

**Expulsion and Suspension Prevention Webinar Series –
Webinar 2: Establishing Federal, State, and Local Policies
February 18, 2015**

Tricia Haley: Great to have you on, but we are seeing that a few folks are still getting on the webinar, so we're going to give people just a couple of more minutes and then we will get started.

Hi, everybody. Thanks again for joining us. This is Tricia Haley with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) here in the Washington D.C. office. I'm going to give you just a few, quick, logistical announcements and then we will get started.

First of all, you have likely realized by now that all of your lines are muted. It's so that we can avoid getting any sort of background noise, titter chatter, the sounds of people eating lunch, whatever it might be. But that doesn't mean we don't want to hear your questions and thoughts. We would love to hear your questions and thoughts. Please feel free to enter them in the chat box throughout the course of the webinar. If we're getting a lot of them early on, we'll take a break and do some questions; otherwise we will focus in on questions at the end. But please do feel free to type them to us as you think of them.

Finally, inevitably folks will be wondering if the slides to this PowerPoint are available. They currently are not available, but we will post the whole presentation, including the audio along with the slides and a transcript hopefully within a few weeks of the webinar. And as soon as we post that, we'll make sure to send a message out to everyone so that they know that it's up.

Those are your logistics announcements, so without further ado, I will introduce Shantel Meek, policy advisor for early childhood development here at ACF.

Shantel Meek: Thank you, Tricia, and welcome, everybody. Thanks for taking time out of your day to join our second webinar in our series of four looking at expulsion and suspension prevention.

So, today's webinar is really going to focus on the policy aspect of expulsion and suspension. I am going to unpack the Federal policy statements. Then, we have a representative from the State of Colorado, Jordana Ash, who is going to give us an overview of what that looks like at the state level. And then we have a representative from Chicago Public Schools, Justina, who will then provide us a local example of what it looks like to incorporate expulsion and suspension explicitly in policy.

Then as Tricia mentioned, at the end of the session we'll have a Q&A, but if we have a lot of questions coming in throughout, we're happy to take a break and address some of those questions.

So, without further ado, I will jump into the Federal policy statement.

So as many of you know, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released a joint policy statement on expulsion and suspension in December. And before I really jump into that, I want to make sure to set the context. For those of you who joined the first one, you might have seen this slide before, but we think it's really important to reiterate why we're doing this.

So, last week's presentation really gave a thorough overview of why we should all care about expulsion and suspension practices. We all know how important the early years are to children's development and long-term outcomes. During this really highly informative and sensitive period, the developing brain is highly influenced by the experiences young kids have, and that's for better or for worse.

And so what do we mean by that? If we equip children with enriching positive experiences, the benefits are long-lasting, as we all know. The downside, however, is that during this really sensitive period they're especially vulnerable to negative experiences, making this a pretty high stake period in life.

Expulsion or suspension practices and experiences are stressful for kids. They're stressful for families and these stressful experiences that usually lead up to expulsion and suspension can really be detrimental to children's development in relationships. And we know that many times the kids who are expelled are often the ones that are most in need of additional intervention or support. It may be the very kids who really need these extra supports, and by expelling them from the system, we likely lower their odds of being identified as served.

In addition, as Dr. Gilliam pointed out so eloquently last week, expelling our most vulnerable kids really undercuts early education's return on investment because many times those are the kids who have the most to gain.

Finally, those last two bullets are really important. As we know from kind of a decade of research, and most recently data that came out of the ED's Office of Civil Rights, we know that the rate of expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings are quite high and virtually every study that's looked at the issue have found egregious racial disparity in the practice with young boys of color being expelled and suspended at much higher rates than all other kids. And, so all of these are really fundamental reasons why we must all partner to prevent expulsion and suspension.

So a little bit of context to kind of set the stage for how the Federal policy statement came to be, kind of the genesis of a bunch of different activities that happened over the past few years. So everybody's familiar, hopefully, with Dr. Gilliam's landmark studies, identifying these really high rates of expulsion in early learning settings. He looked at child care in public prekindergarten (preK) settings. We know that last year was a really big year for school climate in general. The president announced the My Brother's Keeper task force. Their early childhood part of that really has -- one part of it is focused on expulsion or suspension.

In the spring, as I mentioned, the Office of Civil Rights at ED released data on preschool suspension and then the ED and Department of Justice released some recourses early last year on improving school climate in generally K–12 settings.

And so all of that kind of lends to the school climate behavior kind of expulsion piece of it, but on the other hand, I mean, we've also had in this administration a big increase in access to early childhood education in general, and with this expansion and access, we know that we had -- you know, we bear a great responsibility to make sure that those programs are really serving the kids that are most vulnerable.

