



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



◆ Key Take-Away Messages

- About 3 out of 4 Alabama children meet the school readiness benchmark when they start kindergarten.
- Children who had First Class Pre-K are more likely to be ready (+7 percentage points).
- First Class Pre-K has a larger impact for children who may need more support to be ready.
 - ▶ economically disadvantaged (+11 percentage points)
 - ▶ special education (+16 percentage points)

1. School Readiness at Kindergarten Entry in Alabama is Measured with the Early Learning Inventory.

Starting in fall 2024, Alabama public schools began measuring school readiness using the Early Learning Inventory (ELI), a 16-item formative assessment tool based on the Teaching Strategies GOLD® Kindergarten Entry Assessment. Because young children's development and early learning are often uneven – with some skills being accomplished sooner than others – school readiness at kindergarten entry is best measured with a “whole child” approach across several different, but related, domains that are associated with later academic success.

These domains include items that represent developmental skills (“building blocks” for school success) and early academic skills (such as literacy and math). Adapted from a similar process and tool used in North Carolina, the 16-item subset was selected from the full assessment to reduce data collection burden for teachers.

*Children are considered ready for kindergarten entry
if they successfully meet at least 9 of the 16 items.*

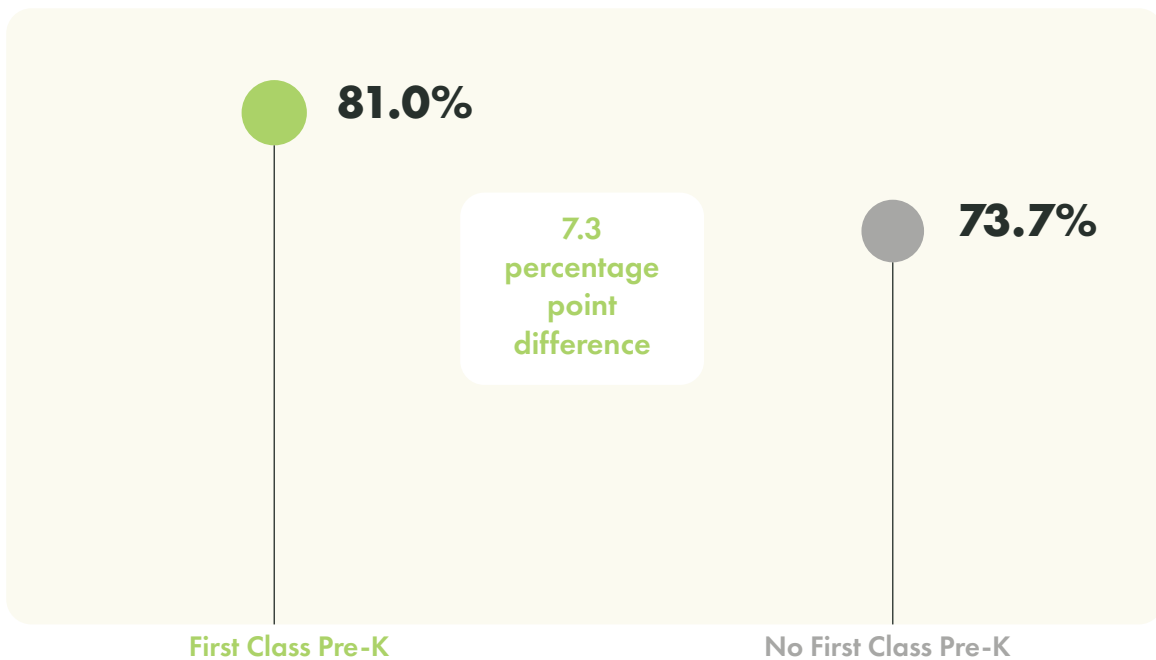
II. Most Alabama Children Meet the School Readiness Benchmark at Kindergarten Entry.



- For the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 school years combined, about 3 out of 4 Alabama public school children (76.7%) were [ready for school at kindergarten entry](#).

III. Children who had First Class Pre-K are More Likely to be Ready for Kindergarten.

Figure 1. Percent of Children Ready for School at Kindergarten Entry, First Class Pre-K compared to No First Class Pre-K.

