

Advancing Student Success and Narrowing the Achievement Gap of Low Income Children by Aligning Educational Experiences to Create a Seamless Learning Continuum from Preschool to 3rd Grade

Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education
Alabama State Department of Education
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Year 2 Pilot – School Year 2018/2019
Evaluation Report

Report prepared by
Julie Preskitt, MSOT, MPH, PhD¹
Heather Hudspeth Johnson, MPH¹
James Ernest, PhD²

University of Alabama at Birmingham
¹School of Public Health
²School of Education

P-3 Framework



LEADERSHIP

- Embrace the pre-k-3 early learning continuum
- Ensure developmentally appropriate practice
- Participate in a year long leadership academy and a community of practice

ASSESSMENT

- Ongoing, observation, standards based
- Include all domains of development: social emotional, language, physical, cognitive, literacy, mathematics social studies, science and technology

INSTRUCTION

- Align and coordinate standards
- Use consistent instructional approaches across grades
- Family engagement
- Horizontal and vertical team meetings
- Active Participatory Learning Approach/ project based
- Builds on the success of Alabama First Class Pre-K



Summary of Key Findings:

- The Alabama Preschool to Third Grade initiative (P-3) has expanded significantly in pilot year 2, serving more children in more schools and classrooms throughout the state – roughly doubling the reach compared to pilot year 1. In addition to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant, P-3 efforts have been reinforced through funding from the State Legislature and Governor Kay Ivey’s support as a key pillar of her Strong Start Strong Finish Initiative.
- Children in all grades showed significant improvements across all areas of development and school readiness based on Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment.
 - Lower starting percentages of children meeting or exceeding widely-held expectations at the higher grades support the need for a P-3 approach.
 - Consistent exit percentages in excess of 90% of children meeting or exceeding widely-held expectations are reassuring and indicate across-grade success.
- Families, teachers, and leaders report growth in child academic performance, problem-solving skills, communication, and behavioral/social-emotional regulation along with decreased office referrals.
- Teachers and leaders both report professional growth in classroom and leadership skills, as well as job satisfaction and excitement in watching children be engaged in learning.
- The quality of teacher-child interactions was similar to national averages based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Alabama average was higher for the important dimension of Concept Development – shown to be associated with later student success in vocabulary, language, and math. P-3 classrooms also improved in quality on average from Fall (pre) to Spring (post) assessments across all domains.

Teacher and Leader Participant-Identified Needs:

- More/enhanced coaching, professional development, and observation opportunities to support the implementation of developmentally-appropriate/active participatory learning approaches in the classroom, especially in the higher grades.
- Alignment of state educational standards, grading, and reporting requirements with student-led, participatory approaches.

I. Project Overview

A high quality early education provides the foundation for student success in school. Having a seamless learning continuum from Pre-K to 3rd grade will align and integrate a comprehensive educational approach to student learning during the years when children have the greatest growth potential and ensure that children enter classrooms that promote their ongoing educational progress by building on what they have previously learned. In addition to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant, P-3 efforts have been reinforced through funding from the State Legislature and Governor Kay Ivey’s support as a key pillar of her Strong Start Strong Finish Initiative.

Governor Kay Ivey's Strong Start, Strong Finish education initiative focuses on three stages of education: early childhood education, computer science in middle and high school, and workforce preparedness. With Governor Ivey's strong support for extending the First Class Pre-K (FCPK) principles and approaches into the K-3rd grade education system, the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education and the Alabama State Department of Education are working collaboratively to develop a Pre-K-3rd Strong Start Early Learning Collaborative. This initiative focuses on establishing a strong early learning foundation for the children of Alabama and will be accomplished through a comprehensive, systematic approach to high quality learning opportunities using the Pre-K-3rd framework and early learning continuum. The P-3 continuum surpasses the boundaries of preschool into the first few years of elementary school in order to produce a seamless learning experience for children from age four through third grade. The basic framework and three focus areas of the continuum are based on leadership, instruction, and assessment.

1. Leadership
 - a. Leaders embrace the Pre-K-3rd early learning continuum
 - b. Leaders ensure developmentally appropriate practices
 - c. Leaders provide personalized, blended learning environments
 - d. Leaders use measures to guide growth in student learning
 - e. Leaders build professional capacity across the early learning community
 - f. Leaders make schools a hub for Pre-K-3rd learning for families and communities

2. Instruction
 - a. Align and coordinate standards, curriculum, instructional practices, assessment, environments and professional development creating an incremental alignment plan for Pre-K-3rd
 - b. Use consistent, yet developmentally appropriate, instructional approaches across grades
 - c. Require horizontal and vertical team meetings
 - d. Use instructional coaches with early childhood learning experiences and credentials
 - e. Communicate proactively and involve parents, families, and the community

3. Assessment
 - a. Ongoing comprehensive system to include diagnostic, formative/progress monitoring, and summative assessments
 - b. Include all domains of development and learning: social, language, physical, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science and technology, and the arts

Two main strategies were undertaken to achieve grant goals:

1. Developing and delivering a Leadership Academy for elementary school principals and leaders serving children ages 3-8 years (Pre-K to 3rd Grade)
2. Providing grants to a subgroup of schools whose principals participated in the Leadership Academy to support the delivery of a coordinated and comprehensive high-quality early childhood continuum

The Department of Early Childhood Education awarded funds received from the Kellogg grant to the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) to support an Alabama Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy: Excelling Innovation in Leadership of Pre-K-3 Learning Communities. CLAS, in collaboration with the Department of Early Childhood Education and the National Association of Elementary School Principals

(NAESP), developed a high quality professional learning and resource program to meet the needs of elementary principals serving children from ages 3 to 8, or Pre-K-3 in Alabama. The purpose of the Leadership Academy is to improve attitudes and knowledge regarding early childhood practices in education to assure incorporation of best practices.

Participants in the Leadership Academy were invited to submit applications for the 2018-2019 school year for grants that support the delivery of a coordinated and comprehensive high-quality early childhood continuum. The Alabama Preschool to Third Grade initiative (P-3) has expanded significantly in pilot year 2, serving more children in more schools and classrooms throughout the state – roughly doubling the reach compared to pilot year 1. In June 2018, pilot year 2 Alabama P-3 Initiative Grants were awarded, including both new classrooms and schools, as well as continuation and expansion of pilot year 1 capacity. Taken together, the P-3 initiative in year 2 included 76 classrooms in 13 schools in 8 school districts. This is an increase from the pilot year 1 reach of 35 classrooms in 7 schools in 5 school districts. Through these grants, 1,323 Alabama Kindergarten through 2nd grade children (up from 636 in pilot year 1) had opportunities to learn in classrooms enhanced with high quality, early childhood learning materials, coaching for teachers, and local leadership support to establish a strong foundation of early learning experiences that promote student achievement and success. In addition, another 443 4-year-olds (up from 199 in pilot year 1) received a high quality preschool experience through First Class Pre-K classrooms located in these schools.