So the purposes of the Federal policy statement. We really wanted to raise awareness that this issue even exists. So, many people that we talk to still on a daily basis don't know that it's an issue. I mean, it's not logical to think that a 3-year-old would be kicked out of preschool, so part of this is really making people aware that this is an issue.

Secondly, we wanted to provide recommendations informed by research, both to programs at the local level and to States. And so a lot of these -- I'll go over in a second -- they kind of mirror each other at a different scope and level.

Third, we wanted to really highlight early childhood workforce competencies and a few evidence-based approaches that we know work to prevent and reduce expulsion and suspension. Actually, next week's webinar is going to take a really big deep dive into a couple of those strategies.

And then lastly, we really wanted to identify some free resources, put them all in one place for folks -- and I will share those at the end of the webinar as well.

So in getting our thoughts together and getting our strategy together, we developed these pillars of expulsion and suspension prevention in early learning settings. We know this is a really complex issue. There's not one solution; there's not a magic bullet. It really takes a whole series of things happening.

The first of them, which is what we'll talk about more today, is fair and appropriate policies. Because of the infrastructure, the support, the resources, and kind of disparities and regulation in early learning settings, it varies so much across the country that many programs may not have explicit policies on suspension and expulsion. This may leave programs, teachers, directors, whoever, with handling cases on an ad hoc kind of inconsistent case-by-case basis.

Second, we need to set goals and track our own data. So I think this is a basic component of reaching any goal, really, across the board, but a particularly important for this issue is in the racial disparities that we see. The best way to identify if your program has a problem, is really, by seeing the numbers.

Third, forming strong partnerships with families. As Dr. Gilliam said last week, and as he has famously said, he's never known of the case where a child was expelled or suspended when the

parent and teacher knew or liked each other. And I think that's incredibly telling. And parents are really important aspects in this issue.

Fourth, universal developmental and behavioral screening and appropriate follow-ups; so we know this is a basic preventive practice principle. By screening every child, we can identify those who may need extra supports or services as soon as possible and prevent these more difficult to complex issues from evolving without the necessary support.

Fifth, and maybe one of the most important ones, is really assuring that we have a highly-skilled workforce. Our teachers are the most important component of a quality, early learning experience. We have to ensure that they're well-equipped with the skills to foster children's social and emotional health, work through challenging behaviors, understand screening, and how to use them in individualized practice, primarily with families.

And this last part is important. Really have self-reflective capacity to understand how implicit biases because we all have them, make plans to interact with children.

And then finally, and this kind of goes along with the workforce, access to specialized consultation. It's critical that our frontline providers and teachers have skills, right, but it's also equally critical that they have backup support for when a situation might escalate, for prevention for building continued capacity, people like early childhood mental health consultants, behavioral coaches, quality coaches. It's critical that they have that kind of second line of support.

So building on those pillars of prevention, we then set out to make recommendations to early learning programs. The first was really to develop preventive guidance and disciplined practices that make sure that all the staff in the program is trained in these practices; that they are communicated really clearly to the families, to the staff, all partners; and that they're implemented without bias. Programs that really establish the features on how to deal with challenging behaviors, because working with kids 0 to 5, you're going to have a challenging behavior. Every child is likely going to demonstrate some kind of challenging behavior.

So the procedures should be developed mentally appropriate; they should be clear; they should be consistent. In kids this young, we really think that discipline should be a behavioral development learning opportunity, not a punishment.

So the next piece, of course, develop expulsion and suspension policies. As I mentioned earlier, many programs may not have these explicitly written in their policy manuals of procedures and that kind of leaves the door open for kind of deciding things on an ad hoc basis, so really putting that in your program manuals.

And I'm going to use the language specifically as it was vetted here, but establishing policies that eliminate or severely limit expulsion and suspension or other exclusionary discipline; inclusionary measures should be used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a determination of a serious safety threat, if not otherwise be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modification.

So we do know, though, that at times it might be appropriate to transition a child to another program that might better suit the needs of that child, in which case it's not an expulsion, but it's a planful transition. So, we set out a couple of different guiding principles or steps for when the need for a transition does arrive. There should always be a receiving program on the other end. The family and child shouldn't just be kicked out kind of left to figure their situation without any assistance.

The next part -- we talked a little bit about the workforce and this is -- again, can't say it enough how critical the workforce is to really moving us forward in this issue. You know, the National Workforce Study for Early Care and Education found that only about 20 percent of teachers teaching kids under 5 reported receiving specific training on facilitating children's social and emotional growth in the past year. Several studies have also found that dealing with challenging behaviors is one of the main training needs as reported by teachers.

And experts -- let alone behavior -- without enough training in basic child development, it may be difficult to distinguish behaviors that are actually challenging and problematic versus those that are just developmentally appropriate -- a 3-year-old is being a 3-year-old. Experts have found that developmentally, inappropriate behavioral expectations may lead to inappropriate labeling of child behavior. A child is challenging or problematic when in reality it's just typical behavior.

