



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



## ***SPOTLIGHTING PROGRESS IN POLICY AND SUPPORTS***

*An updated snapshot of the innovative policies and support strategies State and local leaders around the country are putting into place to prevent, reduce, and ultimately eliminate expulsion and suspension practices in early learning settings. (Updated November 2016)*

# STATE AND LOCAL ACTION TO PREVENT EXPULSION AND SUSPENSION IN EARLY LEARNING SETTINGS

The beginning years of any child's life are critical for building the early foundation of learning, health and wellness needed for success in school and later in life. During these years, children's brains are developing rapidly, influenced by the experiences, both positive and negative, that they share with their families, teachers, peers, and in their communities.

It is crucial that children's earliest experiences truly foster and never harm their development. Expulsion and suspension are stressful and negative experiences that too many young children encounter in early learning programs. Though each case is different, expulsions and suspensions may be products of misguided or absent policies and/or insufficient training and support services for staff, especially in managing challenging behavior, recognizing trauma, and promoting social-emotional development.

Suspension and expulsion can set a negative trajectory for young children. Students who are expelled or suspended are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not. Furthermore, data consistently show racial disparities in expulsion and suspension. For example, recent data indicate that African American boys make up 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of preschoolers suspended.<sup>1</sup>

**It is critical that the early childhood system prevent, reduce and ultimately eliminate these harmful practices by establishing developmentally appropriate and fair policies *and* enhancing supports to early childhood teachers and staff.**

In February 2014, President Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative to ensure that all young people can reach their full potential, including boys and young men of color. Among the many issues that disproportionately affect young boys of color is suspension and expulsion. As part of MBK, in December 2014, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education released a policy statement on expulsion and suspension in early learning settings, which included State and local recommendations to prevent and ultimately eliminate these practices.<sup>2</sup> Since then, States and local communities around the country have also started to take action. From **New Jersey** to **Arkansas** to **Connecticut**, places across the country are working with urgency to address this difficult issue by closely examining both policies *and* the supports offered to early childhood teachers in their child care and State preschool programs.

This document summarizes the Federal policy recommendations released in December 2014, and provides an update (from the original Federal expulsion and suspension prevention resource guide released in April 2016) on the innovative policies and workforce supports adopted by States and local leaders around the country who are leading the way by proactively addressing expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings. Though no State or community highlighted here considers its work finished, they are taking important steps forward to address the issue and have a series of planned next steps they intend to pursue. Their innovative ideas and valuable lessons learned can support and guide localities similarly alarmed by- and committed to addressing- this issue.

## Policy and Supports

Each State and local profile will include the following sections:

- State/Local Snapshot
- Policy Response
- Supports for Teachers and Providers
- Pathways to Progress
- Continuing Progress

## State and Local Innovators

- Arkansas
- Chicago
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Houston
- Maine
- New Jersey
- New York City
- Ohio
- South Carolina
- Washington
- Washington, D.C.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014). Data Snapshot: Early Childhood Education.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Education Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings (2014). ODAS-ACF-PS-2016-01. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/expulsion\\_suspension\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/expulsion_suspension_final.pdf)

# Federal Policy Statement

## Overview

In 2014, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED) jointly released a policy statement addressing expulsion and suspension in early learning settings and highlighting the importance of social-emotional and behavioral health. The policy statement affirms the Departments' attention to social-emotional and behavioral health and includes recommendations and free resources to assist States and early childhood programs in their efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate expulsion and suspension.

## Overview of Recommendations

1. **Establish Fair and Appropriate Policies and Implement them Without Bias:** States, schools, and early childhood programs should establish developmentally appropriate expulsion and suspension policies. Policies should eliminate or limit these exclusionary practices, to be used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety concern that cannot be reduced or eliminated with reasonable modifications. Given the disparities noted in the data, entities should ensure that policies are not disproportionately impacting any group of children.
2. **Invest in a Highly Skilled Workforce:** Teachers and caregivers are critical ingredients of high quality early learning programs. Programs should strive to build their workforce's capacity to prevent and manage challenging behaviors, promote social-emotional development, form nurturing relationships, identify children who need additional supports, and have a strong understanding of culture, diversity, and implicit bias.
3. **Access Specialized Supports for Administrators and Educators:** All staff should have access to support from specialists, such as early childhood mental health consultants and behavior coaches. This support provides assistance in identifying needs and referring children, families, or staff for social services as needed; understanding and responding appropriately to children exposed to traumatic events or stress; developing behavior plans for children who require them; and building greater capacity to prevent and manage challenging behavior, promote social-emotional development, and engage in self-reflective practice to prevent potential biases in practice.
4. **Strengthen Family Partnerships:** Families are children's first and most important teachers. Family-teacher and family-program or school partnerships are critical to reducing expulsion and suspension. Programs should work with families to identify concerns early, collaborate on solutions to address challenging behavior, and share strategies to promote children's healthy development.
5. **Implement Universal Developmental and Behavioral Screening:** Ensuring that all children receive early and regular developmental and behavioral screenings is critical to identifying concerns early and ensuring children who need supports, receive them as early as possible.
6. **Set Goal and Track Data:** Eliminating expulsion and suspension will happen at different rates, depending on where programs or States start. Each program and State should have goals to set policies and implement wide-scale preventive practices, such as those discussed here, to eliminate expulsion and suspension. Entities should track data on rates of expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings, and ensure that data is disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, and disability status, at a minimum, to track disparities.

# ARKANSAS

## State Snapshot

In 2013, Arkansas had the second highest poverty rate in the country, with about 29% of its children living below the poverty line. Relatedly, 28% of children were living in households that were ‘food insecure’ in the past year. About two-thirds of young children had all available parents in the workforce, and 18% of Arkansas’ low-income parents reported that child care issues affect their employment.

About 16% of children screened in Arkansas’ public pre-K program have significant behavior concerns. Among children ages 2-17, 22% have one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental concerns. Despite the need, most mental health providers in the State are not trained in evidence-based interventions for young children.

The release of the HHS-ED Federal policy statement on expulsion and suspension, new provisions in the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, and Arkansas’ ongoing concerns about the child poverty rate and the social-emotional and behavioral health of its youngest learners, set the stage for the State to take action on expulsion and suspension.

## The Policy Response

Arkansas has a State funded pre-K program - Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (ABC) - which serves more than 20,000 preschoolers each year. The program has a longstanding expulsion prevention policy that outlines procedures that must be taken before exclusionary practices can be considered, such as:

- Observation from a professional;
- Documenting incidents;
- A focus on teaching social-emotional skills;
- Implementing environmental modifications;
- Engaging in discussions with parents; and
- Seeking support services from specialists

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Arkansas’ ABC Pre-K Expulsion Policy States:  
*“No child shall be dismissed from the program for behavior without prior approval from the Arkansas Department of Human Services/Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE).”*

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Arkansas also has 2,313 licensed child care centers and family child care homes in the State. In 2015 and 2016, the State made a number of reforms to prevent and reduce expulsions and suspensions, including:

- **Revising Arkansas’ Minimum Child Care Licensing Requirements:** These rules enhance support for children’s social-emotional development and include a new requirement to use curricula that promote social-emotional development and lower teacher-child ratios for children under 36 months of age;
- **Embedded a Non-Suspension/Expulsion Policy in Provider/Teacher Agreement:** Each child care center that accepts child care vouchers must sign an agreement with the State. The inclusion of a no expulsion/suspension policy now aligns with ABC’s existing policy;
- **Added Expulsion/Suspension Content on Annual Provider Test:** Each year, child care programs that accept subsidy must take a test to demonstrate their knowledge about State child care policies. This test will now include questions on expulsion and suspension policies; and
- **Encouraged Programs to Notify Families of Policies:** The State provided child care centers accepting vouchers with 40,000 packets to distribute to parents, including information about the expulsion and suspension prevention policy, how to get help, and strategies to support social-emotional development.



## Supports to Providers and Teachers

Paired with these policy efforts, in the fall of 2015, the State used Child Care and Development Funds to **double** funding for Project PLAY, the State's early childhood mental health consultation program. The State targeted expansion sites using a data-driven approach. Centers with high needs - defined by licensing violations related to behavior guidance and the access to high quality child care for children in poverty- were given support first.

Findings from Project PLAY's evaluation indicate that teachers participating in the program demonstrated more positive interactions with children, decreased use of punitive discipline, and created a more supportive classroom environment. Children showed fewer challenging behaviors and more pro-social behaviors.

In addition, the State hosted six statewide training events on the theme "Quality Programs Support All Children" to promote a better understanding of the issue by the child care workforce. These trainings were mandatory for child care centers accepting vouchers and were attended by over 700 child care directors. In addition, in partnership with Naptime Academy®, the State provided child care program staff with a web-based expulsion prevention training series.