2018-2019 Alabama P-3 Initiative Grantees

County	School	2017-2018 Classrooms by Grade	2018-2019 Classrooms by Grade
Calhoun	Ohatchee		4 – Kindergarten
Cleburne	Pleasant Grove	2 – Kindergarten 2 – First	2 – Second
	Fruithurst		2 – Kindergarten 2 – First
Coffee	Kinston	1 – Kindergarten 3 – First	3 – Second
	New Brockton	3 – Kindergarten 3 First	3 – Second
	Zion Chapel	3 – Kindergarten 3 – First 3 – Second	1 – Kindergarten
Elmore	Wetumpka	3 – Kindergarten	3 – Kindergarten
Jackson	Skyline	2 – Kindergarten	2 – First
	Woodville		2 – Kindergarten
Mobile	Robert E. Lee		5 – Kindergarten 5 – First
Morgan	Barkley Bridge	3 – Kindergarten 4 – First	1 – Kindergarten

St. Clair	Moody		5 – Kindergarten
	Odenville		1 – Kindergarten

The overarching goal of the project is to develop a seamless learning continuum from Pre-K through 3rd grade that will align and integrate a comprehensive educational approach to student learning.

Targeted goals focus on the three main areas of concentration: leadership, instruction, and assessment.

Goal 1. Provide the Early Childhood Education Leadership Academy annually (2018-2019) to an additional two cohorts of 35 administrators and 12 state advisors (70 total administrators, 24 total state advisors).

Goal 2. Provide annual funding (2018-2019) for 30 (60 total) pilot classrooms to support full and authentic implementation of the Integrated Approach to Early Learning continuum.

Goal 3. Provide 600 children annually (1,200 total) with a research-based, developmentally appropriate assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD) to measure student achievement and success, and to guide instructional practices.

II. Evaluation Results

A. Evaluation Plan

Evaluation of the Preschool to 3rd Grade Continuum is being completed by a subgroup of the First Class Pre-K Research Evaluation Team (led by the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health, along with and the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Education, the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, and ThinkData Solutions). The research evaluation plan is a mixed methods approach that aligns strategies according to the three focus areas:

- 1. **Assessment:** Primary measure quantitative measure = Teaching Strategies GOLD
Primary qualitative method = Surveys with teachers and families
- 2. **Instruction:** Primary measure quantitative measure = Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
Primary qualitative method = Surveys with teachers
- 3. **Leadership:** Primary quantitative measure = Pre/post data from leadership academy
Primary qualitative method = Surveys with principal/director

Research evaluation aims are presented below.

Research Evaluation Aims

- 1. To describe the pilot development and implementation of a Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum in selected school systems in Alabama.

2. To gain knowledge and lessons learned to inform expansion of the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum model to additional school systems in Alabama.
3. To describe perceived benefits and challenges to implementing the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum model as experienced by project participants.
4. To assess academic outcomes and performance of children in Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum classrooms (standardized assessment, school system data, parent perception, teacher perception).
5. To assess classroom instructional practice for teachers in classrooms participating in the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum (quality; implementation of active participatory learning approaches; teacher perception).
6. To describe perceived changes in leadership skills and approaches related to implementing the Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum model as experienced by project participants.
7. To assess subsequent differences in student academic outcomes between groups of children who attended school in Pre-K to 3rd grade continuum classrooms and those who attended schools implementing traditional approaches to learning.

B. Progress Toward Project Goals

Progress	Goal	Comments/ Activities
Mostly Met	<p>Goal 1. Provide the Early Childhood Education Leadership Academy annually (2018-2019) to an additional two cohorts of 35 administrators and 12 state advisors (70 total administrators, 24 total state advisors).</p>	<p>The Department of Early Childhood Education awarded funds to the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) to support an Alabama Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy: Excelling Innovation in Leadership of Pre-K-3 Learning Communities. CLAS, in collaboration with DECE and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), developed a high quality professional learning and resource program to meet the needs of elementary principals serving children from ages 3 to 8, or Pre-K-3rd Grade in Alabama. The purpose of Leadership Academy is to improve the attitudes and knowledge regarding early childhood practices in education to assure incorporation of best practices. The second cohort of the pilot year 2 Leadership Academy included 26 administrator/leader participants and 7 advisors.</p>
Exceeded	<p>Goal 2. Provide annual funding (2018-2019) for 30 (60 total) pilot classrooms to support full and authentic implementation of the Integrated Approach to Early Learning continuum.</p>	<p>During pilot year 2, 76 classrooms in 13 schools in 8 school districts were provided with funding to support full and authentic implementation of the Integrated Approach to Early Learning continuum.</p>
Exceeded	<p>Goal 3. Provide 600 children annually (1,200 total) with a research-based,</p>	<p>During pilot year 2, 1,323 children (K-2nd grade; additional 443 4-year-olds were served in First Class Pre-K classrooms) were provided with a</p>

	developmentally appropriate assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD) to measure student achievement and success, and to guide instructional practices.	research-based, developmentally appropriate assessment (Teaching Strategies GOLD) to measure student achievement and success, and to guide instructional practices.
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C. Results and Outcomes

A total of 1,323 student in Kindergarten through 2nd grades and 443 4-year-olds in First Class Pre-K were in classrooms participating in the P-3 Pilot during the 2018-2019 school year. As shown in the table below, demographics were similar across the group with higher percentages of Black and Other race and lower percentages of Hispanic ethnicity children in First Class Pre-K classrooms compared to K-2nd grade classrooms. Larger differences were noted in percentages of children who received free or reduced lunch, a proxy measure for low income, with First Class Pre-K classrooms having nearly 5 times the percentage of children receiving free or reduced lunch. First Class Pre-K classrooms also included slightly lower percentages of children who had Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Only 4 schools included 2nd grade classrooms in P-3 Pilot year 2. No schools included 3rd grade classrooms.

Students in P-3 Classrooms: First Class Pre-K and K-2nd Grade

Characteristic	First Class Pre-K (n=443)		K-2 nd Grade (n=1,323)	
	n	%	n	%
Grade				
Kindergarten	--	--	713	53.9
1 st Grade			421	31.8
2 nd Grade*			189	14.3
Gender				
Male	225	50.8	653	50.6
Female	218	49.2	670	49.4
Race**				
Black	36	8.1	55	4.2
White	363	81.9	1,036	78.3
Other	30	6.8	32	2.4
Ethnicity**				
Hispanic	10	2.3	61	4.6
Not Hispanic	433	97.7	1,240	93.7
Has IEP	11	2.5	52	3.9
Gets Free or Reduced Lunch	138	31.1	80	6.0

Quantitative Results

1. Assessment

Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD)¹ is an ongoing, observation-based, research-validated assessment system. Grounded in current research related to child development and learning, the assessment includes 38 objectives across six domains of development (social-emotional, physical, language,

cognitive, literacy, and math) that are associated with school success based on school readiness standards.

Students are assessed at entry (Fall), midpoint (Winter), and exit (Spring) of the preschool year, with scores compared to widely-held expectations (WHE) for children of their age and grade as provided by TS GOLD for each time point. Results are typically dichotomized to “below expectations” and “meets or exceeds expectations.” Fall and Spring checkpoint data were compared for each child in order to assure equal comparison of children with both an entry/pre assessment and exit/post assessment.