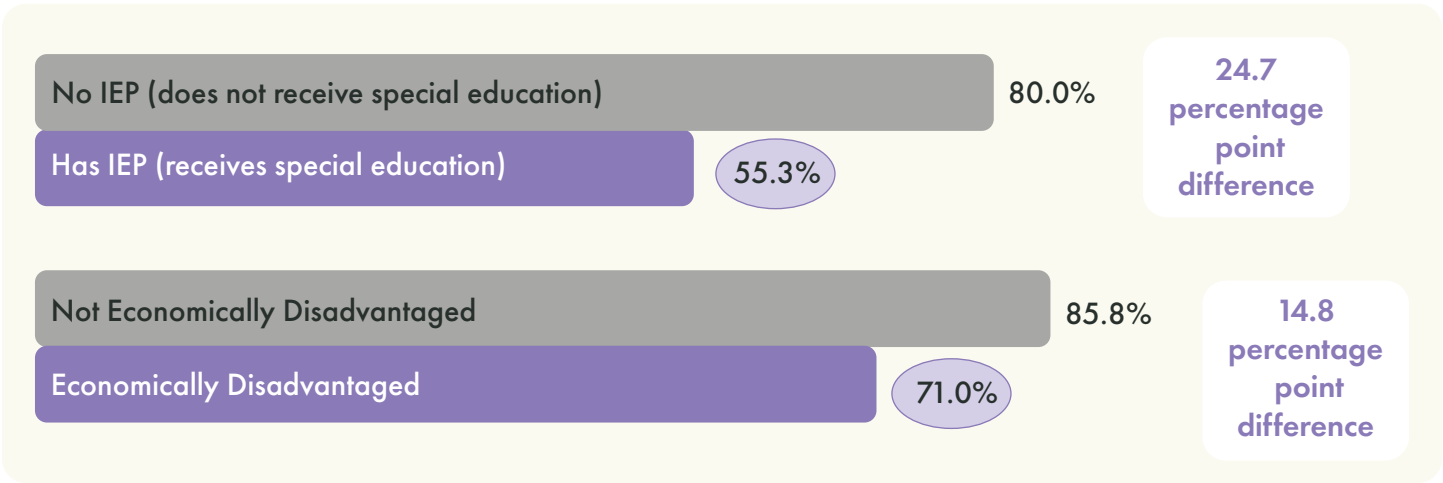


Difference is statistically significant based on Chi-square analysis ($X = 566.4381$; $p < 0.001$).

- Children who [had First Class Pre-K \(FCPK\)](#) are more likely to be ready for school at kindergarten entry than are children who [did not have First Class Pre-K \(No-FCPK\)](#).
- [More than 8 out of 10 \(81.0%\) children who had FCPK](#) arrived in kindergarten ready to learn compared to 73.7% of children who did not participate in the program, representing [a 7.3 percentage point difference](#) between the two groups.

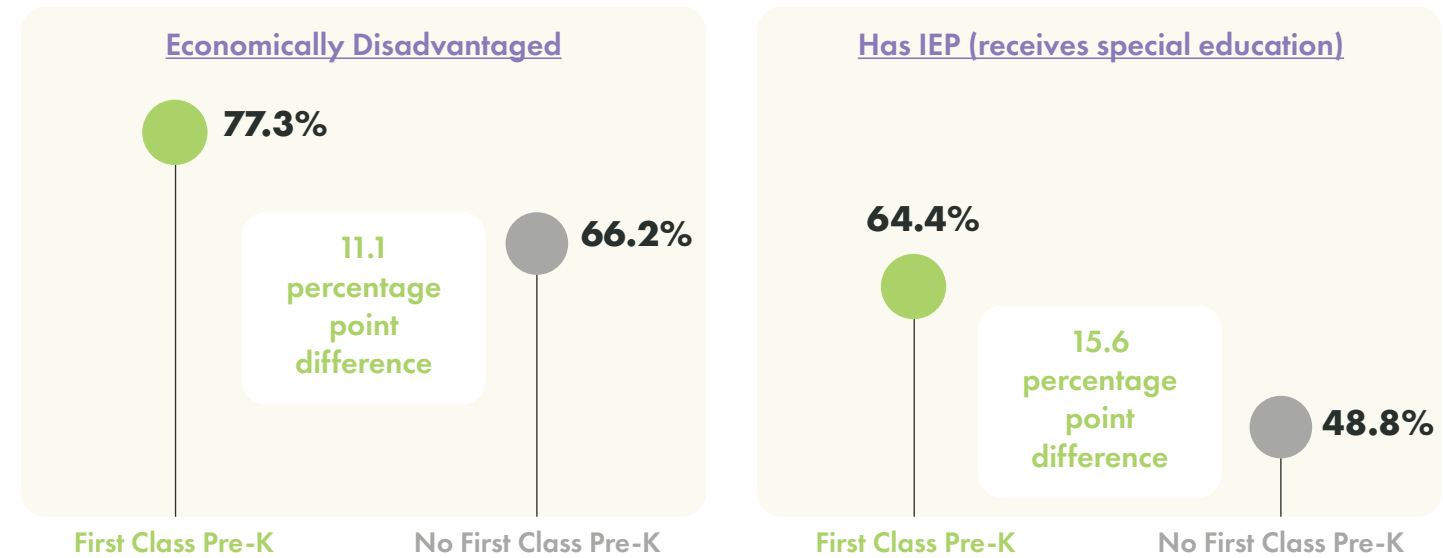
IV. First Class Pre-K has a Larger Impact for Children who may need More Support to be Ready for Kindergarten.