So, we also know, those last two bolded bullets are really important. As I mentioned before, access to specialized support and then backup for our teachers, because they also need that support and extra resources to work on the front lines with all children.

And then that last one, teacher wellness, and teacher and self-wellness. We know that from Walter Gilliam's research that stress is associated with higher expulsion and suspension, and so really making sure teachers are well cared for, well taken care of will also help the issue.

Data. We talked about data little bit before, but data really makes the problem real. They kind of help us own the problem. So if you're looking at your own program data, especially for disparities and for race, that really helps catalyze people to action. We know at the Federal level when we started owning that Federal level data that did prompt folks to start paying attention more, so it's been an incredibly valuable tool.

I provide a couple of example goals here, one on kind of the professional development (PD) piece, one on reducing suspension. But every program is going to be different. The policy statement has several other examples that folks can pull from, but at the end of the day, it's really what's specific to your program and what progress you think you want to make.

And then we transition over to recommendations for States, and you'll see that these recommendations are kind of parallel with the program recommendations just at a different scope. So the first one, of course, developing clearly communicated expulsion and suspension policies. Jordana from Colorado will tell you a little bit more about how Colorado was doing that in a bit. But we do think it's important to establish statewide policies that are really applicable

across settings, publicly-funded, privately-funding settings, remote children's social and emotional behavior health, and eliminate and severely limit the use of expulsion and suspension.

Again, we think there are times when the need may arise for an appropriate transition, in which case it's safe to provide guidance on what that should look like, including a receiving program.

And then finally, the policy and procedures should be clearly communicated to all relevant parties and that includes families; that includes providers; that includes community partners. Under the reauthorized Childcare and Development Block Grant (CDBG), States are required to disseminate consumer education information to parents and the general public and policy providers, which may include policies on expulsion of children receiving support under CPBS.

So data. Again, coming back to data -- and I think we can't really harp on this enough -- tracking data is just incredibly important at the State level for the same reasons it is at the Federal, local, and at the local program level. Webinar four, as a reminder, two weeks from today, will discuss some creative ways a few States are collecting data on this issue.

And then, of course, coming back to the workforce and what that State role is. The State has a really important role to play in ensuring the high-quality workforce. We know that the reauthorized CDBG again includes a set-aside of funds to be used to improve the quality of child care for kids receiving assistance under CPBS and several for infant-toddler care for increasing the quality of that.

And investing in PD of the child care workforce, specifically in behavioral management strategies and training that promotes children's positive social-emotional (SE) development and reduces challenging behaviors and expulsion is an allowable use of those quality dollars in the meanwhile. A few other mechanisms to enhance the workforce at the State level are listed here and they're elaborated on in the actual policy statement.

And then finally, here's a link to the actual statement for those of you who have not taken a look at it yet. At the end, it includes several appendices that includes free recourses, free online resources for all of the audience that you see there across all the different components that we talked about in expulsion and suspension, and we are hoping to have a webpage up, too. And then we will be sure to share that with folks.

So now, without further ado, I'm going to introduce Jordana Ash. She is the early childhood mental health director to the Office of Early Childhood for Colorado's Department of Human Services. Jordana?

Jordana, if you have started speaking, you might need to unmute yourself because we cannot hear you.

So, as you guys have all probably realized, Jordana is not coming through quite yet. We're going to take a minute and see if we can figure out what our technical difficulty is.

Jordana Ash: Hi. There you go. I think everyone can hear me now.

Shantel Meek: Yeah. Now, we got you. Thank you so much.

Jordana Ash: Okay. Sorry about that. Thanks, Shantel, for that introduction and good morning to those of you on the West Coast and good afternoon to all of you in the snowy East Coast, and, of course, hello to the rest of us here in the middle.

I'm very happy to be with you today to share just a small sampling of the innovative things happening in Colorado for young children, families, and those who care for them. It's really an amazing time to be thinking and working in this field of early childhood, and particularly with a focus on challenging behaviors in child care suspensions and expulsion.

First off, I wanted to describe some features of our State that are particularly relevant to this discussion. It's critically important for any State that may be considering how to embrace the recent recommendations of Secretaries Burwell and Duncan to take stock of the current conditions; that is that a current policy, funding and practice that exist, and that will be extended or built out to respond to the Federal charge.

So let's take a look at our child care universe, and that's the slide we have up right now. So if you look closely at this slide, you'll see that this is information about our non-24-hour facilities with open licenses and the capacity that goes along with those facilities as of the beginning of January 2015. So our data team reminds me that this is a snapshot in time and that at any time the actual count of children in care will differ. So that's just a background to remember, when we're looking at these numbers.

