

## ***Starting at Zero*** takeaways

- In the United States, four million children enter kindergarten each year. Only 20% arrive prepared for success through having attended a high-quality early learning program.
- 70% of mothers with children under 18 participated in the labor force in 2019, compared with 11% in 1960. Yet there has been no significant shift in educational policy to address the need for child care.
- To sustain the American Dream in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our nation needs “Early Childhood Governors” to step up in every state.
- Brain architecture consists of billions of neural connections. The most active period for building these connections is the earliest years.
- Children who receive high-quality early learning are more likely to lead productive, successful lives.

*“What we found is that early interventions are very cost effective interventions. And so if we make these investments in early life, then later investments that come in, you know, in third grade and eighth grade and so on can be more effective, because we’ve already laid this strong groundwork that pays off over the lifetime.”*

—Diane Schanzenbach, Ph.D.,  
Director, Institute for Policy  
Research, Northwestern  
University

### Alabama’s **First Class Pre-K** program

*“One of the very big things that we did ... is that we provided pay parity for those pre-k teachers. So a pre-k teacher makes exactly what a teacher in K-12 makes. In providing that salary, that teacher’s a professional. She wants to stay in that classroom. And, it’s really increased our quality.”*

—Tracye Strichik, Ph.D.,  
Senior Director, Alabama  
Department of Early  
Childhood Education

- The state of Alabama often makes national news with its top-ranking football teams. Yet beneath the headlines, the Alabama Department of Education’s First Class Pre-K program has been ranked #1 in the country for more than a decade by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).
- The Department of Early Childhood Education is a separate, independent department in the executive branch of Alabama’s state government. Alabama is one of a few states to house this department outside of K-12. The Secretary of Early Childhood Education is a member of the governor’s cabinet and ensures early childhood programs provide high-quality education for children across the state.
- Researchers have been studying the impacts of Alabama’s #1 nationally ranked First Class Pre-K program. The results are clear: the Pre-K program, along with Alabama’s other birth to five interventions, is closing the achievement gap. The most significant gains have been made among children living in poverty.
- Third grade reading scores from children who attended First Class Pre-K are consistently higher than those of their peers who did not attend the program. Studies are proving: these results are not “fading out”—they last.