Figure 2. Percent of Children Ready for School at Kindergarten Entry, Differences based on Special Education and Income.



- Some children may need extra support to be ready for kindergarten.
- **Children who have an IEP** (individualized education program, receive special education) are less likely to be ready for school at kindergarten entry.
 - ▶ **Just over half of these children (55.3%)** arrived in kindergarten ready to learn compared to 80.0% of children who did not have an IEP, representing a **24.7 percentage point difference** between the two groups.
- **Children who met the definition of “economically disadvantaged”** (students whose household income is below the poverty level) are less likely to be ready for school at kindergarten entry.
 - ▶ **About 7 out of 10 of these children (71.0%)** arrived in kindergarten ready to learn compared to 85.8% of children who were not economically disadvantaged, representing a **14.8 percentage point difference** between the two groups.

Figure 3. Percent of Children Ready for School at Kindergarten Entry, First Class Pre-K compared to No First Class Pre-K among Children who are Economically Disadvantaged or Receive Special Education.



Difference is statistically significant based on Chi-square analysis ($X = 717.2561$; $p < 0.001$).

Difference is statistically significant based on Chi-square analysis ($X = 252.8771$; $p < 0.001$).

- The impact of the First Class Pre-K program is even greater for these children.
- For children **who have an IEP (55.3% ready overall)**, there is a **15.6 percentage point difference** in school readiness at kindergarten entry between those who **had FCPK** (64.4%) and children who **did not have FCPK (48.8%)**.
- For children who are **economically disadvantaged (71.0% ready overall)**, there is a 11.1 percentage point difference in school readiness at kindergarten entry between those who **had FCPK** (77.3%) and children who **did not have FCPK** (66.2%).

V. Data Notes

- The sample included all children enrolled in participating Alabama public school kindergarten classrooms in early Fall of two school years, 2024-2025 and 2025-2026. Analyses were limited to children who had results for at least 9 of the 16 items included in the assessment tool (n = 78,808).
- Student performance data were matched with student enrollment data to identify whether the child had previously participated in the First Class Pre-K program and to gather sociodemographic information.
- Results are based on teacher observation of student performance for a set of 16 items included in The Early Learning Inventory (ELI), a subset of objectives in the Kindergarten Entry Assessment from Teaching Strategies

Social-Emotional

- ▶ 1a Manages Feelings
- ▶ 2b Responds to emotional cues
- ▶ 3a Balances needs and rights of self and others
- ▶ 3b Solves social problems

Physical

- ▶ 4 Traveling Skills
- ▶ 5 Balancing Skills
- ▶ 7a Uses Fingers and Hands

Language

- ▶ 8b Follows directions
- ▶ 9d Tells about another time or place
- ▶ 10a Engages in conversations

Cognitive

- ▶ 11a Attends and engages
- ▶ 11b Persists

Literacy

- ▶ 17a Uses and appreciates books and other texts
- ▶ 17b Uses print concepts

Mathematics

- ▶ 20b Quantifies
- ▶ 20c Connects numerals with quantities

- Teachers are trained in using the tool and scoring performance, but variation could still exist at the individual teacher level. Data are entered by teachers; standard limitations related to data entry error apply.

Suggested Citation:

Preskitt J, Kerch C, Ernest J, Adams J, Becker D, Rahim J, Sen B Yami A, Hume J, Walker T, Brooks A, & Johnson H. (2025) School Readiness at Kindergarten Entry in Alabama Public Schools: Early Learning Inventory (ELI). Overall Readiness and the Impact of First Class Pre-K. [Issue Brief].

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