But you will see that in terms of facilities, well, our child care whole make up slightly over 45 percent of our facilities, child care centers make up approximately 22 percent with preschools adding an additional 13 percent. Our school-age programs and other programs, such as neighborhood youth organizations and residents camp, make up the remainder. So we have many, many child care homes in our State and it's a good idea to think about and help with your child care licensing colleagues to understand what the facilities are in your particular State.

For capacity, however, we see that the child care centers make up the majority here with over 100,000 spots, or 40 percent, for children in centers with an additional capacity 29,000 spots in preschool. For child care homes, on the other hand, though they make up 45 percent of our facilities, have a capacity for about 7 percent of our spots or just over 17,000 children. So, it's important to know the breakdown of State, when you're thinking about crafting policy that's going to affect children in various care settings.

There are a few other things to know about Colorado, which contributes to our progress to date and sets us up for going forward in a responsive manner to the issues of expulsion and suspension.

So, in 2012, Governor Hickenlooper, our governor, announced the creation of the Office of Early Childhood in the Department of Human Services. So we have two major divisions in our office,

the division of early care and learning, and the division of community and family support. And in addition, we have our Race to the Top (RTT) initiative here in the Office of Early Childhood.

So, having a dedicated office with an early childhood focus, allows us to work across programs that would otherwise be much more limited or challenging, if we're trying to make things happen across departments or across other agencies, both within and outside of our own department. So, it really sets the stage for a lot of collaboration, and innovative and creative ways to approach these problems.

We have many Federal partnerships. I mentioned RTT specifically here because of their work on quality ratings and improvement systems and a lot of our quality dollars flow through that effort, and so they are a key partner in any of these approaches that are going to look at reducing and eventually eliminating expulsions and suspensions. We're privileged to have many other Federal agencies as partners in our early childhood work.

And then additionally, I wanted to mention that as it was referenced in Shantel's opening statements, having a statewide program of early childhood mental health consultation is an incredible benefit as we'll be getting to think about response to challenging behaviors and set the tempo of expulsion.

However, as a statewide program at the early childhood mental health specialist funded by general fund dollars and it's been in existence 2006-2007. Each of our 17 mental health centers have one, full-time position paid for with these funds and since these contracts moved to the Office of Early Childhood from our Office of Behavioral Health, we require that at least 50 percent of their time be dedicated to mental health complication in child care settings. And even prior to this move here to the office, many, if not most of these positions, were used to provide consultation in child care.

That means that we have a long-standing statewide commitment to complication, a deep understanding of that practice, and a high degree of expertise in the work of both developing systems for mental health complications, as well as supporting the competency development of the consultants themselves.

So now we're going to turn our attention to the process that Colorado has for child care rule revisions. Since we've identified this as one of our best levers to improve quality for all children to elevate the role of child care providers as unmistakably critical to fostering well-being and well-being in young children, and to help us consider Federal recommendations without the reduction of expulsion in a state-driven manner.

So these are some of the steps that we go through whenever we are considering our rule revision, and what I'm going to share about this process is just to give you a sense of how it unfolds. This is very preliminary, and someone mentioned to me that you can think about it as setting the table for a future dinner conversation.

The biggest thing I want to emphasize from this particular slide is the stakeholder input and contribution to the process. From the very beginning of our consideration of any role changes or

policy changes, we work very closely with stakeholders, both, internal and staff; the Office of Early Childhood; as well as external stakeholders, including providers, parents, and other professional colleagues to help us really think through what the best approaches are going to be and to help us make recommendations that will eventually go out for even broader public commentary prior to being accepted in school. That's the background of what we do here in Colorado.

So, we're so fortunate that we undertake this iterative process for changes to policy and procedures, so that we're always paying attention to the needs of our stakeholders as well as national themes in our work, such as the current theme of suspensions and expulsion for very young children. So, I want to emphasize that the following ideas are not yet a national draft form and that the process I described for finalizing any draft, including releasing it for public comment and to have our State board look through their readings have not yet happened.

That said, here are some ideas that stakeholders have raised for possible inclusion when the time comes to create the draft rule. I just wanted to point out that these were ideas that we had prior to the release of the Federal policy statements and these were things that were already under consideration.

So why did we have this aligning the center and home rules? Our whole child care rules were revised in 2010 and there was a requirement in those child care home rules that stated that 3 of the 15 required clock hours for continuing education for providers in the area of social and emotional development. We want to align any center-based rules to be in correspondence with those child care home rules.

Programs need to have a written plan for accessing mental health consultants for responding to children with behavior. This initially grew out of our State's long-standing awareness of the benefit of complications as an effective resource for child care directors and staff, and I would add family. As we know, when there's a growing body of research about the benefits of consultation, it's really a resource that is easily delivered in child care setting and is a supportive resource that -- all the relevant individuals concerned with the care of one child.