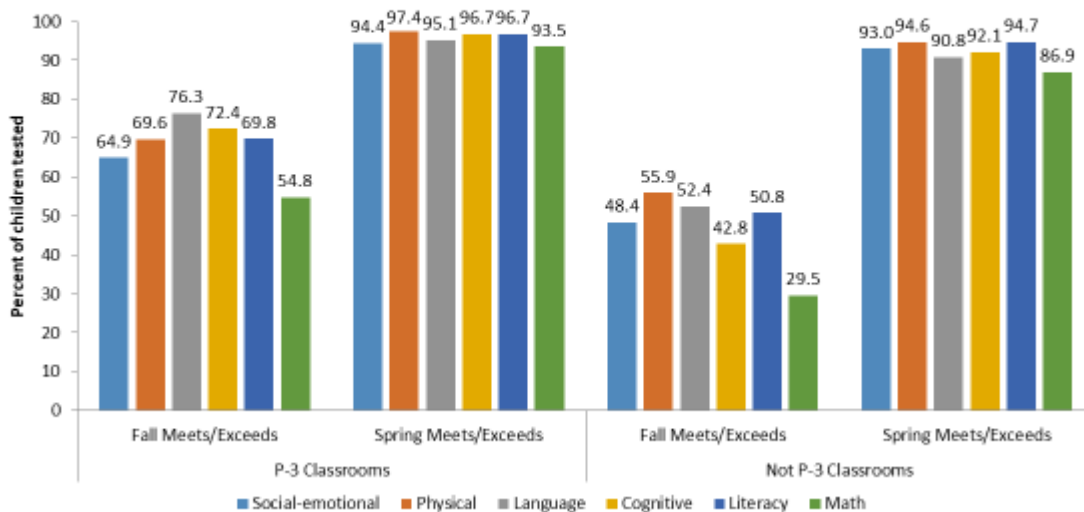
TS GOLD also provides an assessment of Kindergarten readiness by domain based on selected items. Kindergarten readiness is assessed for 4-year-olds in First Class Pre-K classrooms at the Spring checkpoint (exit) and for Kindergartners at the Fall checkpoint (entry).

a. Meeting/Exceeding Widely-Held Expectations (WHE): First Class Pre-K – P-3 vs. Non P-3 Classrooms

The chart below presents performance for 4-year-old children in First Class Pre-K classrooms, comparing classrooms that participated in the P-3 Pilot to all other First Class Pre-K classrooms. For each developmental domain, children in classrooms that were part of the P-3 Pilot had higher percentages of meeting/exceeding WHE at the entry assessment (Fall) compared to non-P-3 Pilot classrooms. However, by the exit checkpoint (Spring) results were similar between the groups, with a trend toward slightly higher performance for the P-3 Pilot classrooms. More than 90% of children met or exceeded WHE for 4-year-olds at First Class Pre-K exit for all domains (except math for non-P-3 Pilot classrooms).

Performance Compared to Widely-Held Expectations, FCPK 2018/2019 (Teaching Strategies GOLD)

Classrooms that were a part of the P-3 Pilot started with higher percentages of Meets/Exceeds in Fall compared to classrooms that were not part of the P-3 Pilot, but all had similar percentages in Spring.

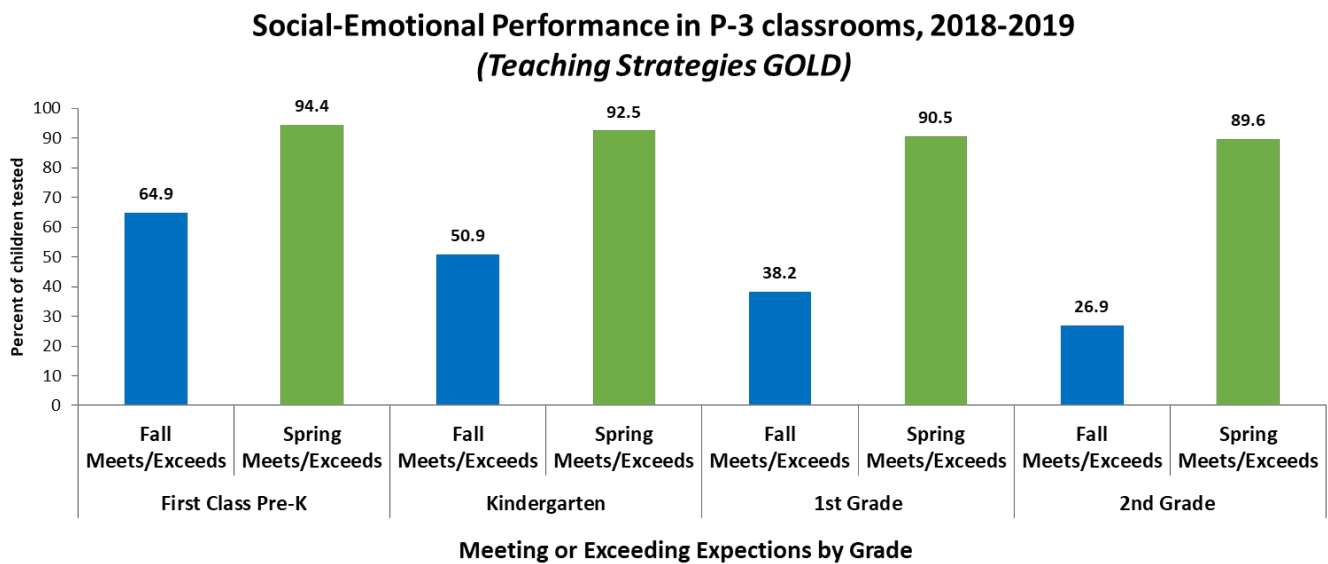


b. Meeting/Exceeding Widely-Held Expectations (WHE): P-3 Pilot Classrooms

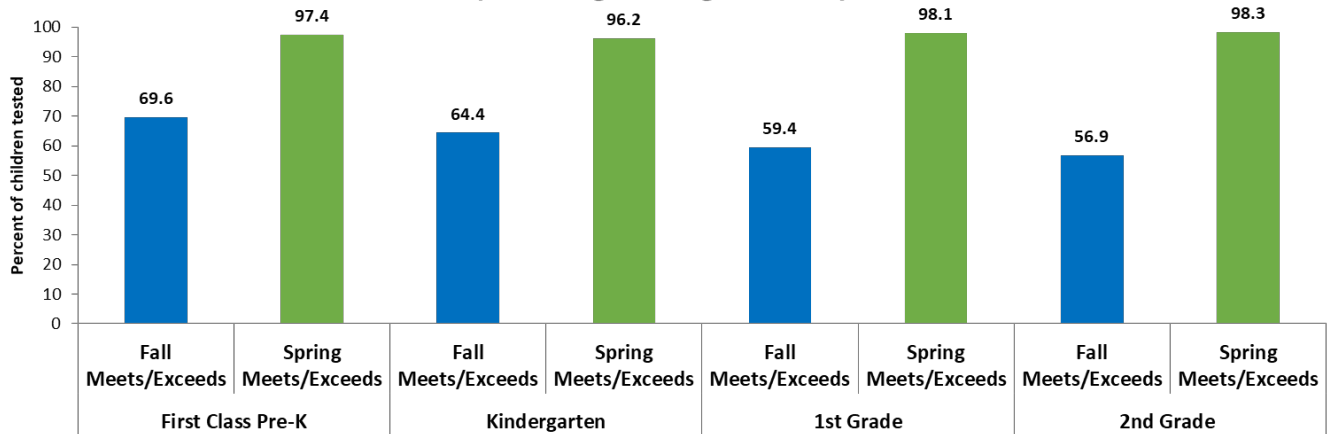
The charts below present performance for children in classrooms participating in the P-3 Pilot, including First Class Pre-K through 2nd Grades. Based on TS GOLD assessment at school year entry in Fall 2018, in general, the percentage of children meeting or exceeding WHE for their age tended to be lower as the grade level increased and this trend was consistent across all six domains of development. At school entry, the range of percent of children meeting or exceeding WHE was broader for children in these older grades, with significantly lower performance compared to 4-year-old children in the First Class Pre-K classrooms participating in the P-3 Pilot. These lower starting percentages observed in older grades support the need for the expansion of the P-3 approach.