The State also launched the Behavior Help System - a statewide response system to provide a single point of entry when support is needed to address behavior challenges in the classroom. Behavior Help coordinates key training, technical assistance, and mental health consultation resources in the state with the goal of helping early childhood teachers access support that meet their needs in a timely fashion. Request for support can be generated by teachers, parents, child welfare case workers and others. The State has undergone extensive outreach efforts to ensure that families and child care staff know about this service, including offering nine forums to educate families on the prevention of expulsion and suspension and how to access Behavior Help.

## Pathways to Progress

Arkansas has long been at the forefront of efforts to prevent suspension and expulsion. The State first began to fund Project PLAY pilots in 2004. In addition, the State's preschool program has had long-standing rules to prevent expulsion, prompted by an early study examining preschool expulsion.

The release of HHS and ED's Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension spurred a more widespread and concerted effort. Upon the release of this statement, Arkansas' Director of the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education convened a workgroup tasked with addressing suspension and expulsion, with participation from leaders representing the State preschool program, the Child Care and Development Fund program, child care licensing, the quality rating improvement system, Project PLAY, and other early childhood professional development initiatives in the State.

The group was charged with identifying how Arkansas can improve its approach to addressing each of the six areas outlined in the policy statement: *establishing fair policies, setting goals and tracking data, promoting strong family partnerships, focusing on developmental and behavioral screening, ensuring access to specialized consultation and ensuring a highly skilled workforce.*

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*A strong commitment from leadership at the highest levels of the State's Department of Human Services enabled Arkansas to take action on preventing expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings.*

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## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

Since the inception of the State's workgroup, the State has made tremendous progress in developing an innovative plan and implementing that plan. Though many of the reforms in the group's plan have been implemented, they continue to meet to ensure efforts are coordinated and that progress continues to be made. The State plans to continue its work by enhancing its suspension and expulsion data tracking and system.

# CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Local Education Agency (LEA) Snapshot

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the nation's third-largest school district, serving 393,000 students in 660 schools. About 86% of students are economically disadvantaged. In the 2012-2013 school year, over 2,700 children, prekindergarten through second grade, received an out of school suspension. The following school year more than 1,800 young children in the same age range had received out of school suspensions.

In 2013, Chicago's Mayor established *Chicago: Ready to Learn!*, which coordinates early learning programs across the city, and expands access to and the quality of early learning opportunities. Since *Chicago: Ready to Learn!* began, Chicago has expanded early learning programs to 5,000 new children, and expanded the breadth of services children in existing care receive, including intensive parent engagement, nursing services, and community partnerships.

The infusion of young children in the district through expansion of full day Kindergarten and preschool, highlighted the need for professional development focused on working with very young children, especially on developmentally appropriate practice and managing challenging behavior. At the same time, interest from the advocacy community and Federal policy makers, through My Brother's Keeper and other initiatives, on supporting children's social-emotional development, preventing expulsion and suspension, and ending the school-to-prison-pipeline, led the district to take additional action on exclusionary discipline.

## The Policy Response

In 2014, CPS established a "no suspension" policy for children in preschool through second grade, in its revised Student Code of Conduct. A no expulsion policy was already in place. The policy was paired with additional supports, including:

**District-wide Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS):** The district developed MTSS in all schools to ensure students receive individualized academic and social-emotional supports. The MTSS framework ensures that schools develop preventative structures and focus on identifying the root cause of behaviors in order to determine appropriate interventions.

**Restructured Data System:** An updated district data system provides schools with real-time tracking of behavior data, intervention usage, and suspensions. The system also notifies users who attempt to record a suspension for a child younger than second grade, that students in this age range cannot be suspended.

**Social-Emotional Learning Specialists:** CPS also hired social-emotional learning specialists, who assist school staff in behavior management and social-emotional development, regularly check suspension data in schools, and follow up if data are concerning.

**Appeals:** CPS expanded and facilitated its suspension appeals process, making a help line available to families to report unjust suspensions, and providing access to a district representative from whom they can request an investigation.

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*Chicago's Student Code of Conduct indicates that: "Students in grades prekindergarten through second may NOT be assigned in-school or out-of-school suspensions. If a student in prekindergarten through second grade exhibits behavior that presents an imminent endangerment to the physical, emotional, or mental safety of specific students/staff, the Network Chief or designee may grant an exception and assign an emergency one-day in- school or out-of-school suspension after the student's parent/guardian has been notified. During the suspension, the principal or designee must develop a plan addressing the safety of students/staff and including strategies for preventing future behavior incidents, restoring relationships, and addressing the student's ongoing social, emotional, and academic needs."*

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## Supports to Providers and Teachers

CPS paired its new policies with on-the-ground support for schools from the district's social-emotional learning team. If schools are having difficulty managing challenging behavior or promoting children's social-emotional development, they have access to a district specialist who can provide coaching on implementing effective strategies. They are also tasked with helping schools build their own behavioral health teams.

The district also incorporated "morning meetings", where all early childhood classrooms start their day by practicing a concrete set of social-emotional skills. A daily morning meeting is an opportunity for students to build caring relationships with their peers and teachers and actively practice social-emotional skills through brief, engaging activities. For instance, children learn to speak to each other respectfully, listen attentively and respond with empathy. The district plans to further this work by also beginning the day with community-building strategies to strengthen students' sense of school connectedness and improve interactions in the classroom.

## Pathways to Progress

A series of factors prompted CPS to act on exclusionary discipline. First, addressing expulsion and suspension – including racial disproportionality of these practices- has been an important focus for Chicago, brought to the forefront by student, early childhood, and education advocacy groups. In addition, CPS notes that the expansions of full-day Kindergarten and preschool in the last decade have resulted in thousands of additional young children in the education system. This infusion of young children has highlighted the need for more support for teachers focused on working with very young children, especially on developmentally appropriate practice, supporting social-emotional development, and managing challenging behavior.

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*After the new discipline policies took effect, of the 24,000 children enrolled in the district's preschool program, not one child was suspended or expelled in the 2014-2015 school year.*

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Under these contexts, in 2012 the district began revising its policy manual and included a no suspension policy for pre-K and Kindergarten students. In 2013, as district leaders were analyzing suspension data, they noted that suspensions of young children were still happening, despite the policy, and many of the reasons children were being suspended for were not violent or aggressive in nature. Rather, they were developmentally appropriate behaviors that could be addressed by providing additional support to teachers and adjusting the learning environment. In 2014, the district completed another round of revisions to the Student Code of Conduct which included stricter limits on suspension. The new policy began implementation in the 2014-2015 school year.

After the policy was implemented, paired with appropriate supports, the number of children receiving out of school suspensions in the prekindergarten through second grade age range dropped from 1,800 down to 94, none of whom were preschoolers.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

Though CPS has made important progress in addressing early childhood expulsion and suspension, its work to better support schools, teachers, students, and their families in this important area, continues. Next steps include:

- **Analyzing data** to assess the impact of its policies and any adjustments needed to optimize outcomes;
- **Providing additional supports** to support teachers and students;
- **Certifying social-emotional exemplar schools** that can serve as models to other schools; and
- **Addressing racial disparities** by working with community partners to implement more reforms that promote restorative practices in schools.

# COLORADO

## State Snapshot

In 2013, 19% of Colorado's children under the age of 6 were living in poverty— a slight decrease after a decade of staggering increases in child poverty. Poverty rates decreased for children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds between 2012 and 2013, but gaps between children of color and their non-Hispanic white peers remained wide.

As of January 2016, Colorado had 4,566 child care centers, family child care homes, and preschools licensed to provide early care and education, but capacity is well below what is needed to meet the needs of children from working families. The Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) is Colorado's State funded, voluntary preschool program for three- and four-year old children who experience risk factors known to increase academic failure. In 2014-2015, Colorado's legislature authorized 28,360 CPP slots, reaching nearly half of all three- and four-year old children in the State. Preschool enrollment rates are lowest among children of color and children in low-income families.

A 2006 study on expulsion and suspension in Colorado's early learning settings, indicated a rate of 10 per 1,000 children, which was higher than the nationally estimated average of nearly 7 per 1,000. Using those data, paired with momentum of Federal efforts to eliminate expulsions and suspensions through My Brother's Keeper, Colorado used the revision of child care center rules to begin taking action on early expulsion and suspension.