An ideal was suggested to better support qualified teachers -- and that goes to the workforce development idea that Shantel approached -- by having alternative pathways to reach an educational requirement. And I know that this particular idea was generated from some of the providers themselves, who were out there needing to meet the educational requirements through college courses, and have identified other ways that were sufficient in the material to really ground them in the knowledge that they needed to provide the best fit care for our children.

And finally, there are recommendations to highlight the protections for children with special health care needs, including those with or at risk of developmental behavioral or emotional condition, in addition to any other developmental or physical health care needs that young children might have.

So those are already in consideration. And going forward, I wanted to just give you a little sense of flavor of what we're doing now that the Federal recommendations have come out. And you'll

see here in red, on the next few slides, that I've identified elements of the Federal policy recommendations, and these are the things that Shantel highlighted earlier. So, the idea here is to describe directly the relationship between challenging behaviors, the partnership between child care centers and community support like consultants, and the reduction in expulsion.

So, I'm only going to cover a few of them. This one in particular talks about just an idea -- actually I believe that this one is for programs -- and there's any number of ways to bring focus to the fact that expulsions and suspensions are happening in child care throughout this country every day. There still is a lack of awareness that happens, that this happened, and even sometimes, a reluctance to call an expulsion what it is. I've had many sessions with providers where they're more comfortable talking about it as a withdrawal. They would like to think about children leaving programs because it wasn't a good fit.

Now, that may or may not be true, but what we want to make sure isn't happening is that an expulsion is happening as a result of children's behavior without a plan that supports the understanding and response to that behavior prior to any planned transition that may or may not have to happen.

So, there are a couple of ways that States can go about thinking and improving their approach to this event of child care expulsion. One is to really set some definitions in your policies that present descriptive language on expulsions, suspensions, mental health consultations, mental health consulting, what coaches are going to look like need to be able to create consistent meaning for providers and parents. It's important to elevate the awareness of the phenomena for people to get clear on what these concepts are and clear that it's a topic that's going to be addressed both by providers and by parents through the shared understanding we can maximize the communication on behalf of for young children.

So, consider articulating some child care policies that also reflect that relationship are at the core of our early childhood philosophy, and that we want to cultivate positive culture between children, staff, and families. This idea needs to be called out in order for it to happen. Clearly, it's important to implement teaching strategies that support positive behavior for part of social peer interaction and promote overall social and emotional confidence in young children. We know that providers are really seeking this knowledge and recognize the positive benefit of bringing practices into their classroom.

And thirdly, we want to include ideas around individualized SE intervention for children that include a multistep process for understanding the meaning of the challenging behavior, developing and implementing a team approach, which centers on family, staff, and other specialists' involvement. It's really through a team approach that the best solutions for that individual child that respects that family's culture and that family's parenting style can be [inaudible] there and can promote stability in placements for children.

So, the next Federal recommendation has to do with the States, developing and communicating expulsion and suspension policies. We're just beginning to think about the ways that we can have programs to describe how decisions are made regarding suspensions and expulsion. Most programs have never had to consider, much less articulate, how and under what condition they

would move to expel a child. We can ask programs to define the verification process for parents when a suspension or an expulsion may take place, which allows for a dialogue prior to any of these actions and emphasizes that parents are the primary partner in this process.

This really reflects one of the pillars that Shantel mentioned for strong family partners. We know that a lot of programs are committed to this, but really lack the resources or tools to have authentic parent engagement, and some of the Federal assistance in this regard is really going to enable us to do that and to support programs that they build their family partnership.

And then finally, we're thinking about how we might leverage the compliance role of child care licensing to have directors demonstrate steps taken prior to suspension and expulsion. We want to actually have directors articulate what it is that may go into a policy, what actual steps will be taken, and then have a way to verify that in fact those steps were taken prior to the event of an expulsion.

One of the several recommendations with far-reaching and important implications is that -- which ask States to set goals for improvements and analyze data to assess their progress. So, the charge for all of us is to build the capacity, to collect and analyze statewide data on expulsion and suspension. In particular, the selection was made to coordinate data systems across early childhood programming, and we know that that's a very heavy lift from any State. We feel fortunate in Colorado that we have a process underway to do just that.

As you can see here, our early intervention unit is building a data assistance platform and the early childhood mental health unit will be a module in that system. We're going to be thinking about ways across our programs that we would begin to collect that child care expulsion data, but we really want to determine the best way to use our data assistance capacity to capture data that's meaningful.

And here are some things that we want to make sure we get right, and they're listed here, because they're things we're wrestling with -- how to collect representative data, so data that's representative of all children in care, data that's representative across all of our different facilities. So, at child care homes, what does the phenomena look like there or child care centers and our [inaudible]. We want to make sure that many have data that we know reflects not only our State, but the experience for our children and families who are affected by these events.