The lowest performance at Fall 2018 entry was observed in 1st and 2nd grades for math, literacy, cognitive, and language. Two domains – math and language – saw no children (0%) meeting or exceeding at 2nd grade and only 7.6% for literacy. (Note that the second grade sample was small – 189 children in 8 classrooms within 3 schools.)

After completing the year, significant gains were achieved across all grades and in all domains as measured by the Spring 2019 checkpoint, with the majority of children (82.0%-98.3%) meeting or exceeding WHE for their respective ages. The lowest performance overall and for all grades was observed for math at both Fall and Spring checkpoints.

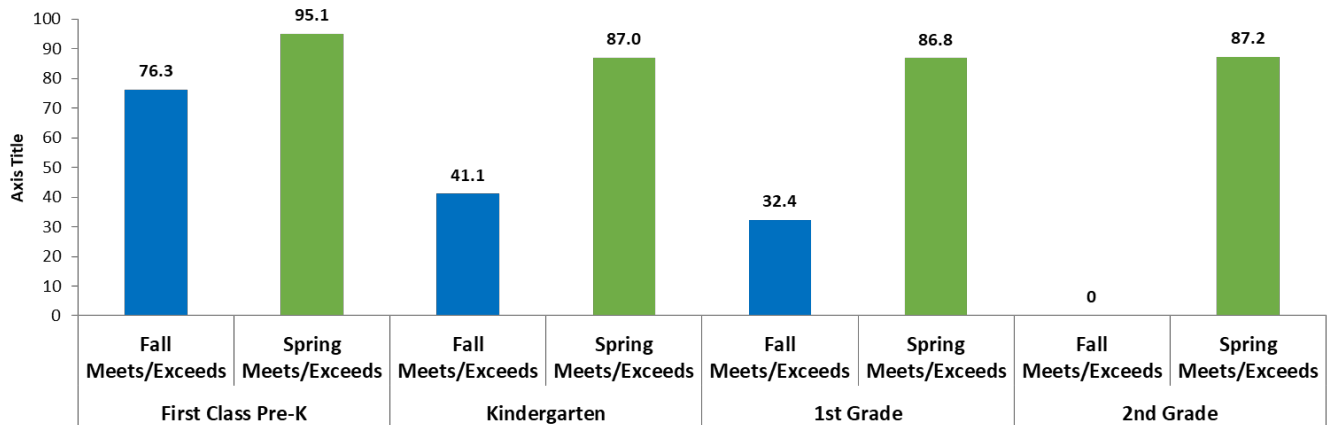


Physical Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)



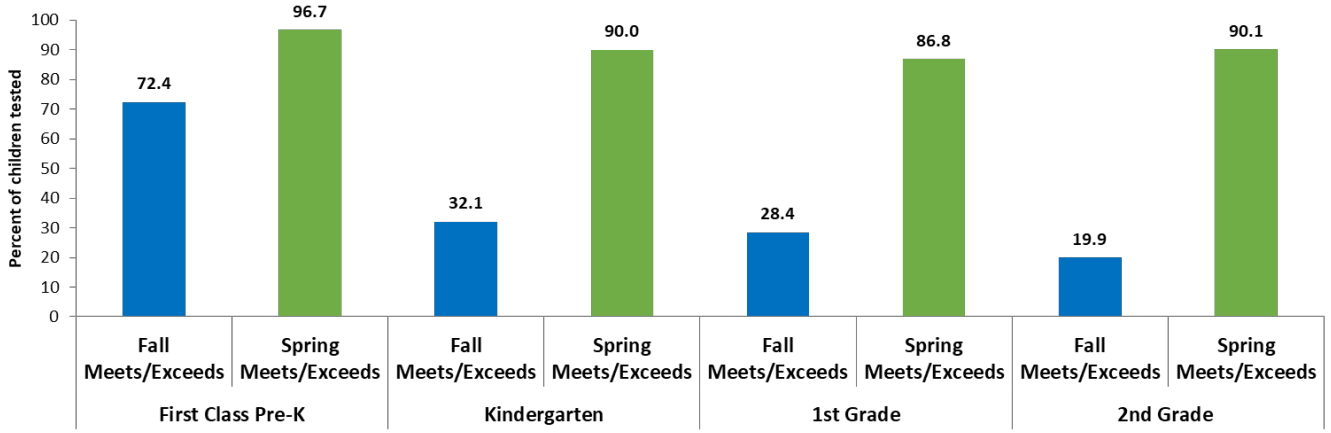
Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Grade

Language Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)



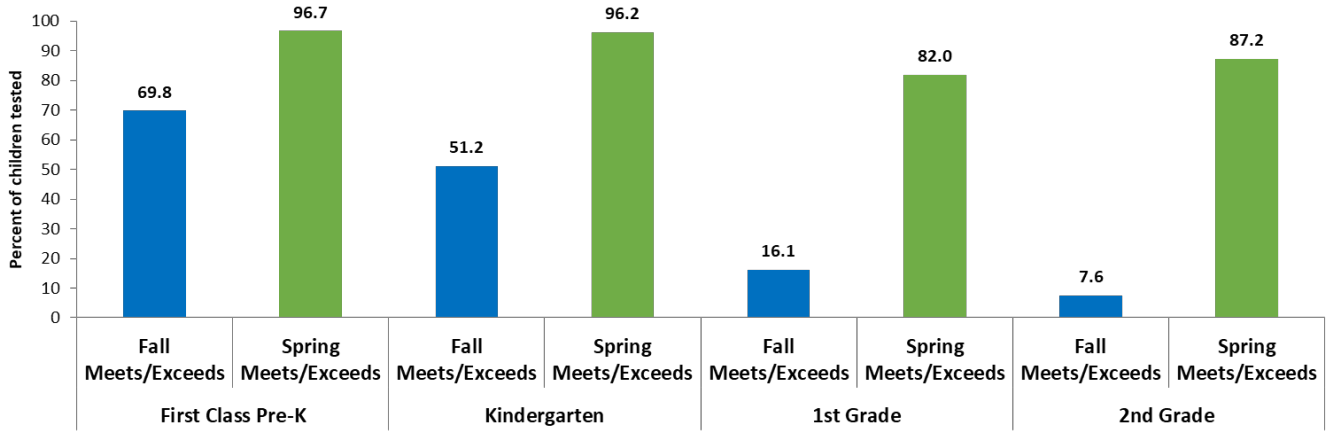
Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Grade

Cognitive Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)