## The Policy Response

Colorado used the updating of the State's child care rules as an opportunity to address early expulsion and suspension, while emphasizing the importance of social-emotional development, and parent engagement. The new rules indicate that:

- Twenty percent of the annual continuing education required of child care teachers must be in social-emotional development.
- Programs must outline how decisions are made and what steps are taken prior to a suspension, expulsion, or request to withdraw a child from care due to concerns about the child's behavioral issues.
- Child care programs must have policies in place that:
  - Cultivate positive child, staff and family relationships;
  - Create and maintain a socially and emotionally respectful early learning and care environment;
  - Implement teaching strategies supporting positive behavior, pro-social interaction, and overall social-emotional competence in young children;
  - Provide individualized social-emotional intervention supports for children who need them, including methods for understanding child behavior; and developing, adopting and implementing a team-based positive behavior support plan for reducing challenging behavior and preventing suspensions and expulsions; and
  - Access an early childhood mental health consultant or other specialist as needed.

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Colorado's 2015 Child Care Center Rules state: *"Programs must outline how decisions are made and what steps are taken prior to the suspension, expulsion or request to parents or guardians to withdraw a child from care due to concerns about a child's behavioral issues."*

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In addition to this work, Colorado invested in local data and research to better understand the scope of the issue and implement strategies that meet the needs of the community. In particular, the State is currently developing a rigorous evaluation study of the rate of suspensions and expulsions from child care programs. They plan to disaggregate data by race, gender, and family economic status. In addition to gathering point in time data from child care programs, they will survey teachers and directors who have expelled and suspended children to explore issues of provider experience and implicit bias, and conduct focus groups with families of children who have been expelled or suspended to better understand the family experience.



## Supports to Providers and Teachers

In order to support prevent and reduce expulsions and suspensions from child care programs, Colorado increased supports for early educators. Colorado's Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Specialist program, funded with State general funds since 2006, provides: coaching and mental health consultation to child care professionals and early childhood programs on supporting children's social-emotional development, early identification of mental health concerns, and support on implementing policies that prevent expulsion and suspensions.

The new child care provider requirements, paired with attention from the Federal government on both early childhood suspension and expulsions and the inclusion of children with disabilities in early learning settings, prompted a FY 2016-17 supplemental legislative request for spending authority to **double the size** of the ECMH Specialist program, bringing the total to over 40 positions. The measure passed both chambers unanimously and was signed by the Governor in March of 2016. The State is now working on implementing the program's expansion, as well as establishing an infrastructure hub to ensure coordination, stable financing, consistency of onboarding, orientation and practice, and organized evaluation for all of Colorado's early childhood mental health consultants.

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*A supplemental legislative request that doubles the size of the State's Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist program was passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor in March of 2016.*

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The State has also long implemented the Pyramid Model- a coaching model for early educators to build their capacity in supporting children's social-emotional development and behavior. In 2009, Colorado established the Pyramid Plus: Colorado Center on Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion to build the capacity of communities and programs across the State to implement the Pyramid Model. Online courses on supporting children's social-emotional development are also offered through Colorado's Professional Development Information System, funded through its Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant.

## Pathways to Progress

Colorado has a long history of attention to early childhood expulsion. The legislature first funded the ECMH Specialist program as a pilot in 1997. One of the early outcomes from the pilot was reduction in expulsions when child care programs had access to the service. This success led to funding for statewide ECMH Specialists in 2006. Colorado has a strong network of stakeholders who have rallied together on multiple issues to champion the needs of young children, including supporting increases to the ECMH Specialists program. This community support for the program raised the visibility of the issue and brought it before the public and State legislature.

Another influence has been a long-standing workgroup on early childhood expulsions, comprised of children's advocacy groups, academics, State departments, and community organizations. This group submitted recommendations to the Office of Early Childhood when the child care rule revisions were underway, encouraging the use of mental health consultation and other behavior supports to reduce expulsions. Additional action was spurred by capitalizing on the State's early childhood mental health strategic plan, Federal policy statement on expulsion and suspension, and reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

Significant progress has been made in Colorado to call attention to the problem of early childhood expulsions and to take first steps to scale back its use as a response to challenging behavior. However, more work remains to be done to ensure that all teachers have the tools they need to support all children. The State plans to continue its work by:

- Focusing attention on the issues of disproportionality and implicit bias in early childhood suspension and expulsion led by legislators and advocacy groups;
- Conducting multimodal research on Colorado's suspension and expulsion experience to drive programming and support;
- Expanding the reach of mental health consultation beyond child care programs to other front line child and family serving providers; and
- Improve access to appropriate and adequately funded infant and early childhood mental health assessment and treatment when needed.

# CONNECTICUT

## State Snapshot

In 2014, 15% of Connecticut's children were living below the Federal poverty line. About 14% and 38% of families report facing food and housing insecurity, respectively. About one third of Kindergartners entered school needing substantial instructional support and over half of all third graders were reading at grade level.

Connecticut has 1,474 licensed child care centers and 2,245 family child care homes. Head Start programs in Connecticut serve about 7% of three-year olds and about 8% of four-year olds; while the State funded pre-K program, Connecticut School Readiness Program, serves about 6% of three-year olds and 14% of four-year olds. The National Institute for Early Education Research indicates that *School Readiness* meets 6 of 10 established quality benchmarks.

A 2005 report on expulsions from early childhood programs indicated that Connecticut had among the highest rates in the country. Those data, paired with increased nationwide awareness of early expulsion and suspension and its consequences, ongoing social-emotional and behavioral health concerns for young children in the State, and promising results from Connecticut's early childhood mental health consultation program (the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership, ECCP®), set the stage for the State to take action.

## The Policy Response

In 2015, the Governor signed Public Act 15-96 prohibiting most out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of young children in pre-K through second grade.

Prior to Connecticut's action on expulsion and suspension policy, was the State's work on early childhood mental health consultation. In 2002, Connecticut's legislature approved funding for a small-scale early childhood mental health consultation program, Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP®) developed and managed by Advanced Behavioral Health, Inc. Promising results of the program suggested that it was effective in improving children's social-emotional and behavioral health. In 2004, the legislature approved more permanent funding, through Connecticut's Department of Children and Families (DCF). This department oversees the State's child welfare programs and children's mental health programs. In 2006, funding was expanded to support wide scalability of ECCP®.

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*Connecticut is the first State in the country to support a universal early childhood mental health consultation program, paired with legislation limiting expulsion and suspension in public pre-K programs.*

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Today, ECCP is universally available to all early childhood programs serving children birth to age five. To date, Connecticut the first in the nation to have a statewide policy, paired with universal early childhood mental health consultation for all early childhood programs.

Most recently, Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood was awarded a Federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG). Part of the State's proposal included an assurance that all PDG classrooms be provided an intensive "3-4 month dose" of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation per year, using the ECCP® model. Under the proposal, all classrooms receive this service, prior to behavioral concerns arising, making the ECCP® model more prevention-focused as opposed to reactionary. This is an important step forward in ensuring that all children in the State are in programs that have the capacity to support their social-emotional and behavioral health and prepare them for school.

## Supports to Providers and Teachers

ECCP® is one of Connecticut's strongest responses to addressing children's social-emotional and behavioral health needs, and supporting families, teachers, and caregivers. ECCP® is an evidence-based model designed to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and reduce the likelihood a child will be suspended or expelled from his or her early care and education setting. The program is based on supporting partnerships among families and early care and education programs to build their capacity to meet the social-emotional and behavioral needs of young children in their care.

ECCP® services are universally available to all early childhood programs, including Head Start, child care, and prekindergarten. It serves about 3,300 children annually. The program is manualized and operates a centralized information system which has proven critical in demonstrating the program's effectiveness. To date, **99% of children** at risk for suspension or expulsion who completed ECCP services were not suspended or expelled at the one-month follow up.

The model has been rigorously evaluated by three randomized controlled evaluations with each one being implemented during full statewide implementation and by a third party evaluator. The results show that a three-month intervention with ECCP was effective at significantly reducing the types of challenging classroom behaviors in preschoolers that are most likely to lead to preschool expulsions and suspensions.<sup>3</sup>

## Pathways to Progress

In the spring of 2002, Connecticut's Department of Children and Families was awarded funding from the Community Mental Health Strategy Board for five early childhood initiatives designed to address gaps in the mental health service system. One of these initiatives was an early childhood mental health consultation program. In 2004, the ECMHC program was made a permanent line item in Connecticut's budget within the prevention portion of the child welfare budget. An important driver of ECCP®'s success in obtaining this sustained funding was its information system and ability to share data with State leaders that demonstrate impacts on young children, families, and teachers.