But an idea about parents. We want to hear from those affected. I only know of one study. It was a small study that followed parents and asked -- I believe it was a group of a very small -- but what was it like for you when your child was asked to leave the program because of challenging behaviors. Remember, these are not the planned transitions where there's a meaningful dialogue and an action plan to put a child in a setting that's more suited to his/her needs, even though it's expulsions that we're interested in here.

And we really need to understand what the parents explained was what that was like to find other care, what the receiving center knew about the child's behavior, and what supports were in place for both the family and the new providers, so that that child was able to really take advantage of that educational setting.

And we want to look at lead measures, so that we can work on reduction and expulsion. And what we mean by that is that we feel like if we collect information about an expulsion that's already taken place [inaudible] at the measure, that doesn't give us the opportunity to put in place those supports and services, which would interject resources at the right time and change that trajectory for that young child. So, we are really working hard on identifying what those lead measures would be in our State, in terms of our data collection.

So finally, the last recommendation I wanted to highlight was the investment workforce preparation and development. And we think about it as these gears that all turn together and affect one another. So we want to support the workforce development of a provider community, and we want to help them understand how to utilize mental health consultation, how to access mental health consultants; we want our mental health consultants to be prepared for delivering services in a child care community that's sensitive to the future of the center and of the population that they're serving. We want higher education to be responsive and help us in our efforts to fill capacity. And, of course, there are other quality coaches that are working alongside us and are part of this whole system of care.

And finally, I would just say -- my last slide, yes -- that this is really a unique moment in time where there's a convergence of public will, science, policy, and indeed funding that are propelling us forward. And given that we don't know if there's going to be another moment like this, I would encourage all of you to be innovative and creative in your approach to these problems and to think of opportunities that you have to make the most of this compelling topic.

Thank you very much.

Shantel Meek: Thank you so much, Jordana, for that great presentation and an example what this looks like at the State level. Now, we're going to turn to Justina Schlund, who is with the Office of Social and Emotional Learning for Chicago Public Schools. Justina?

Justina Schlund: Great. Thank you, Shantel, and hello everyone. By way of additional introduction, I will also say that I began my career in Chicago Public Schools as a preschool teacher, so know intimately well what it feels like to deal with a roomful of 4-year-olds and their behavior issues.

So, today, I was going to share a little bit about what we did here in Chicago around rethinking our approach to discipline in the early grades. So, what I'm showing you here is just kind of a snapshot of the last 4 years in Chicago, and how we've responded to behaviors in preK through second grade.

Around 2011-2012, our schools began reporting a really big piqued increase in behavior issues, especially at the preK and kindergarten level. And the result was this really concerning kind of spike -- the blue bars that you see -- in the number of out-of-school suspensions that we were reporting to our youngest students. Even more concerning, though, I think, our data was really showing us that suspension were not being used as a last resort, but often kind of the first measure that schools were taking, meaning we weren't doing a whole lot proactively in terms of

developing students' social and emotional skills before we were sending our really young students out of the classroom and out of the school building.

I'm going to dive a little bit into how we address this, but I just want to point you to kind of the far right bars to show you where we are now. You'll notice we've eliminated preK and kindergarten suspensions altogether this year, and we've greatly, greatly reduced our first and second grade suspension. And if you look at the green bars, you'll also notice that number of restorative responses -- and we classify this as anything from parent conferences that are restorative nature to social skills intervention -- that these are now the predominant response to behavior intimates at these grade levels.

So how did we get here? So, a little bit of background. In 2011, our district began a multiyear investment into expanding preK and full-day kindergarten. We now have universal full-day kindergarten for all students and it's been a great win for Chicago. But kind of on the flip side of that, what was happening was our office started getting more and more calls from schools that were saying, "you know, all these young children are now showing up in my school building, and I don't know how to deal with these behaviors."

In 2012, we launched kind of a first wave of provisions to our student code of conduct, but it was largely in response to the overuse of suspensions at the high school level. So, we did things like removing a clause that had mandatory suspensions for certain behaviors, and we also included kind of a teeny tiny sentence in there that said preK and kindergarten children cannot be suspended, but it wasn't a huge focus of that policy's change.

In 2013, following the release of that student code of conduct, we actually decreased high school suspension rates dramatically, but at the same time, our elementary school suspensions were climbing and despite that kind of teeny tiny sentence that we added in, we had hundreds of suspensions of preK and kindergarten suspensions over the last few years even following that policy change.

So last school year, with all of these continuing concerns, we launched a really large-scale of district-wide efforts to reduce our suspensions and expulsions rates at all the grade levels, and in addition to policy change, we focused on things like our accountability and data systems, resource development, PD, all of those kind of pieces. And as a result, in 2014, this school year, we passed probably our strictest restrictions to date on our use of suspensions at the preK through second grade level.