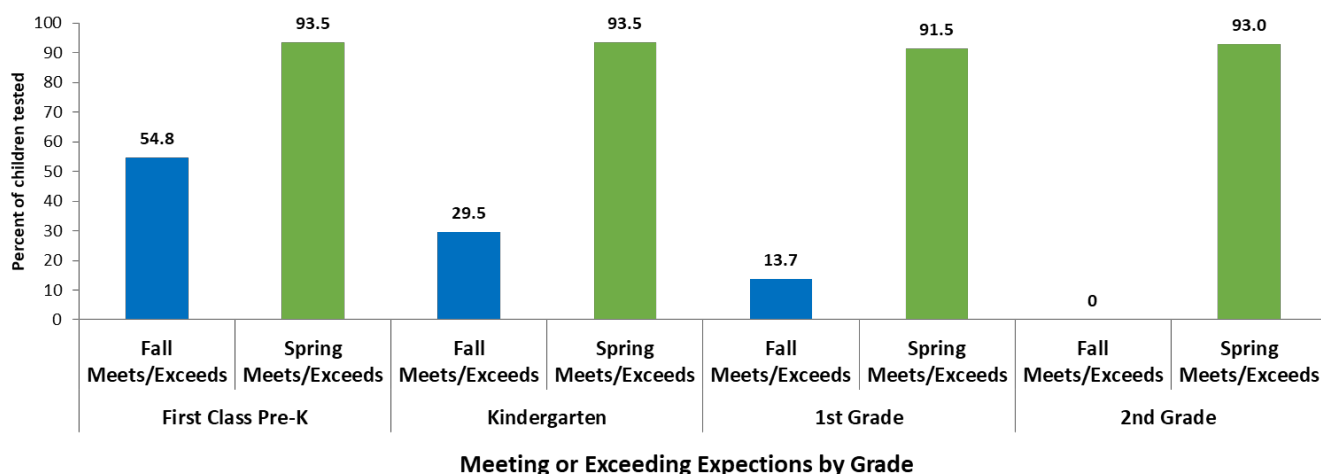
Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Grade

Literacy Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019
(Teaching Strategies GOLD)



Meeting or Exceeding Expectations by Grade

Math Performance in P-3 classrooms, 2018-2019 (Teaching Strategies GOLD)



The chart below displays the percentage point increases in children meeting or exceeding WHE between the Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 checkpoints by domain for each grade. The magnitude of these gains was larger for children in older grades. At each grade, the largest increases were observed in the math domain, ranging from a 38.7 percentage point increase for 4 year-olds on First Class Pre-K to a 93.0 percentage point increase for 2nd grade. The observed large gains for math skills is an important finding as research suggests early math skills not only predict math achievement through high school, but are also a better predictor of later reading achievement than even early reading skills. Large percentage point increases were also observed for language, literacy, cognitive, and social-emotional domains.

Percentage Point Increases by Domain (Fall 2018 to Spring 2019), Teaching Strategies GOLD				
	First Class Pre-K	Kindergarten	1st Grade	2nd Grade
Social-Emotional	29.5	41.6	52.3	62.7
Physical	27.8	31.8	38.7	41.4
Language	18.8	45.9	54.4	87.2
Cognitive	24.3	57.9	58.4	70.2
Literacy	26.9	45.0	65.9	79.6
Math	38.7	64.0	77.8	93.0

2. Instruction

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)² is an evidence-based tool for defining and measuring effective teacher-child interactions in classrooms. The tool includes 10 dimensions that are rated by a trained external observer using a 7-point scale, from low to high. In general, higher scores indicate better teacher-child interactions for all dimensions. The one exception is the negative climate dimension, for which lower scores are desirable. The 10 CLASS dimensions are aggregated into three domains: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.

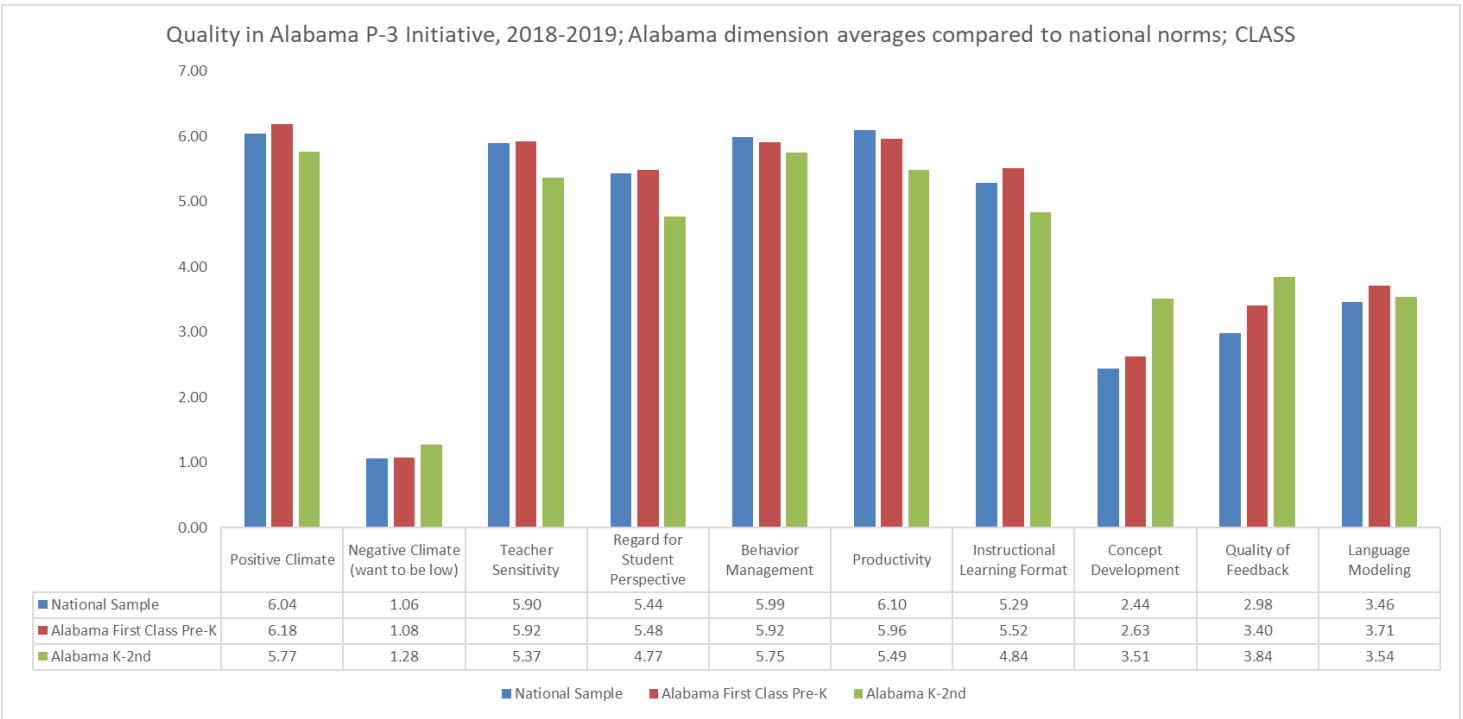
- Emotional Support assesses the degree to which teachers establish and promote a positive climate in their classroom. (Higher levels of emotional support have been shown to be associated with social competence in Kindergarten and growth in reading and math achievement from Kindergarten to 5th grade)³⁻⁴
- Classroom Organization assesses classroom routines and procedures related to the organization and management of children's behavior, time, and attention in the classroom. (Higher levels of classroom organization have been shown to be associated with gains in literacy in 1st Grade).⁵
- Instructional Support assesses the ways in which teachers implement the curriculum to effectively promote cognitive and language development. (Higher levels of instructional support have been shown to be associated with gains in pre-reading and math skills in preschool).⁶

a. Classroom Quality by Dimension

The chart below presents average CLASS scores by dimension for Alabama First Class Pre-K and Kindergarten-2nd grade classrooms in the P-3 Pilot. The Alabama averages are compared to national averages provided for the 2017-2018 Head Start grantees.⁷ Though these national averages are based upon 4-year-olds in Head Start classrooms, they are the best available comparisons as no national scores have been published at this time for classrooms of children in older grades.