Connecticut's focus on early childhood expulsion and suspension was prompted by a 2005 national study on preschool expulsion, which indicated that Connecticut's rates were among the highest in the country.<sup>4</sup> These findings strengthened public will to address early childhood professionals' competencies in supporting children's social-emotional development and preventing expulsion. Most recently, as the national conversation on expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings began to intensify, advocacy groups, such as the Center for Children's Advocacy, partners from academia, and State agencies, including Connecticut's Department of Children and Families, Office of Early Childhood, Department of Education, and the Court Support Services division (i.e. probation) came together to prioritize this policy issue. The group worked together to push legislation on early childhood expulsion and suspension prevention, helped organize public hearings, and worked with the legislature and other stakeholders to ensure the law was passed.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

While Connecticut's law is one of the first of its kind in the country, it only applies to public pre-K programs that are administered through school districts. As a next step, leading advocates are interested in exploring the possibility of widening the net of early childhood programs to whom the suspension and expulsion restrictions apply, to include a broader array of early childhood programs that utilize Federal and State funding. This effort would be coupled with more access to supports for early care and education programs, including early childhood mental health consultation.

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<sup>3</sup> Gilliam, W. S., Maupin, A. N., & Reyes, C. R. (2016). Early childhood mental health consultation: results of a statewide random-controlled evaluation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 55(9), 754-761.

# HOUSTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

## LEA Snapshot

The Houston Independent School District, encompassing 333 square miles within greater Houston, is the seventh-largest public school system in the nation and the largest in Texas. A vibrant population of students and families, reflecting Houston's international standing and diversity are served by HISD, as students and families speak over 100 languages. Of the 215,000 students served, about 80 % are considered economically disadvantaged, 62 % identify as Hispanic and 25 % identify as African American. Past discipline policy and practices led to a disproportionately higher rate of suspension for African American students than for all other student populations in the district, particularly in prekindergarten through second grade. In the 2014-2015 school year, 70 % of students who were removed from the school setting in prekindergarten through second grade were African American.

This data, paired with increased attention on the importance of fostering children's development in the early years and the detriments to children's trajectories that can result from suspensions and expulsions, prompted the District to develop a new policy to ban suspensions for the prekindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade years.

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HISD's policy states: *"Beginning with the 2016–17 school year, no student shall be informally sent home. No student prior to third grade shall be suspended, placed into a disciplinary alternative setting, or expelled, except as required by law. Disciplinary actions that remove students from their school setting shall be used as a last resort for other elementary students in third through fifth grades."*

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## The Policy Response

In 2016, the HISD's School Board passed a policy that eliminated expulsions and suspensions for children in pre-K through second grade, and limited it for children in third through fifth grade.

The new policy states that all school-based faculty and staff shall be trained annually in methods to foster a positive school climate, prevent crises, and de-escalate disciplinary challenges. School-based faculty and staff must also be trained periodically on issues of equity based on factors like age, race, national origin, gender, and disability status, as applied to the population served at that school. The policy further states that annually, all school principals must publically share disaggregated disciplinary data and plans for improving school climate.

The district's Code of Student Conduct was revised for the 2016-2017 school year to reflect the district's changes in policy and practice. The changes included:

- Added support for strategies that teach appropriate behavior rather than relying on exclusionary consequences for challenging behavior;
- Updates that aligned the Code of Conduct with the new policy that prohibits suspensions for pre-K through second grade students;
- Limits to the number of days older students can be suspended or placed in alternative settings; and
- Requirement that schools consider mitigating factors when making decisions about suspension and placements in alternative settings, including factors like intent, disciplinary history, and the child's developmental capacity to appreciate the wrongfulness of the conduct.



## Supports for Teachers

Paired with the new expulsion policy are increased supports for both educators and administrators. The school district committed approximately \$1,000,000 to create a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Department to address discipline equity, positive behavior structures, and coordinated support districtwide to meet the social and emotional needs of all children. Existing department resources used for disciplinary alternative programs, safe schools, and classroom management were combined with the new funding.

HISD is hiring ten additional behavioral interventionists to assist schools with supporting students' social-emotional and behavioral development and maintaining structures for keeping students in school and learning. The new SEL department is staffed with 35 professionals that oversee classroom management and crisis intervention training, consult with schools to create effective intervention assistance team (IAT) structures, and support individual students. Most recently, HISD focused its annual Professional Learning Conference on improving school climate and promoting positive behavior interventions and solutions.

To date, approximately 5,000 teachers from 68 campuses have been trained in PBIS and many more have participated in a training or conference session on this issue. All campus leaders have participated in a learning series, where alternatives to suspension, adverse childhood experiences, and other topics relevant to behavior were discussed.

HISD has also coordinated over 130 community-based partners to provide comprehensive services to children who need them, including health and behavioral supports. The district has also coordinated cost sharing programs with community-based partners to fund mental health specialists and social workers on school campuses, and with the University of Texas at Houston to implement a trauma informed universal screener at 25 campuses.

## Pathways to Progress

HISD ramped up its work on this issue after the Rethink Discipline convening at the White House in the summer of 2015. After the convening, Office of Student Support Services analyzed its discipline data by age group and found that HISD had suspended 1,400 children in pre-K through second grade. With this data in hand, the brain science that indicates the sensitive nature of children's development during this time, and the importance of positive experiences in the early years, Student Support Services moved forward with drafting a no-expulsion/suspension policy.

Passing this policy was no easy feat, as it failed two times as a suspension ban before ultimately receiving Board approval in January of 2016. In addition to several board members advocating for this policy, many community members, parents, organizations, and State legislators galvanized support by speaking at board meetings, writing letters to board members, placing op-eds in local newspapers, hosting events, and publishing data in support of this policy. Ultimately, the board approved the policy and committed to prioritizing and supporting district initiatives that provided teachers and administrators professional development on alternatives to suspension and additional district personnel that focused on behavioral interventions. Including training requirements in the policy was pivotal in garnering support to pass this suspension ban.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

HISD will continue implementing its new policy and supporting educators in preventing and eliminating exclusionary discipline for the youngest learners. Student Support Services is seeking to develop a wraparound services model that will address some root causes of misbehaviors, such as food insecurities and mental and behavioral health concerns, amongst others. It is also coordinating efforts with the City of Houston's My Brother's Keeper Initiative and various community partners that provide behavioral and mental health supports. The school district has recently formed new partnerships with the following groups to continue its efforts to address discipline policies and practices:

- Houston Federation of Teachers: providing professional development to teachers on classroom management strategies and supporting schools in implementing a community schools model;
- Texas Appleseed: advocating for State and local policy changes that ban suspension; and
- ONE Houston (local teacher and parent group): advocating for local policy changes to ban suspension

# MAINE

## State Snapshot

In 2013, 78,873 or 49% of Maine's children under the age of 6 were from low-income families, with 23% of these children living below the Federal poverty line. Nearly 40% of all children under age 5 are recipients of the Women, Infants, and Children supplemental food and nutrition program. Among Maine's 78,873 children under age 6, 43% are exposed to one or more risk factors associated with poor developmental outcomes; 14% of all children under age 6 experienced three or more of these risk factors.

In 2014, 5,057 children or 36% of Maine's four-year olds were enrolled in the State's public pre-K program. In 2013, Maine had 2,008 center-based child care, family child care and nursery schools licensed to provide early care and education programming.

In response to testimony at a public hearing on the social-emotional development and learning of young children in Maine, the State legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs (Committee) noted that there appeared to be an increase in young children's challenging behavior, leading to a corresponding increase in expulsions without attempts to address the behavioral issues. The Committee requested that the State take a closer look at the causes and possible remedies to the issue.

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*Commissioned by Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, a statewide survey on the voluntary and involuntary dismissal of young children in early care and education settings and information on evidence-based practices and current policies will inform recommendations to address the social-emotional growth and behavioral needs of Maine's young children and families.*

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## The Policy Response

Maine's legislature passed a resolve to create a Study Commission on the *Social Emotional Learning and Development of Maine's Young Children* to promote the social-emotional learning and development of young children and reduce expulsions in early child care and education settings. The work includes developing an inventory of policies, rules, funding and services regarding early child care and education in the State and making recommendations, including suggested legislation, to strengthen the support for young children's social-emotional learning and development and to address young children's behavioral needs.

The Maine Children's Growth Council and the Maine Department of Education are spearheading this work. Their first task includes gathering and analyzing data to develop cross-sector recommendations on promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies to more effectively support the healthy social-emotional learning and development of children from birth through second grade. A kickoff meeting for this project was convened in August 2015 with members of the Council, other key stakeholders, and a team of national partners. A project Steering Committee was established to develop a statewide survey, data analysis, and a State policy landscape to ultimately inform the final recommendations to the Joint Committee of the legislature.