So how did we do this? One of the first and probably the most important things we did was start with an enormous amount of stakeholder engagement. Our office convened a district-wide committee. It included folks from early education, security, legal, diverse learners, which is our special ed department, and others. And then with this committee, we did a listening tour across all of our schools. We worked with principals, teachers, social workers, and we reached out to the Chicago Teachers Union and were really fortunate to have a strong partner in Karen Lewis, who's the president of our teachers union, and her leadership team.

And then in addition to that district-wide committee, we also formed a citywide collaborative that continues to meet this year and it includes people from community groups that have previously protested our district's use of suspension, academic groups, student groups, a number of folks from around the city. And one of the most frequent pieces we heard from all of these people was that there was a huge concern over the use of suspensions at the early grade level, and a lot of times it was because children didn't understand their behavior and they were being suspended into homes that people weren't necessarily there to kind of guide them and support them.

So, if you go to the next slide, I'll talk about how we kind of turned this into a draft of a policy. So, we took all these ideas, and we did a really deep analysis of our district's behavior and suspensions data. We consulted with experts in the field and we tried to identify what was really behind these suspensions. And what we found was that in almost all these incidents, it was really pointing to a need for transition support, SE skills, or really just concrete strategies for teachers and schools to use with young children, and in almost all the cases, suspension just simply wasn't the answer. It was providing a short-term solution to our schools and they needed really a long-term strategy.

So, with that in mind, we crafted a few versions of a policy -- and if you go to the next slide, I'll show you where we've landed. So, this is kind of where we ended up, in terms of preK through second grade suspensions. We essentially restricted all preK through second grade suspensions, except in those very rare situations where there is a serious safety threat; and in those situations, we allow our network who are -- who oversee our schools -- they can allow a one-day emergency suspension where the focus is on developing a safety plan and behavioral strategies, but the point being that suspension is really the exception and not the rule when we're dealing with students this young.

Next slide. So how did we get this policy passed? Once we had this drafted, we started what we internally called a hearts and minds campaign. So, it was really kind of presenting to any district group that would have us, any city group that would have us on the research, and the data around suspension; we filmed a video on restored discipline; we had our communications department work with the CEO to do interviews with the media. And then one of my favorite things is we actually had our community partners -- who were the same people who have protested our district for our suspension rates -- we actually had them co-present the policies to the board of education. And during that presentation, they said this was one of the first, true collaborations in this effort between the district and the community.

And so on the next slide, we passed the policy this school year, but of course, we learned from past experience that this was the easy part and the actual challenge is in the implementation piece. So, we did a lot of focus around resources, training. This summer we provided mandatory PD to all our principals, not just on our new policy, but for the first time on how to approach discipline from a restorative plan. And if nothing else, if you ask any of our schools this year, they'll tell you that if they got no other message this year, they got a message that Chicago Public Schools does not want to suspend kids.

In addition to this training, we also identified 65 priority elementary schools that are now part of 2 cohorts that meet throughout the school year on school climate. We added a new social and emotional learning position to all of our networks so that they can provide on-the-ground coaching, and then specific to early ed, we began piloting targeted social skills intervention that kind of goes along with our universal social skills curriculum and we're also in the process of developing behavioral health teams at the school and district level, and these can create really those individualized behavior plans for students.

And then, lastly, we're working on developing a lot of resources that talk about things like developmentally appropriate strategies for responding to behaviors for young children, and we have a kindergarten mentoring program district-wide that matches kindergartners with volunteers.

Where do we go from here? So, I'd like to say this has resolved all of our issues, but, of course, it hasn't. So, this year, we're kind of continuing the work. We're doing focus groups around how our student's code of conduct has been working so far. We're doing another analysis of our behavioral in suspensions data, and we have a lot of other things in the works, but just a couple that I will mention. We're doing a lot of the preventative work, such as developing morning meetings in all of our early childhood classrooms to really address those social and emotional needs. And then we are developing model restorative practice in SEL schools, so that we can really spread it to all grades, all schools throughout our district.

And then if you'll go to the last slide, major lessons learned. So, I think that Jordana nailed it, when she said this was a unique moment in time for us, the Federal policy statements, and some of the bills that were happening at our State level in Illinois around suspension. Our effort wasn't directly related or as a result of those, but all these pieces were kind of bubbling up at the same time that we internally were sounding the alarm on suspensions at the early grade levels and we knew that if there was any kind of moment to get this policy passed, that this was our chance. So we worked really hard to build that momentum. In the past, policy change had been led by our law department, and I think with our office, Social Emotional Learning leading the charge, we were able to connect this to students' lives and conversations about things that are bigger than just policy.

The other things that I think were critical for us was kind of that data piece; using data to drive our strategy, so that this wasn't grounded in speculation or personal feelings, but actual patterns and trends. But once we knew the direction to go in, I would say that one of the most successful things we did was let our allies and champion really do the talking for us so that this message wasn't coming from central office, but from our community members, our teachers, and other students.