For each dimension, Alabama averages were similar to national averages, with Alabama First Class Pre-K classrooms performing slightly better compared to K-2nd grade classrooms, not an unexpected finding given that the Pre-K classrooms have been established for a longer period of time and teachers have had more professional development and coaching related to developmentally appropriate practice. Further, Alabama First Class Pre-K classrooms exceeded national averages for 7 of 10 dimensions, including the critically important dimension of concept development. This is an important finding as previous research suggests that higher levels of concept development were beneficial to student outcome when teachers had even moderate levels of emotional support and classroom organization domains.⁸ Alabama K-2nd grade P-3 classrooms exceeding national averages for 3 of 10 dimensions, again including concept development and also quality of feedback and language modeling. In fact, Alabama K-2nd grade P-3 classrooms even outperformed First Class Pre-K classrooms for these three domains.

Quality in Alabama P-3 Initiative, 2018-2019; Alabama dimension averages compared to national norms; CLASS

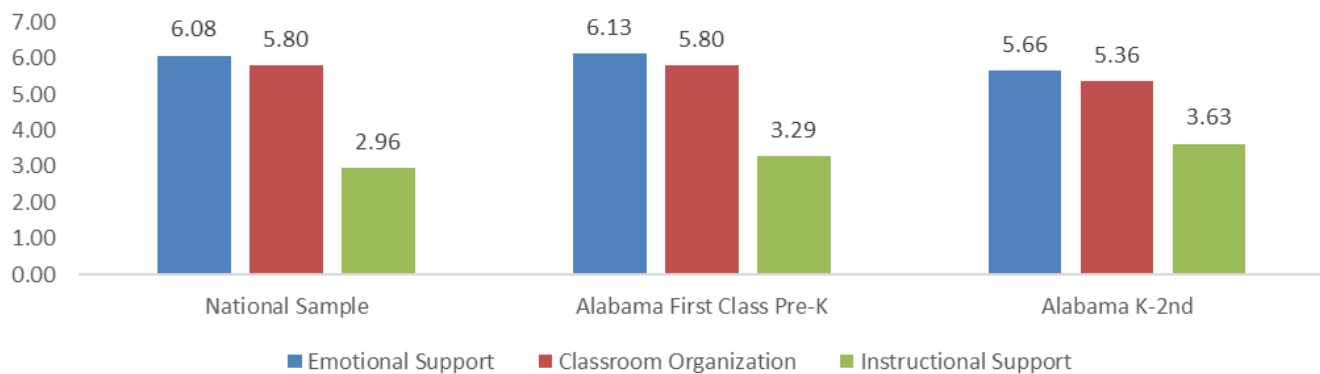


b. Classroom Quality by Domain

The chart below presents average CLASS scores by domain for Alabama First Class Pre-K and Kindergarten-2nd grade classrooms in the P-3 Pilot. Once again, Alabama averages are compared to national averages provided for the 2017-2018 Head Start grantees.⁷

Alabama averages were similar to national averages, though First Class Pre-K P-3 classrooms matched or exceeded national averages across all three domains and Alabama K-2nd grade P-3 classrooms exceeded national averages for instructional support. Previous research suggests that nationally, students are exposed to moderate to high levels of emotional support and classroom organization, yet lower levels of instructional support.⁹ Based on the 7-point CLASS scale, quality is divided into low (1-2), moderate (3-5), and high (6-7).¹⁰ Alabama averages indicate that all children in P-3 classrooms are in moderate to high quality settings. Prior research has found that as long as the scores are in the 5-7 range for emotional support, students on average improve and have better social outcomes.¹¹ Alabama’s higher than national average performance in the instructional support domain is an important finding given the previous discussion of the benefits of higher levels of concept development (a dimension of the instructional support domain).^{8, 11}

Quality in Alabama P-3 Initiative, 2018-2019; Alabama domain averages compared to national norms; CLASS



c. Changes in Classroom Quality: Fall 2018 (pre) to Spring 2019 (post)

The following table displays average changes in quality of the classroom setting between pre (Fall 2018) and post (Spring 2019) CLASS assessments. It is anticipated that quality will improve through professional development and coaching during the year. Increases were noted for 8 of 10 dimensions for First Class Pre-K classrooms and for all 10 in K-2nd grade classrooms. Increases were also noted for all domains across both types of classrooms. These are important findings, suggesting benefits to the quality of the classroom environment, likely related to professional development and coaching.

Alabama P-3 Initiative, 2018-2019; Classroom Quality, Pre (Fall 2018) to Post (Spring 2019) Comparison; CLASS

Domain	Dimension	Alabama First Class Pre-K		Alabama K-2nd	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Emotional Support	Positive Climate	6.20	6.17	5.47	6.08
	Negative Climate (want to be low)	1.12	1.03	1.29	1.27
	Teacher Sensitivity	5.89	5.94	5.11	5.63
	Regard for Student Perspective	5.30	5.67	4.41	5.13
Classroom Organization	Behavior Management	5.97	5.86	5.54	5.96
	Productivity	5.92	6.00	5.25	5.72
	Instructional Learning Format	5.37	5.67	4.54	5.14
Instructional Support	Concept Development	2.45	2.81	3.20	3.83
	Quality of Feedback	3.40	3.86	3.37	4.32
	Language Modeling	3.47	3.94	3.03	4.05
Alabama P-3 Initiative	Emotional Support	6.07	6.19	5.42	5.89
	Classroom Organization	5.76	5.84	5.11	5.61
	Instructional Support	3.05	3.54	3.20	4.06

3. Leadership

The primary project strategy focused on leadership is a Pre-K-3 Leadership Academy, facilitated in partnership with Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS) and National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and based on the six leadership competencies identified in a 2014 NAESP white paper “Leading Pre-K-3 Learning Communities: Competencies for Effective Principal Practice.”

Based on pre and post testing (before and after participation in the Leadership Academy), participants reported statistically significant growth on each of the six NAESP Pre-K-3 leadership competencies. Further, advisors also reported statistically significant growth across the 6 competencies for the participants assigned to them during the Academy.

Average Participant and Advisor Ratings of Knowledge and Skills by NAESP Leadership Competency, Before and After Participation in Leadership Academy (1-6 scale, 1=low-6=high), Alabama P-3 Initiative

Competency	Participant Rating		Advisor Rating	
	Before/Pre	After/Post	Before/Pre	After/Post
1: Embrace the Pre-K-3 early learning continuum	2.5	5.0	3.1	5.4
2: Ensure developmentally appropriate teaching	3.0	5.1	2.4	5.0
3: Provide personalized learning environments	3.2	5.1	2.6	5.1
4: Use multiple measures of assessment to guide student learning growth	3.4	5.0	2.7	4.7
5: Build professional learning capacity across the learning community	3.3	5.2	3.1	5.6
6: Make schools the hub of Pre-K-3 learning for families and communities	3.2	4.8	3.1	5.0

*All differences are statistically significant based on paired t-test.

Qualitative Results

To supplement quantitative results, surveys were developed for P-3 classroom teachers and families of children in P-3 classrooms. Additional survey questions matching selected items from the teacher survey were included in the Leadership Academy post-test. All three surveys were provided in electronic format. Highlighted results are discussed below. Based on response numbers and rates, findings from the teacher and leader surveys may be considered representative of the experiences of teachers and leaders who participated in the P-3 Pilot project. Family survey findings should be considered as trends that are helpful for planning purposes but not necessarily representative of the experiences of all families of children in P-3 classrooms.