## Supports to Providers and Teachers

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) led the design and administration of a survey of early care and education programs across the State to collect information about exclusionary practices, prevalence of child behavior problems, and available supports. The survey closely examined the need for professional development and consultation to early care and education teachers, and respondents' views about other resources programs need to promote children's social-emotional health and address behavior problems.

Lead teachers of publicly funded center-based child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, preschool programs and family child care providers were invited to participate in the confidential, voluntary survey. As of January 2016, surveys were sent to 1,755 center-based programs and family child care providers. Results from the survey are forthcoming and will inform the type of supports to be made available to providers and teachers in the future.

## **Pathways to Progress**

Maine's focus on early childhood expulsion and suspension was prompted by Dr. Walter Gilliam's 2005 national study on preschool expulsion, which indicated that Maine's expulsion rates for prekindergarten were the second highest in the country. While nationally, 6.67 preschoolers were expelled per 1,000 enrolled, in Maine, 14.73 preschoolers were expelled per 1,000 enrolled – more than double the national rate. In addition, the legislature also noted recent Federal attention on the issue, through HHS and ED's Federal policy statement on expulsion and suspension. Advocacy efforts have also played an important role in highlighting the need to focus on this issue.

To date NCCP's statewide survey has been conducted and Maine Children's Alliance, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, NCCP and the Steering Committee have identified topics or focal areas for a State policy landscape. The following topics were prioritized:

- Professional development focused on social-emotional learning and development
- Early childhood mental health consultation
- Involuntary and voluntary dismissal
- Child screening/assessment for social-emotional problems and strengths
- Parent education, engagement, and support
- Early childhood special education (Early Intervention/Part C & Preschool Special Education/Part B)

## **Continuing Progress-Next Steps**

Responses from the statewide survey are currently being analyzed. Findings will be reported to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs of the State legislature with recommendations to follow. As an additional next step, Maine will review all existing statutory language, regulations, program standards, funding sources, administrative data, and current practices directly related to the social-emotional growth and behavioral needs of young children, families, and early learning program staff.

# NEW JERSEY

## State Snapshot

Sixteen percent of New Jersey's children live below the poverty line. Starting in 1999, after a mandate from the Supreme Court, the 31 most disadvantaged districts in the State began to receive increased funding to serve all resident three- and four-year-old children in high quality preschool programs. The court mandate was catalyzed by a case that argued that the State's public education funding system resulted in disparities in the ability for lower- versus higher-income districts to meet the educational needs of the children in their communities.

Today, New Jersey's State funded preschool program, formerly called the "Abbott preschool program", serves 45,000 3- and 4- year olds. The National Institute for Early Education Research ranks New Jersey as 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation for access to pre-K among 3 year olds and 19<sup>th</sup> among 4 year olds. The program meets 8 of 10 quality benchmarks.

## The Policy Response

In 2016, New Jersey's legislature passed a bill that was signed by the Governor to ban expulsions and suspensions for preschoolers. The law also bans expulsions and limits suspensions for young children in Kindergarten through second grade.

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Senate Bill 2081 states: "*A student who is enrolled in preschool in a school district or charter school shall not be suspended, and shall not be expelled from school, except as provided pursuant to the Zero Tolerance for Guns Act*".

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The law codifies and extends a longstanding New Jersey Department of Education policy, in place since 2003, prohibiting expulsions and suspensions of preschoolers. Specifically, the policy states that "*Preschool students in a general education program or special education program shall not be suspended, long-term or short-term, and shall not be expelled.*" The policy further states that:

- Districts should seek to involve families, administrators, teachers and other auxiliary staff to provide support to children and prepare them for successful preschool experiences;
- Challenging behaviors exhibited by preschool children must be addressed in the classroom through a comprehensive approach such as the preschool Pyramid Model;
- The Division of Early Childhood supplies coaches, referred to as Preschool Intervention and Referral Teams (PIRT), to assist preschool programs in supporting children's healthy social-emotional development and ensuring inclusion of all children in early education programs; and
- In cases where problem behaviors cannot be adequately addressed through the implementation of the preschool Pyramid Model, the PIRT can refer children directly to the school district Child Study Team, which provides further evaluation and support.

## Supports to Providers and Teachers

Paired with New Jersey's policy efforts to prohibit suspension and expulsions in preschool, was the need to support early educators in fostering the social-emotional and behavioral development of young children. To address that need, the State created PIRT. These PIRTs are fully funded through the base preschool funding formula. Each PIRT is made up of four specialists who provide support to educators who are part of the State's preschool program. PIRT team members include early childhood specialists, and may include a combination of preschool curriculum specialists and disability and intervention specialists. Each fall, PIRTs are assigned a block of approximately 15 preschool classrooms and work with teachers to build positive relationships with children, well-structured classroom environments, and strategies to support children's social-emotional and behavioral development.

The PIRTs use the preschool Pyramid Model as a foundation for their coaching efforts. The preschool Pyramid Model is an evidence-based program where coaches work directly with classroom teachers and families to support the social-emotional and behavioral development of young children. Research indicates that the preschool Pyramid Model



increases children's social skills and positive social interactions, decreases children's challenging behaviors, and increases teachers' classroom satisfaction.

## Pathways to Progress

New Jersey has long been at the forefront of efforts to prevent suspension and expulsion, as evidenced by one of the earliest explicit policies to prohibit expulsions and suspensions, and universal access to behavioral supports for public preschool teachers. The new legislation codifies longstanding practice and further ensures that the youngest learners remain in the classroom and receive the appropriate, preventive supports they need to thrive.

Because social-emotional and behavioral supports were embedded in the State's preschool program from the onset, New Jersey's pathways to progress on expulsion and suspension are intricately tied to the development and scaling of the public preschool program. One of the catalysts for the expansion of high quality preschool in New Jersey was a decision made by the Supreme Court in the case known as *Abbott v. Burke*. In 1981, the Education Law Center argued that the State's funding methods for public education was unconstitutional because it resulted in expenditure disparities between poor urban and wealthy suburban school districts. These disparities, it was argued, resulted in the inability of poorer districts to meet the educational needs of the children they served.

After a series of court decisions and ensuing legislation, in 1998, the Supreme Court mandated that the 31 most disadvantaged districts in the State begin to receive increased funding to serve all resident three- and four-year-old children in high quality preschool programs. In 2000 and in 2002, two additional motions were filed, alleging that the State failed to allocate sufficient funding to ensure that the preschool programs were of high quality. The courts ruled in their favor and required the State to fund key high quality indicators, including ensuring appropriate teacher qualifications.

In 2003, with the policy in place to prohibit preschool suspensions and expulsions, it was clear supports were needed to prevent suspensions or expulsions. PIRTs were hired using State funds and made available to districts based on the School Funding Reform Act. Preschool Pyramid Model specialists were brought in to train PIRT teams. Today, the New Jersey Early Childhood Division sponsors yearly trainings for new and veteran PIRTs statewide. In 2016, over 200 PIRTs throughout the State will participate in a training program on measuring the reliability of Pyramid Model practices using a valid measurement tool, and on how to use this measure as a professional development tool to improve teachers' practices.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

New Jersey's example of pairing a strong policy with supports for early educators served to raise teacher awareness and build capacity in supporting children's social-emotional and behavioral development, both of which help children remain in their programs, learning and thriving.

New Jersey's future directions include expanding supports of the Pyramid Model to the full early childhood system statewide, which includes the private child care system, outside of those currently contracting with New Jersey's Department of Education. In addition, the State plans to align its early childhood social-emotional and behavioral support system (the Pyramid Model) with the parallel system used in Kindergarten through second grade, Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (SW-PBS). The linking of the Pyramid Model and SW- PBS offers a seamless framework of behavioral supports, across the early childhood and education systems. Establishing this seamless trajectory of supports would help address the emotional and behavioral needs of children across their educational trajectories and will enable a no suspension or expulsion policy to truly succeed.

# NEW YORK CITY

## City Snapshot

In 2014, 29% of children under five in New York City were living in poverty. In 2013, 28% of children under age six were living in low-income working families. In 2013, 76% of children were living in low-income households with a high housing cost burden, in which more than 30% of the monthly income was spent on rent, mortgage payments, taxes or related expenses.

Pre-K for All is New York City's (City) historic initiative to provide free, full-day, high quality prekindergarten to every four-year old in the City who seeks it. The 2015-2016 school year marked the culmination of the City's two-year expansion to provide universal prekindergarten, enrolling 68,574 children. This number more than tripled the 20,000 children who attended before the Pre-K for All expansion in over 1,850 pre-K programs citywide. Pre-K for All programs operate in four settings: district schools, New York City Early Education Centers, contracted by the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), EarlyLearn NYC centers, contracted by the New York City Administration for Children's Services (NYC ACS), and charter schools.

