



School Readiness in Alabama: The Impact of First Class Pre-K

School Readiness at Kindergarten Entry Research Summary • 2024-2026

Alabama uses a tool called the Early Learning Inventory (ELI) to measure whether children are ready to learn when they walk into kindergarten for the first time. This brief shares what we found — and what it means for Alabama families.

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Alabama children who had First Class Pre-K are ready for school at kindergarten entry



+7 points

More likely to be ready if a child had First Class Pre-K compared to children who did not

How First Class Pre-K Improves the Odds on School Readiness

Had First Class Pre-K

81.0%

+7.3 points

No First Class Pre-K

73.7%

Had First Class Pre-K Did not have First Class Pre-K Difference between groups

What “Ready for Kindergarten” Means

Kindergarten readiness isn’t just about knowing the ABCs. Teachers observe children across **16 areas of development and learning** that support the whole child — social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics. A child is considered ready if he or she demonstrates at least **9 of 16 skills**.

These “building blocks” help predict a child’s long-term success in school.

 Managing Feelings

 Social Skills

 Balance & Movement

 Fine Motor Skills

 Communication

 Books & Print

 Numbers & Math

 Focus & Persistence

First Class Pre-K Helps the Children Who Need It Most

Some children may need extra support to be ready for school. First Class Pre-K has an even bigger impact for children who may need more support.



Children from Low-Income Families

Children whose household income falls below poverty level are less likely to arrive at kindergarten ready — but First Class Pre-K significantly closes that gap.

Had First Class Pre-K

77.7%

No First Class Pre-K

66.2%

+11.1 points

difference in school readiness



Children with Special Learning Needs

Children who receive special education services are also less likely to be ready — but First Class Pre-K makes a dramatic difference for them.

Had First Class Pre-K

64.4%

No First Class Pre-K

48.8%

+15.6 points

difference in school readiness



What Does This Mean for Alabama Families?

- ✓ Investing in quality pre-K helps Alabama children start school on equal footing — regardless of background.
- ✓ More than 8 in 10 First Class Pre-K graduates enter kindergarten ready to learn and thrive.
- ✓ The program works — and it works *especially* well for children who need extra support.
- ✓ First Class Pre-K prepares children for a strong start — not just academically, but socially and developmentally too.



About the Data

- Data from **78,808 kindergartners** across Alabama public schools in fall 2024–25 and fall 2025–26.
- A child is “ready” if he or she demonstrates at least **9 of the 16 skills**.
- Readiness assessed by teachers using the **Early Learning (ELI)** – 16 observed skills.
- Differences between groups are **statistically significant** ($p < 0.001$).

For the complete report: Scan →



Click here: [School Readiness in Alabama: The Impact of First Class Pre-K](#)