

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Barbara Cooper,
Secretary of Early Childhood Education

FROM: Governor Kay Ivey

DATE: January 18, 2023

SUBJECT: Prioritizing New Pre-K Classrooms in High-Poverty Counties

As you know, the Fiscal Year 2023 Education Trust Fund Budget appropriated some \$173.7 million to the Department of Early Childhood Education, Office of School Readiness. In spending these funds, I ask you to prioritize creating new pre-K classrooms in counties where more than 20% of the population falls below the federal poverty guidelines. I also request that you prioritize funding such classrooms in feeder patterns related to our Turnaround Schools Initiative.

The National Institute for Early Education Research has recognized the Alabama First-Class Pre-K program for fulfilling all quality benchmarks in every year since 2006. When I entered office, the First-Class Pre-K Program consisted of just over 800 classrooms that served 24% of Alabama's eligible four-year-old children. Five years later, as I start my second full term in office, there are now almost 1,500 First-Class Pre-K Classrooms for the 2022-2023 school year serving 46% of Alabama eligible four-year-old children. Clearly, I am committed to increasing the concentration of First-Class Pre-K classrooms in Alabama's most high-need counties.

No later than September 30, 2023, counties in Alabama with 20% or more of the population living below the federal poverty guidelines should be targeted for providing full access to all four-year-old children whose families desire to enroll them in the First-Class Pre-K Program. Full access, or "saturation," should be estimated at levels equal to 70% percent of eligible four-year-old children.

Based on estimates you have provided, approximately 37 classrooms are required to reach saturation in each of the following Alabama counties with 20% or more of the population living above the federal poverty guidelines: DeKalb, Escambia, Pike, Clark, Lowndes, Fayette, Russell, Barbour, Geneva, Monroe, Greene, Bullock, Sumter, Wilcox, Perry, Pickens, Hale, Dallas, and Marengo Counties.

No later than March 31, 2023, please provide to me a plan, including a timeline and anticipated budget, for achieving saturation of First-Class Pre-K classrooms in all counties with 20% or more of the population living below the federal poverty guidelines.