Pre-K for All is the cornerstone of the Mayor's efforts to combat income inequality and foster opportunity. By investing in early education, the City is ensuring that each of its four-year-olds, regardless of economic background, is gaining a foundation that will support success in Kindergarten and beyond. Enrollment is high across every community, with the greatest participation among low-income families. Pre-K for All is administered through the NYCDOE.

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New York City's policy statement on behavior guidance: "*Children in Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC programs may not be expelled or suspended.*"

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EarlyLearn NYC is the City's birth to five initiative which merges child care, Head Start and Universal Pre-K into a single, seamless system. Administered by NYC ACS, EarlyLearn NYC targets children and families who live in high need communities and qualify for subsidized early childhood services. EarlyLearn NYC serves over 37,000 children in both center- and home-based settings. Pre-K services are embedded in the full day of care for all four-year-olds in EarlyLearn NYC programs.

## The Policy Response

The Statement on Positive Behavior Guidance—jointly issued by NYCDOE and NYC ACS—prohibits the expulsion or suspension of children enrolled in the four-year old Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC programs, as well as the children age 0-3 served through EarlyLearn NYC.

The statement directs educators to structure learning environments and child-family-teacher interactions in ways that build positive relationships with children and families. Programs are expected to develop strong communication and relationships with families to exchange information about positive behavior solutions. Programs are guided to take proactive measures in the classroom (e.g. manage transitions); use positive reinforcement (e.g. offer praise); redirect or provide children with acceptable substitutes; support the child's sense of security, self-regulation and self-soothing skills; limit negative attention; and employ responsive strategies (e.g. identify situations that trigger disruptive or

unsafe behaviors). Strategies for guiding children to appropriate behaviors must be implemented in a calm, consistent, and non-punitive way to support children’s social and emotional development and approaches to learning.

## **Supports to Providers and Teachers**

NYCDOE provides social workers for all Pre-K for All programs. Their role is to build the capacity of Pre-K for All programs to:

- Build strong relationships with children and families,
- Differentiate children’s social-emotional learning, and
- Empower families to support their children’s education in pre-K and beyond.

The social workers are also the NYCDOE’s primary support to programs that need intensive guidance to implement positive behavior management strategies, as outlined in the Positive Behavior Guidance Policy. In situations where Pre-K for All programs need intensive support in interpreting or implementing positive behavior guidance strategies, social workers are mobilized to come onsite and provide hands-on support as outlined in the Positive Behavior Guidance statement.

In addition to accessing NYCDOE social workers, EarlyLearn NYC programs have partnerships with mental health consultants who provide observation, guidance, and support to teachers in developing a plan to meet a child’s individualized social and emotional needs. In addition, the mental health consultants support EarlyLearn NYC programs in family and caregiver engagement around children’s mental health needs.

## **Pathways to Progress**

In 2012, NYCDOE and NYC ACS developed a Statement on Behavior Management. This policy document outlined guidance for educators to respond to support children’s behavioral needs. It articulated the ways in which early childhood educators should work with children and engage families to ensure that students are supported in the development of social-emotional skills. This initial policy restricted expulsion and suspension for behavior reasons, requiring written approval from NYCDOE or NYC ACS. The comprehensive 2015 update to the policy, Statement on Positive Behavior Guidance in Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC Pre-K Programs, prohibits expulsion or suspension in all cases—no Pre-K for All or EarlyLearn NYC child may be expelled or suspended for any reason.

## **Continuing Progress-Next Steps**

The Statement on Positive Behavior Guidance policy is expected to have a constructive impact on children, families and programs collectively. The policy completely eliminates expulsions and suspensions of Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn children, promotes social-emotional wellness for all, and supports educators in maintaining children in their learning environments. NYCDOE and NYC ACS will be learning from implementation of the policy to inform continuous improvement over time. In the meantime, NYCDOE and NYC ACS are focusing on strengthening the program support aspect of the policy to ensure that positive behavior strategies are implemented in Pre-K for All and EarlyLearn NYC programs citywide.

# OHIO

## State Snapshot

In 2013, 312,529 or 50% of Ohio's children under the age of 6 were low-income, with 28% of these children living below the Federal poverty line. Among Ohio's 825,818 children under age 6, 60% are exposed to one or more risk factors associated with poor developmental outcomes; 20% of all children under age 6 experienced three or more of these risk factors. The State has increased funding for its public preschool program over the last several years. Most recently, its 2016-2017 biennium budget supports 6,000 preschool slots for four-year olds living under 200% of the Federal poverty level.

Data from the 2012-2013 academic year indicated that nearly 4,000 out-of-school suspensions and expulsions occurred among Ohio's Kindergarteners due to disruptive behaviors. A 2012-2014 survey examined an unduplicated sample of 258 children, birth to age six, served by Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) and found that 11.6% had experienced a suspension or expulsion prior to the administration of the survey.<sup>5</sup>

These results contributed to the State's action on expulsion and suspension, which included a substantial increase in the numbers of early childhood mental health counselors to provide consultation in early learning and child care environments across the State.

## The Policy Response

The Governor's 2016-2017 State budget allocated funding to prevent expulsion among infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Upon passage of the budget, OhioMHAS announced \$9.1 million in funding through the agency's "Whole Child Matters: Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Initiative" to be implemented in 75 of Ohio's 88 counties. This nearly **doubled** funding for ECMH capacity in the State and **more than tripled** the number of ECMH consultants deployed across the State. Ohio views its investment in expanding early childhood mental health consultation services statewide as a proven intervention to reduce and eliminate preschool expulsion rates, support children, families and teachers in sustaining the highest levels of academic success, and improve social-emotional wellness.

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*Ohio will invest \$9.1 million to expand its early childhood mental health consultant program, through the Whole Child Matters Initiative, which is supported by the Governor's 2016-2017 budget. These consultants will offer rapid response to early learning settings when parents, teachers or program directors need help in addressing behavioral concerns in young children.*

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The Whole Child Matters Initiative goals are multi-dimensional and include:

- 1) **Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant Workforce Expansion** – The Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge grant funded 18 early childhood mental health consultant positions. Ohio's new \$9.1 million investment funds 64 additional mental health consultant positions to work with teachers, staff and families of children being served in preschools, child care and Head Start settings. Consultants conduct on-site classroom observations; deliver evidence-based training and coaching to teachers and providers; develop child and family-focused supports and intervention plans; and provide resources for parents, teachers and staff to support children's social-emotional and behavioral development. The number of new consultants more than triples the original number of consultant positions.
- 2) **Centralized Intake** – The funds also support a statewide, centralized intake process through which early childhood and Kindergarten teachers or families can call for a rapid in-person consultation by an early childhood mental health professional.



- 3) **Statewide Training and Professional Development** – Supported with funds from the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant, the initiative also supports seven master trainers who coordinate and oversee high quality early childhood professional development across the State.

## Supports for Teachers and Providers

Providers and teachers in early learning settings in any of the 75 funded counties can request help from an early childhood mental health consultant through a “Whole Child Matters” consultation. A mental health professional follows up within 24 to 48 hours of receiving the request and sets up an in-person visit. At the in-person visit, the consultant follows evidence-based service protocols for consultation and screening as set forth in Ohio’s model for Early Childhood Mental Health early intervention and consultation. This intake process provides a seamless, rapid response for families and early learning programs requesting assistance.

## Pathways to Progress

Throughout the years, Ohio has made critical investments to reduce suspensions and expulsions and improve the social-emotional wellness of young children. As early as 2000, Ohio began implementing the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) Program where consultants help early childhood professionals and parents problem-solve challenging child behaviors occurring both in and out of the classroom. Through this program, consultants have been providing onsite child-family focused supports to parents, teachers and staff that have included art therapy, play therapy, physical health referrals for children, and training and professional development for the early childhood workforce. Funding from the Whole Child Matters: Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative originally began as a pilot from the \$70 million RTT-ELC grant Ohio received in 2012.

Evaluation results indicate that the ECMHC program has shown positive results, including significant increases in children’s social skills and reductions in problem behaviors for children who receive it. Studies show that more than three-quarters of the children who were at risk for expulsion were able to be maintained in their current child care placement; of those who changed placements, half were removed involuntarily – meaning that the early care and education program removed the family. Ohio has used this finding as evidence to continue mental health consultation as a strategy to reduce expulsions for young children with problem behaviors.

These findings, paired with the increasing body of brain development research indicating the importance of the first years of life, led the Governor to continue to fund the early childhood mental health consultation work in Ohio’s 2016-2017 biennium budget.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

Ohio plans to continue supporting early childhood social-emotional development and preventing preschool expulsions through early childhood mental health consultation. Counties that were awarded Whole Child Matters: Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative grants have each developed a sustainability plan laying out how they will go about sustaining services for children, families and teachers after the Whole Child Matters grant funding ends.