Survey	Number Responses
Family	139
Teacher	45
Leadership Academy Participants	26

1. Teacher and Leader Surveys

A. Perceptions

- Most teachers (86%) and leaders (81%) agreed (somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) with the following statement: “An active participatory learning approach fits with the way I believe children of this age learn best.”
- Teachers and leaders expressed a belief that most of the 14 areas of learning presented were best addressed through active participatory approaches vs. traditional direct instructional practices. The only discrepancies between the two groups were noted for literacy/pre-literacy/reading and math/pre-math skills.
 - Traditional approaches were favored by 64.1% of teachers and 26.3% of leaders for literacy/pre-literacy and reading skills.
 - Traditional approaches were favored by 30.8% of teachers and 0% of leaders for math/pre-math skills.

	Better addressed through traditional direct instructional practices and approaches to learning	No differences	Better addressed through active participatory approaches to learning
Literacy/Pre-Literacy and Reading Skills: letters, sounds, words, vocabulary, spelling, words	26.3% leaders 64.1% teachers	21.0% leaders 5.1% teachers	52.6% leaders 20.5% teachers
Math/Pre-Math Skills: shapes, numbers, counting, arithmetic	0% leaders 30.8% teachers	6.7% leaders 15.4% teachers	93.3% leaders 48.7% teachers
Language/Communication: understanding and speaking			✓
Science and Technology Skills			✓
Motivation to learn, receptiveness to learning, engagement in the learning process			✓
Wanting to come to school			✓
Problem-solving, making decisions			✓
Positive ways of dealing with conflict; controlling emotions and behaviors			✓
Interacting with other children			✓
Interacting with adults			✓
Self-Care Skill Management: managing clothes and jacket, buttoning and zipping, eating/feeding self, hanging up backpack			✓
Fine Motor Skills: using small muscles of the hand; drawing, writing, cutting			✓

Gross Motor Skills: moving large muscles; walking, pedaling, climbing, running, jumping, using stairs			√
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B. Progress and Improvements

- Both teachers and leaders described positive differences observed in how children in their P-3 classroom(s) interacted with each other and learned, which they attributed to the active participatory learning approaches implemented as a part of the P-3 Pilot project.
 - Student engagement, participation in learning, and eagerness to learn
 - Student interaction, growth in problem-solving, and conflict resolution
 - Student confidence and creativity
 - Fewer behavioral problems

Selected quotes:

“I have noticed that students are more excited about coming to school and are more excited about learning about different topics. They are more invested in their learning because they actually are a part of the learning process.” –teacher

“The classrooms that have participated in the active participatory learning approaches have less discipline issues. The children are given time to be active, while learning, and that has made a world of difference in discipline issues. We also participated in Conscious Discipline training and that has helped tremendously.” –leader

“By using the active learning even students with learning difficulties are able to participate and be successful. It levels the playing field.” –teacher

- Teachers reported extensive professional growth as a result of participation in the P-3 Pilot project.
 - Most significant areas of growth related to:
 - teacher-child interactions,
 - knowledge of active participatory approaches to learning, and
 - knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice.

C. Successes

- Teachers and leaders described successes related to their participation in the P-3 Pilot. Successes were divided into the following themes:
 - Student engagement and motivation
 - Student learning – overall improvements, including those who have learning difficulties and children who are English Language Learners
 - Students working together
 - Student problem-solving
 - Teacher job satisfaction, enthusiasm, and growth of skills

Selected quotes:

"The students are much more confident and they can carry on conversations about their learning." –leader

"I believe that the students' attitudes about school and about coming into my classroom to learn have been the best success story I could ask for!" –teacher

"Our teachers are finding a balance between all areas of learning, where we have traditionally been focused heavily on academics. We are now looking for more opportunities to ensure that the social/emotional developmental areas are not being neglected." –leader

"I feel like the biggest success story is my growth as a teacher. I feel like I have learned a lot by using the active participatory learning approach this year. I have enjoyed watching my students play, learn, & interact more with each other." –teacher

"Students working out problems with one another. Learning and practicing strategies of problem solving." –teacher

"The biggest success story is watching children who otherwise basically can't be successful in traditional settings be very successful when participating with partners/active hands on learning situations." –teacher

D. Challenges

- Teachers and leaders described successes related to their participation in the P-3 Pilot. Challenges were divided into the following themes, listed in order of most to least common major theme:
 - Teaching Strategies GOLD concerns (insufficient training, learning to document, time involved, alignment with other assessment and grading requirements, lack of curriculum)
 - Grading policies; alignment of strategies and standards with other assessments and district mandates
 - Changing teaching approaches, teacher resistance (especially second grade and "experienced" teachers), getting teacher and stakeholder "buy-in"
 - Time management for planning, implementation, and professional development
 - Lack of feedback on implementation of approach

E. Additional Support Needs

Teachers and leaders described additional support needs as follows:

- More professional development
- More coaching and feedback from observers
- Curriculum (most notably requested by teachers older grades)
- Opportunities to watch implementation in other classrooms
- More time overall (to documents and implement), time to plan with other P-3 teachers
- More resources (monetary/grants, texts)
- Smaller class sizes and/or a classroom aide

- Complementary alignment of assessments, grading, and approaches (Teaching Strategies GOLD and other district mandated assessments, competing philosophies, grading requirements)

2. Family Survey

A. Awareness, Perceptions, and Knowledge

- Nearly half of family respondents (46.3%) reported knowing a “pretty good bit about” active participatory approaches to learning and how they can be used in classrooms and more than half (53.9%) were moderately or extremely aware that their child’s teach and school were participating in the P-3 pilot project. The most common example parents reported of how the teacher included active participatory learning approaches in the classroom during the year was learning centers/stations.
- Parents overwhelmingly agreed that children were excited about learning (84.7% agree or strongly agree; mean=4.3).

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral/ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
My child comes home excited about learning.	1.7%	4.2%	9.3%	35.6%	49.1%

My child comes home excited about learning.



- Three of four parents agreed that they can better support their child’s future learning because he or she was in the P-3 classroom (76.1% agree or strongly agree; mean=4.0).

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral/ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Because my child has been in this classroom, I understand how I can better support his or her learning and future school success.	3.4%	6.8%	13.7%	35.9%	40.2%

Because my child has been in this classroom, I understand how I can better support his or her learning and future school success.



- Eight of ten parents agreed that they believed that their child would be better prepared for success in the next school year because he or she was in the P-3 classroom (80.0% agree or strongly agree; mean=4.1).

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral/ Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Because my child has been in this classroom, I believe he or she is better prepared to be successful next year in school.	6.1%	6.1%	7.8%	31.3%	48.7%

Because my child has been in this classroom, I believe he or she is better prepared to be successful next year in school.



B. Progress and Improvements

- Parents noted progress in each of the 14 areas of learning and development discussed in the survey, but the most extensive progress was reported for the skills listed below. For each of these, half or more of parents reported extensive progress made during the school year (*scale: no progress, minimal progress/a little progress, moderate progress/some progress, extensive progress/a lot of progress*).

