): Eighty-six percent of participants are a parent/guardian of young children. Grandparent of young child(ren) and Other caregivers represent 4% each. Six percent of participants were expecting their first child.
- Number of Children in Participant’s Care (Figure 2): Over half (54%) of participants have one child. One-third (31%) of participants have 2 children. Nine percent have three children and 6% have four or more children.
- Participant Ages (Figure 3): Most participants (67%) are between the ages of 26-40. Representing 16% of participants are those ages 40 and above. Eleven percent of participants are ages 21-25 and 6% are ages 16-21.

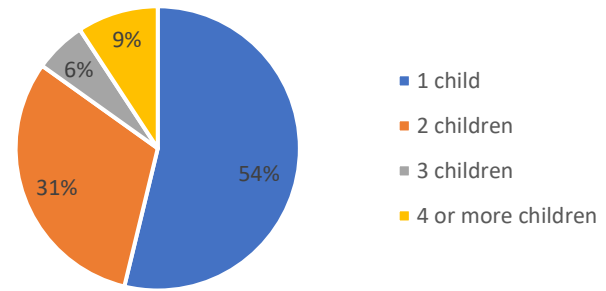
*Table 1. Program Locations (source: Weeks 2 and 3 Survey, Q4, n=256)*

<b>Count</b>	<b>Program Location (A-Z)</b>	<b>Beginning Date</b>	<b>Responses</b>
1	A Better Choice CDC, Meridianville	1/7/2023	19
2	Barbour County Schools at Barbour County Primary School	1/7/2023	7
3	Brown Elementary, Birmingham	4/1/2023	7
4	Carter Daycare at Ruby Pickett Tartt Public Library in Livingston	4/8/2023	4
5	Coastal Family Partners, Mobile	3/25/2023	4
6	Early Learning Academy, Mobile	3/4/2023	4
7	Ekklesia Preschool and CDC, Sheffield	2/4/2023	31
8	Fonvielle Head Start, Mobile	3/4/2023	19
9	Guntersville City Schools at Guntersville First Baptist Church	4/8/2023	19
10	Hayes K-8, Birmingham	4/1/2023	4
11	Huntsville City Schools Mastin Lake Facility	3/25/2023	10
12	Sophia Kingston Elementary School, Selma	3/11/2023	23
13	South Shelby Early Learning Center, Calera	1/28/2023	9
14	Spot for Tots Daycare and Learning Center, Chatom	2/25/2023	21
15	Talladega Head Start in Talladega	2/11/2023	9
16	The CHOICE Resource Center, Perry County	1/21/2023	17
17	United Way of West Alabama at New Heights Community Resource Center, Tuscaloosa	1/21/2023	42
18	Washington K-8, Birmingham	4/1/2023	2
19	West End Academy, Birmingham	4/1/2023	5