# SOUTH CAROLINA

## State Snapshot

There are 289,990 children under age 4 in South Carolina. Approximately 25% of children ages 0-5 are living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Of these children, 69% are children of color. The 2015 Self-Sufficiency Standard for South Carolina indicates that the amount needed for a family to be economically self-sufficient varies by geographic location, fluctuating from 166% of the FPL in one region to 244% of the FPL in another. Sixty-two percent of children below 200% of poverty are not enrolled in preschool compared to 43% of children at or above 200% of poverty.

Over 10,000 children participate in Child Development Education Program (CDEP), the State funded pre-K program for 4 year olds administered by the State's Department of Education. There are approximately 16,800 children under age 6 enrolled in subsidized child care programs in the State. Additionally, over 15,000 children participate in Early Head Start and Head Start. The overall participation of children in early care and education programs is approximately 46% in the State.

## The Policy Response

South Carolina's Department of Social Services oversees the State's Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program which recently issued a policy on expulsion and suspension that outlines considerations and recommendations for child care programs. Specifically, the State expects programs to:

- Have the goal of ensuring that all children's social-emotional and behavioral health are fostered in an appropriate high quality early learning program, working toward eliminating expulsion and suspension practices across early learning settings;
- Develop and clearly communicate appropriate policies that are implemented consistently and without bias or discrimination across the diversity of young children represented in early learning settings;
- Use evidence-based practices to create positive climates and focus on prevention; develop clear, appropriate and consistent expectations to address challenging behavior; and ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement;
- Develop and clearly communicate preventative guidance and discipline practices;
- Develop and clearly communicate expulsion, and suspension policies; and
- Access technical assistance in workforce development to prevent expulsion and suspension.

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*"The South Carolina Division of Early Care and Education and its partners recognize the importance of children's social-emotional and behavioral health. We believe high quality early childhood environments and positive experiences nurture social-emotional and behavioral health. Exclusionary practices, such as expulsion and suspension, are negative experiences that hinder children's development and learning. Therefore, it is our policy to work toward eliminating expulsion and suspension practices across early learning systems in South Carolina."*

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South Carolina provides pre-K for 4 year olds through local and State funded programming. The locally funded 4K programs adhere to school district specific suspension/expulsion policies, while the State funded CDEP programs administered by the State's Department of Education follow a set of legislatively mandated program requirements and guidelines from the Federal policy statement. In the CDEP program, teachers must implement a series of preventative actions and provide documented evidence to the State if they are considering any type of exclusionary practice.

## Supports to Providers and Teachers

South Carolina's Department of Social Services uses CCDF resources to support the South Carolina Child Care Inclusion Collaborative (SCIC) program. The SCIC provides training and technical assistance, including on-the-ground coaching to child care teachers across the State. It focuses on conducting developmental screenings, supporting children's social-emotional development, preventing and addressing challenging behaviors, and making modifications

and adaptations in the classroom. SCIC also provides referral-based services when children are at risk for suspension or expulsion or are being denied services. The SCIC is based on the evidence-based Pyramid Model.

In addition to on-call services, the SCIC program is currently recruiting a group of child care centers to provide in-depth training and technical assistance on developmental screening and strategies for embedding individualized learning opportunities in everyday routines. Both efforts are believed to identify and better support children who may need extra help with their social, emotional and behavioral development. SCIC plans to continue recruiting new centers to receive this proactive training and coaching on an annual basis.

South Carolina also has a network of infant-toddler specialists, called South Carolina Program for Infant/Toddler Care (SCPITC) which offers training, mentoring and experiential learning opportunities to infant-toddler child care teachers. These intensive services build the teacher's capacity to support children's social-emotional development, embrace the child's culture, and promote family partnerships through responsive, individualized and respectful practices. Child care programs that participate in the quality rating and improvement system, ABC Quality, can receive support from the SCPITC network. In addition to the SCIC and SCPITC programs, South Carolina's Child Care Resource and Referral network provides trainings on a variety of topics, including behavior management and social-emotional development.

South Carolina's Department of Education provides teachers in the CDEP pre-K program with professional development on addressing challenging behaviors in young children and promoting social-emotional development. In addition, teachers in the CDEP program may request the same SCIC training and technical assistance described above. In fact, all early childhood programs serving children under the age of five, including Early Head Start/Head Start and home visiting programs may access SCIC supports.

## Pathways to Progress

South Carolina has a history of supporting children's social-emotional development through the State's quality standards for child care. The main catalyst for the State's expulsion and suspension policy was the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, which includes a provision for States to provide information about State expulsion policies of preschool age children in early care and education programs.

South Carolina began this work by conducting a policy scan of supports, standards and policies that were currently in place across the early childhood system- in child care, State funded preschool, and Head Start. With that information in hand, the State used the Federal policy statement on suspension and expulsion to inform the development of its own statement and recommendations. Next, it cross walked the new statement and recommendations with the State's child care quality standards, to identify which standards supported implementation of the policy and recommendations. The State is currently in the process of revising its child care standards, which will include explicit reference to the State's new expulsion and suspension policy. That is, in order for programs to be considered quality, they must meet a number of criteria, including not expelling or suspending children.

In addition, the State's child care funding is used to give families vouchers for child care as well as to fund contracts with child care programs to provide direct child care services to young children. The State plans to require all programs that are currently under contract or will be in the future, to follow the new expulsion and suspension policy.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

Though South Carolina has made important progress it identified more work to be done, including aligning expulsion and suspension policies across child care and State funded preschool. The State cites a shortage of reliable data as a challenge it hopes to work on next. South Carolina plans to embed new data fields on expulsion and suspension in ABC Quality rating tools, so that ABC Quality monitors can collect reliable data. It plans to explore the best method for data collection (e.g. is it best to collect data from the child care program director, teacher, or parent?). Finally, while South Carolina supports child care professionals through the SCIC and SCPITC programs, the reach does not go far enough. The number of child care programs with needs far outweighs the capacity of both the SCIC and SCPITC. The State plans to continue exploring funding mechanisms to provide a greater number of specialists and coaches who can support child care professionals and other early learning professionals in ensuring that all children thrive.

# WASHINGTON

## State Snapshot

In 2013, about 20% of Washington's children under age six were living below the Federal poverty line. The percentage is higher for children under age three – at a rate of 35%. Of this group, half are children of color. A 2010 report to the State legislature indicated that a growing number of vulnerable working parents cannot afford high quality formal child care for their infants and toddlers. Head Start services were provided to more than 12,000 children in 2014 and the State's public pre-K program - the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) - served more than 11,000 children during the 2014-2015 school year. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, ECEAP meets 9 out of the 10 established quality benchmarks.

Early data collected in the State on expulsions in the child care system indicated that most child care center and family child care professionals had asked a child to leave the program due to behavioral concerns in the past five years. This data, combined with the growing recognition of the importance of the early years and high quality early education, helped contribute to policy action.

## The Policy Response

Washington has over 5,000 licensed centers and family homes serving over 160,000 children across the State. Prompted by data indicating high expulsion and suspension rates in child care programs, the State decided to address the issue through its quality rating and improvement system- Early Achievers. Specifically, child care programs received a "quality point" if they were able to demonstrate:

- Evidence of a "no expulsion" policy; and
- Evidence of transition plans, including evidence of written policy to support referrals and transitions and evidence that children who were removed from the program were supported.

With respect to the public pre-K program, ECEAP has had a no expulsion/suspension policy since 2006. To prevent expulsions and suspensions, ECEAP teachers are required to address preventive practices including:

- Supporting classroom teachers,
- Planning efforts to meet individual needs of children,
- Engaging community resources, and
- Choosing an alternative schedule or setting.

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*Washington is one of the first States in the nation to work on addressing expulsion and suspension in young children through policy and prevention efforts, across the early childhood system, in both public preschool settings and child care settings.*

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Transitions to an alternative setting, planned jointly by staff and parents, are not considered expulsion. The rules indicate that short-term suspension must not be used as punishment, though receiving temporary services at home may be part of a child's behavioral support plan. If contractors have implemented their usual strategies and the classroom is still unsafe or excessively disrupted, they are encouraged to contact the State ECEAP Office for specialized technical assistance.

## Supports to Providers and Teachers

Paired with these policy efforts, the State offers professional development opportunities for child care professionals, Head Start and Early Head Start teachers and State pre-K teachers. In 2013, using funding from its Race to the Top- Early Learning Challenge grant, the State launched the Early Achievers Institutes, a series of professional development opportunities offered by the University of Washington. In 2015, the State legislature funded continuation of the Early Achievers Institutes as part of the Early Start Act.



