



## Early Education

# Success in School Starts Early

What happens in early childhood matters. By age 5, the architecture of the human brain is 90% developed, and early experiences have literally shaped how the brain is built. Adverse experiences—poverty, abuse, neglect—interfere with children’s healthy development, potentially setting them back months, even years from their peers. The period of early childhood (before birth to age 5) dramatically affects the future health, wellbeing, and success of a child. These formative years impact a person’s entire life.

Early childhood affects not only individuals, but all of Alabama. From low education and poor health outcomes to high crime and addiction, the biggest challenges we face in our state connect back to early childhood.

**High-quality early education programs set the foundation for school and life.**

Early education programs, led by well-educated and effective teachers in licensed child care, Head Start, and pre-kindergarten programs (Pre-K), help to ensure that children are safe, supported, and ready to succeed when they enter school.

## WINNING WITH PRE-K IN ALABAMA

Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program has ranked #1 in the nation for quality for 12 consecutive years. In addition to helping children get ready for school, First Class Pre-K also provides early screening and assessment, connecting parents and children with programs and services that can change the course of their lives for the better.

Children who participate in the program grow up more likely to:

- Outperform their peers in reading and math.
- Graduate and go on to higher education.
- Have a job and earn more.
- Stay in better health.



**28%** OF ELIGIBLE ALABAMA 4-YEAR-OLDS have access to our celebrated Pre-K program.

We must expand investment in First Class Pre-K.

## MAKING PROGRESS WITH CHILD CARE

Most young children in Alabama have both parents in the workforce, which helps drive Alabama's economy. For many families, child care is critical for being able to work. Families need affordable, flexible child care options. They also need safe environments that support their children's growth and development.

Alabama is only one of 7 states that does not require all child care facilities to be licensed by the Department of Human Resources and inspected for Minimum Standards. These standards ensure important safeguards such as criminal background checks on all staff, appropriate staff-to-child ratios, and training for First Aid and CPR.

With uniform licensing, parents are better informed and understand that their children are getting:

- Trained staff who understand children's needs and how they can help them grow and develop.
- A quality environment.
- Health and safety standards that protect from smoking and other hazards.

**50%** OF ALABAMA CHILD CARE FACILITIES are unlicensed, leaving children vulnerable at the earliest ages. Licensing is about health and safety, not curriculum or religious beliefs.

We must have uniform standards to better ensure the safety of our children.

## WE HAVE A PLAN FOR OUR CHILDREN, A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

Pre-K and child care licensing are part of a comprehensive plan for strong families, school readiness, and prosperity in Alabama. The Alabama Partnership for Children and nearly 30 organizations have come together as the Alabama Young Child Wellness Council to adopt a common approach to supporting early childhood. Through programs such as First Class Pre-K, *Parents as Teachers*, and *Help Me Grow*, we are working together with policymakers, businesses, and service providers to make the biggest difference for Alabama.



Supporting our youngest children and families is a smart investment in our future.

Alabama voters agree.

Learn more about **Alabama's Blueprint for Strong Families, School Readiness, and Prosperity** and find out how you can support early childhood programs in Alabama at [www.smartstartalabama.org](http://www.smartstartalabama.org)



*Every Alabama Child Will Have the Opportunity to Succeed in Life*