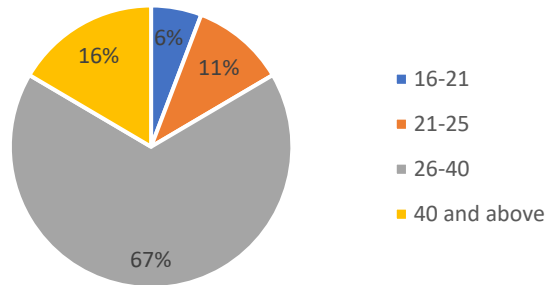
*Figure 1. BRU  
Participant's Role*



*Figure 2. BRU  
Number of Children in Participant's Care*



*Figure 3. BRU  
Participant Ages*



**Born Ready University (BRU) Participant Responses**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Weeks 2 &amp; 3</b>	<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
The presenters communicated information effectively and kept my interest.	Q3_1	Q6_1	Q6_1	Over all four weeks of evaluations, almost all participants strongly agree or agree with all the statements, with only a handful neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statements.
This session gave me information I will be able to use in my parenting.	Q3_2	Q6_2	Q6_2	
This session helped build my confidence as a parent.	Q3_3	Q6_3	Q6_3	
During the session, I learned about other community organizations I can contact for additional support.	Q3_4	Q6_4	n/a	Of participant responses from weeks 1-3, 18% agree and 81% strongly agree that they have a greater community awareness as a result of the session. Three participants neither agreed nor disagreed.
I have a greater community awareness as a result of the session.	Q3_5	Q6_5	n/a	Of participant responses from weeks 1-3, 21% agree and 79% agree that they have a greater community awareness as a result of the session.
During the session, I met other parents I can call on for parenting support.	n/a	n/a	Q6_4	Of participant responses from week 4, 19% agree and 75% strongly agree that they have a greater community awareness as a result of the session. Six percent of participants neither agreed nor disagreed.
I have a greater sense of community with other parents as a result of the session	n/a	n/a	Q6_5	Of participant responses from week 4, 21% agree and 78% strongly agree that they have a greater community awareness as a result of the session. Two participants neither agreed nor disagreed.
Rate the helpfulness of the weekly challenge in your parenting.	n/a	Q3_1	Q4_1	Weeks 2 and 3 participants rated these statements an average of 4.82 (out of 5). Weeks 4 participants rated these statements an average of 4.8+ (out of 5).
Rate the usefulness of the challenge in helping you feel supported in your parenting.	n/a	Q3_2	Q4_2	

Rate the likelihood that you will continue to use the weekly challenge activities.	n/a	Q3_3	Q4_3	
What was particularly helpful about this session?	Q8	Q7	Q7, Q11	Over four weeks of evaluations, there were 496 responses about what was particularly helpful to participants. Eighteen percent of responses listed “everything” or “all” as what was helpful. Outside of those responses, participants frequently listed specific terms include Brain Development, Health and Safety, Discipline Strategies, Communication Skills, School Readiness, Self-Care and Parenting Stress, Community and Networking, Practical Skills, and Diversity of Topics. In summary, the program's success lies in its holistic approach, covering a wide range of relevant topics, providing practical advice, fostering community connections, and addressing both child development and parenting skills.
What suggestions do you have to improve this session? What comments do you have about Born Ready University to help as we plan future sessions?	Q9	Q8	Q15	Eighty-seven percent of the 326 responses submitted over the four weeks had no suggestions about how the program could be improved. Some respondents suggested the continuation of aspects like hands-on activities, interaction among parents, and prioritizing rural areas like the Black Belt. Other respondents identified areas of improvement: more frequent sessions, more awareness/parents involved, starting on time, and offer incentives. Specific topics of interest included prenatal education, childproofing, autism, housing, and coping with trauma.
What was most helpful about the overall program?	n/a	n/a	Q11	One-third said “everything” was most helpful. Most of the remaining comments describe the information, topics, and resources as most helpful.
What was your favorite topic discussed during Born Ready University?	n/a	n/a	Q12	One-fifth enjoyed all the topics. About 17% identified Child Development as their favorite. Other favorites (around 10% each) were Conscious Discipline, Health and Safety, School Readiness, and Social and Emotional.

How did you hear about Born Ready University?	Q10	n/a	n/a	Participants heard about BRU through three main sources: their daycare & Head Start, school, including Pre-K registration and attendance, and parenting programs, like HIPPIY, and other community programs. Other sources included Facebook/social media, friend, or family. Minimal sources were flyer, newspaper, and work.
Please rate the following: Meals and/or snacks; Day and time of session; Location.	n/a	Q10_1-3	Q10_1-3	Weeks 2 and 3 and week 4 participants rated the meals and/or snacks, day and time of the session and location an average of 4.83 (and higher) out of 5.
Did the child care offered at the session meet your needs? Please provide any additional comments about child care.	n/a	Q11-12	Q13, 14, 17	All responses affirmed that the child care offered met participants' needs. All comments submitted were positive. Only the week 4 evaluation asked whether participants used the child care: 76% used the provided childcare and 6% sometimes used it. Eighteen percent did not use the child care.