The Early Achievers Institutes focus on positive behavior support, individualizing instruction, and fostering resiliency and wellness in young children. They enable peer learning and provide professionals with the opportunity to create and use materials to promote social-emotional and behavioral development in their own programs. Participants are also offered technical assistance from regional infant/toddler consultants and include consultations by early childhood mental health experts.

The University of Washington also provides key training to child care licensing staff, coaches, and technical assistance staff who support Early Achievers participants. These trainings include reliability training in classroom quality observation tools, curricula, and effective behavior guidance and management practices.

The State also has a cadre of pre-K Specialists who provide ongoing mentoring and consultation to ECEAP coaches, using the same Early Achievers Framework, to ensure alignment and that all of Washington's children and families are similarly supported by their early learning professionals.

## Pathways to Progress

State level data indicating that expulsion and suspension was an issue in Washington was a contributing factor that prompted action. In 2009, the University of Washington conducted a survey of parents of children transitioning into Kindergarten. Parents were asked whether their child was ever asked to leave a program due to problem behavior. The results indicated an expulsion rate of 16.7 per 1,000. Comparatively, national estimates indicated a rate of about 6.7 per 1,000.

During the same period of time, the Washington Department of Early Learning was piloting its quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). A part of that process included interviewing child care directors. Of the more than 450 directors interviewed, 56% of family child care homes and 69% of centers reported removing a child during the last five years. Data also indicated that 82% of family child care homes and 67% of centers *did not* have a "no expulsion" policy in place.

Part of implementing the QRIS also included standardized classroom and environmental quality assessments, as well as focal child assessments. In order to ensure that children with challenging behaviors were not seen as a liability to programs, the State began embedding expulsion/suspension and behavior management in its professional development efforts, accompanied by messaging that high quality programs, do not expel or suspend.

Data collectors and coaches also heard from early learning professionals that challenging behaviors were the top issues they faced in their programs. This contributed to the implementation of the Early Achievers Institutes, when the State received its RTT-ELC grant. Washington anticipates that high quality instruction will lead to lower expulsion rates and lower teacher turnover due to increased teacher resilience, less burnout, better partnerships with families and support from directors. The State Department of Early Learning and the University of Washington are interested in further tracking expulsion rates over time to identify areas in need of support.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

The Early Start Act requires the creation of a single set of standards across its early care and education settings. As Washington moves to align standards using the Early Achievers quality standards as a framework, it is exploring the implementation of a no expulsion policy across all early learning settings, including licensed child care. This policy recommendation would follow the Caring for Our Children recommendations around limiting expulsion and suspension of young children. The Department of Early Learning will present its aligned standards to the Legislature in November of 2016.

In addition, this school year, the Department of Early Learning is implementing Filming Interactions to Nurture Development (FIND), an intervention to support social-emotional development. FIND uses video coaching and brief, filmed clips of teachers interacting with young children to help caregivers identify and reinforce actions that support healthy development of our youngest learners. FIND is being offered in five regions across the State, with the remaining regions expected to come on board soon.

# WASHINGTON, D.C.

## District Snapshot

In 2014, 24% of young children from birth to age five were living below the Federal poverty line. In 2013, 42% of children had parents who lacked secure employment. Seventy-four percent of children from low-income families in 2013 lived in households with a high housing cost burden, in which more than 30% of the monthly income was spent on rent, mortgage payments, taxes, or related expenses.

A 2014 report released by the DC's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) revealed alarming trends in expulsion and suspension across grade levels, including that that three- and four-year old children in pre-K settings were being suspended and expelled for behaviors that are considered part of typical development for children of this age. These behaviors included temper tantrums, classroom disruptions, and toileting problems. These data helped catalyze action on early expulsions and suspensions in the District of Columbia.

## The Policy Response

The expansion of pre-K classrooms in DC and the evidence of negative impacts of expulsions and suspensions on the developmental and educational trajectories of young children spurred the District of Columbia to take action that protects the city's youngest learners. Councilmembers hosted public hearings to ensure input from stakeholders, including the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board, community-based organizations, advocacy organizations, DC's Department of Behavioral Health, OSSE, and leadership in local public schools.

In January of 2015, The Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act of 2015 was introduced, and a few months later, it was passed. Beginning in school year 2015-2016, the law prohibits, with few exceptions, the suspension or expulsion of any preschool aged student from a publicly funded pre-K program. The law also established annual reporting requirements for each local education agency (LEA) on suspensions and expulsions across grade levels.

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DC's Pre-K Student Discipline Act of 2015 states that, *"A student of Pre-K age shall not be suspended or expelled from any publically funded community-based organization, District of Columbia Public School, and/or Public Charter School who provide Pre-K care and education services to Pre-K age children..."*

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## Supports to Teachers and Providers

DC has also supported evidence-based, supportive disciplinary approaches to keep young children in their pre-K placements. The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) administers an early childhood mental health consultation program, Healthy Futures, in 26 child care centers in underserved wards of the city. DBH also offers a school behavioral health program that offers prevention, early intervention, and clinical services to children and families in 33% of traditional public and charter schools. Another important support for early learning professionals in DC is coaching, on-the-job coaching, mentoring, training, and technical assistance to teachers in Title I schools. In addition, OSSE provides a robust series of professional development opportunities at no cost to teachers with information on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, non-violent crisis prevention, trauma-informed care, restorative practices, as well as information from the Center for Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning. OSSE also provides targeted behavior support trainings tailored to school requests.

## Pathways to Progress

DC has a mixed delivery, multi-sector early care and education system and has engaged in targeted efforts to improve access and quality in the city's underserved wards. In 2008, the Council of the District of Columbia passed the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act, making DC one of the only jurisdictions to have a universal pre-K program for all three- and four-year old children. In recent years, the number of children from vulnerable communities participating has dramatically increased. Since 2010, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has used an innovative funding model to provide comprehensive Head Start services to all learners in Title I schools, regardless of family income.

Compared to States, DC has the highest percentage of children enrolled in pre-K and spends the most per child. The National Institute for Early Childhood Education Research ranks DC as 1<sup>st</sup> in the nation on access and resources for both three- and four-year olds. Eighty-six percent of all three- and four-year olds in DC were enrolled in pre-K programs in 2014. DC's movement toward universal pre-K was a response to a significant body of research showing that investments in early childhood education help to close the achievement gap for low-income students and students of color.

The expansion in pre-K, paired with findings from the report released by the OSSE on early expulsion and suspension, highlighted the need to address exclusionary discipline in DC. Federal attention on the issue, through HHS and ED's policy statement and data released out of the ED's Office of Civil Rights, further shed light on the issue. Under this context, The Education Committee of the DC Council moved swiftly to hold hearings and eventually acted on expulsion and suspension, making DC among the first localities in the country to pass legislation on the issue.

## Continuing Progress-Next Steps

Although DC has shown tremendous leadership in addressing expulsions and suspensions in early childhood settings, early education leaders and legislators in DC report that future work will be focus on:

- Expanding the expulsion and suspension policies to higher grades ,
- Addressing equity issues,
- Expanding the number of high quality programs, and
- Implementing a robust consumer information tool that better supports parent choices and informs the public about the quality of early care and education programs.

# Conclusion

As is demonstrated across these profiles, States and communities are beginning to implement policy solutions and enhance supports to early childhood teachers to eliminate suspension and expulsion in early learning settings. Though each State and local community is addressing the issue differently, common themes and lessons learned appear across profiles. Some of those themes include:

- **Using data to make the case** that expulsion and suspension is a local problem that affects the children and families in the community; **using data to demonstrate that policies and interventions are working** - and **fix those that are not**;
- **Identifying and taking advantage of policy opportunities**, such as the revising of school policy manuals, child care licensing regulations, or quality rating and improvement systems;
- **Having the support of State leaders**- whether Governors, State legislators, Council Members, or Department heads- to help push policies over the finish line;
- **Partnering with families, teachers, and the advocacy community** to ensure that a variety of voices are heard and that the policies and practices implemented are addressing their needs;
- **Addressing the issue across the early childhood system**- including in public pre-K, child care, and other early learning programs, and using policy levers that are specific to each system; and
- **Expanding and enhancing existing supports for early educators**, such as early childhood mental health consultation or behavior coaches.

While the States and communities listed here are leading the nation by taking bold action to address expulsion and suspension in early learning settings, their work is not yet done. Their lessons learned will continue to inform their own efforts and the efforts of others around the country. Understanding the negative trajectory suspension and expulsion has on young children, families, and communities, we encourage other States and communities to take these lessons learned and join in this important work, one step at a time.