	Extensive Progress/ A Lot of Progress
Math/Pre-Math Skills: shapes, numbers, counting, arithmetic	62.3%
Literacy/Pre-Literacy and Reading Skills: letters, sounds, words, vocabulary, spelling, words	61.6%
Fine Motor Skills: using small muscles of the hand; drawing, writing, cutting	51.7%

Love of learning, motivation to learn	51.3%
Science and Technology Skills	50.5%

- Families were asked to describe any differences they may have noticed in their child’s learning, communication, behavior, or social skills this year compared to past years.
 - Families described more positive differences versus neutral or negative comments. Themes included the following:
 - Improvements in social skills/social interactions and independence
 - Improvements in reading, writing, and math
 - Increased confidence and problem-solving skills
 - More positive attitude towards learning and going to school
 - Improvements in language and communication with peers and adults
 - Improvements in conflict resolution, behavior, attitude, and anger management
 - Six out of a total of 67 family comments were negative in nature, though there were no consistent themes.

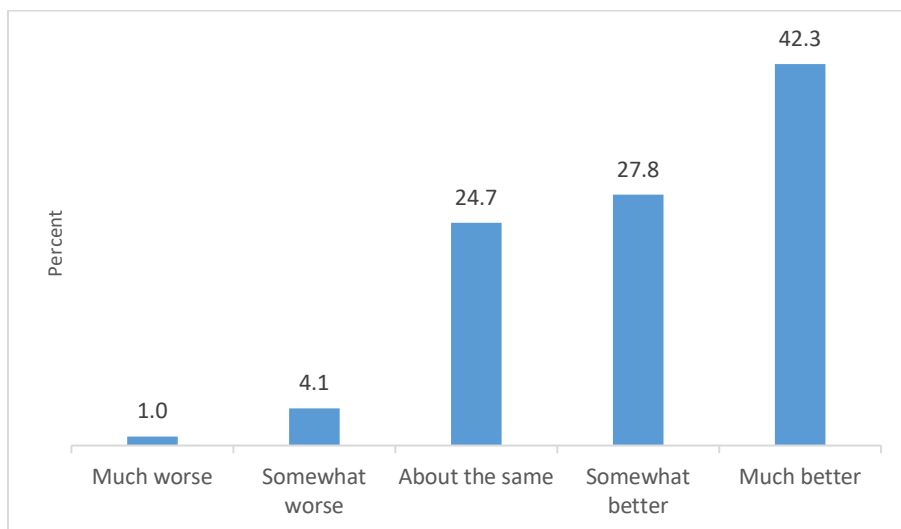
Selected quotes:

*“He has been excited about school and wanting to share things he learns every day! He is a very good communicator and he loves learning new problem solving skills.”
–parent*

“I believe she has come out of her shell this year. She wants to go to school. She used to dread going. I believe she enjoys it more this year. She has grown a lot this year and I believe she is more confident.” –parent

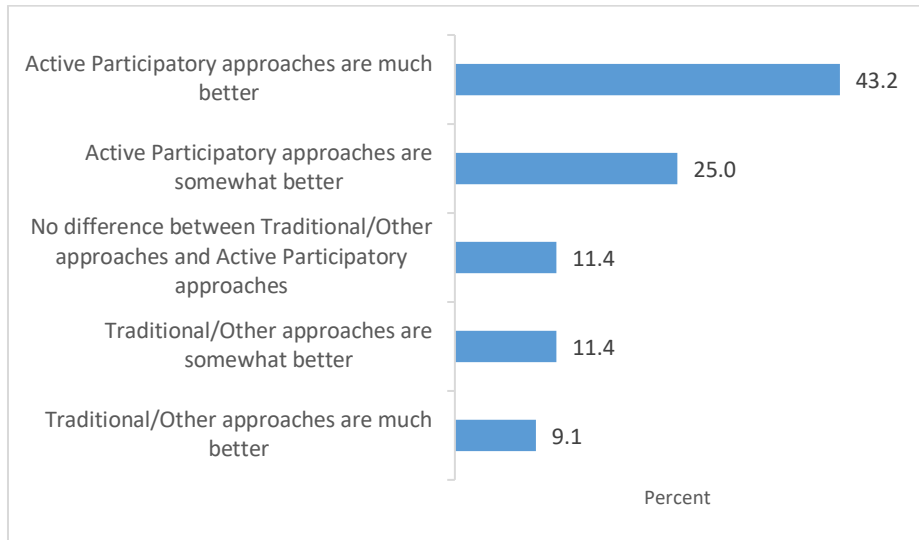
- Almost all parents who indicated that their child had attended school in the previous year reported their child did about the same or better compared to past school years. Of those, 70.1% reported somewhat or much better performance.

Parent perception of school performance compared to previous years



- Among parents who indicated that they had other children who had been in classrooms where the teacher used traditional/direct learning approaches, a clear trend was noted favoring active participatory learning approaches – 68.2% .

Based on your children's experiences and learning progress, how would you describe your feelings about active participatory learning approaches like those that have been used in your child's classroom this year compared to other types of learning approaches use for your other child/children?



Selected quotes:

*“I feel that this way of learning has helped my child deal with real life situations. For example, learning how to solve math problems using real objects that she would encounter in a real life situation. She understands and can figure things out regardless if it’s on paper or if it’s a situation involving that subject.”
–parent*

“I think this program has proven to be successful for our family. We have family members in neighboring school systems which did not use the “play based” learning system and I can honestly say our child is leaps and bounds ahead and much more excited about learning.” –parent

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

By all measures, the second year of the Alabama Preschool to Third Grade initiative (P-3) pilot project was a success. P-3 has expanded significantly in pilot year 2, serving more children in more schools and classrooms throughout the state – roughly doubling the reach compared to pilot year 1. In addition to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant, P-3 efforts have been reinforced through funding from the State Legislature and Governor Kay Ivey’s support as a key pillar of her Strong Start Strong Finish Initiative.

Children in all grades showed significant improvements across all areas of development and school readiness when comparing percentages meeting or exceeding widely-held expectations for their age at school year entry to those percentages at school year exit based on the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. The quality of teacher-child interactions was similar to national averages based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Alabama average was higher for the important dimension of Concept Development – shown to be associated with later student success in vocabulary, language, and math.¹² P-3 classrooms also improved in quality on average from Fall (pre) to Spring (post) assessments across all domains.

Lower starting percentages of children meeting or exceeding widely-held expectations at the higher grades included in the project support the need for a P-3 approach. Consistent exit percentages in excess of 90% of children meeting or exceeding widely-held expectations are reassuring and indicate across-grade success. Anecdotal comments from families, teachers, and leaders detail important growth in child academic performance, problem-solving skills, communication, and behavioral/social-emotional regulation along with decreased office referrals. Further, teachers and leaders both report professional growth in classroom, as well as job satisfaction and excitement in watching children be engaged in learning.

Teacher and leader participants clearly indicated the need for more/enhanced coaching, professional development, and observation opportunities to support the implementation of developmentally-appropriate/active participatory learning approaches in the classroom, especially in the higher grades. Also, teachers and leaders alike expressed concerns in aligning state educational standards, grading, and reporting requirements with student-led, participatory approaches. Finally, responses from families indicate overall satisfaction with the program and significant progress for children in P-3 classrooms across multiple knowledge and skills.

Ongoing evaluation activities include planning for the establishment of a method to identify children who received a P-3 experience (including dose response) in State Department of Education data so their future performance on standardized, statewide assessments of reading and math can be compared with performance for children who did not receive instruction of this type. These longitudinal analyses are based on data availability and include standardized testing in the school setting (such as Scantron), as well as retention, absenteeism, and special education referrals/services.



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