And then lastly, I think this is the biggest challenge, but also the most critical component -- is that we need to get the right resources into the hands of our schools. In a lot of cases when we were hearing from our schools, they didn't actually want to suspend students, especially at this grade level, but they just simply did not know what to do. So, I think the success of our policy and any policies that are developed across our nation, is really going to depend on our ability to have these resources and have the right people in place.

So, that pretty much sums up our story here in Chicago, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Shantel Meek: Great. Thank you so much for that great presentation. Please feel free to type out your questions in the chat box and we will be sorting through those and answering the ones that we can in the amount of time we have left.

I have one for Jordana or Justina. Both of you may have encountered this issue. Someone brought up that it seems that programs would find ways to report other reasons once it's clear that suspension and expulsion or using those terms is not good, and so I think Jordana kind of touched on that in, you know, sometimes it's reported as a withdrawal or as this program wasn't the right fit. How did -- how do you all address that at the State or local level?

Justina Schlund: Sure. I --

Jordana Ash: Hi. I'll jump in.

Justina Schlund: Oh.

Jordana Ash: Oh.

Justina Schlund: Sorry. Go ahead, Jordana.

Jordana Ash: Okay. Thanks. You know, I think that it's a multipronged approach and just like with mental health concerns, we really need to de-stigmatize, in a way the event of expulsion. Of course, while I say that, I don't want it to be something that's normal or typical, but I think we need to begin to name it, begin to speak about it, and begin to train around it.

So, as long as we're avoiding merely talking about what an expulsion or suspension is, we're not going to get to the heart of the matter. And so, then we're not going to be able to really hear and listen well to our providers about what their concerns are, unless we're really talking about what happens when you feel like you have no other option.

So, we need to begin to have that conversation, but we need to be using terms that we're all recognizing and that we can begin to make changes, both in practice and policy, once we begin to start with the foundation of understanding.

Justina Schlund: Yes. This is Justina. I'll second everything that Jordana said and add a little bit.

You know, a couple of other pieces that we're thinking about, is the accountability of our data. So, making sure that as a district we are taking a close look at our suspensions and expulsions data and asking questions when we see things that raise some concerns for us, such as incident reports that seem to refer to something like a suspension, but that wasn't actually tracked in the data.

And then the other piece in terms of accountability that we're doing is really educating family and community members about what a suspension is, what it looks like. So when a school calls you up to take your child home that is a suspension. And so one of the things that we did in our new student code of conduct as well, was expand the ways that parents can appeal a suspension. So we're really working on kind of educating parents to advocate for their children as well.

Shantel Meek: Thank you. And just a reminder to folks, webinar four is going to focus all on data and some States are going to show some creative ways that they're handling the issue.

We're getting a couple of questions about funding. So Jordana, I know you mentioned how Colorado's funding the mental health consultation system. Justina, how is Chicago funding this implementation of SE support?

Justina Schlund: Yeah. I mean, I think we are using funding streams from anywhere that we can pull them essentially. So obviously Title I fund; the general budget that is coming out of our office, Social Emotional Learning; and then we have a number of grants that we're using. So, for example, there's a Federal Department of Justice, ED grant that lets us do some creative things with building restorative practices and positive behavior supports in our schools.

So, I think we're being really creative kind of at the district level about that. And then our schools all have some autonomy around their budgets as well, and they're similarly doing creative things like that.

Jordana Ash: And I would just add that in addition to the mental health specialists that are funded through general funds in the Office of Early Childhood, there are many communities that have found creative ways to fund positions for additional training for providers, whether it's the pyramid or pyramid-plus training using curriculum like incredible years, but also working with our very robust philanthropic community here in Colorado to fund actual positions for mental health consultants.

Shantel Meek: We're getting a couple of questions on families that are related, so I think for both of you -- someone asked, it appears that parents weren't included in the stakeholder engagement initiatives. First, were they? Just a clarification on that. And, if they weren't, why not? And then kind of a follow-up question related to families, what are some of the key ways that you've improved your partnership with parents and families?

Justina Schlund: Sure. So, apologies. The parents were included. We kind of lump that into the community forums piece, but what we did was we held large community forums in all areas of our city and invited parents to those, and we had, in total, several hundred parents actually show up and we had them in circles, in conversations around the discipline issues that they were seeing at their schools, and they were able to participate that way; as well as a number of our community groups are actually parent-centered groups in parent focus groups, so they were able to participate through those channels.

And then the second part of the question -- I'm sorry, can you repeat?

Shantel Meek: Sure. What are some of the strategies that you've used to strengthen the relationships with families?

Justina Schlund: Yeah. That's a great question. So one thing that we are working on this year is with some of our community partners. We're working with a number of our schools to have parent liaisons or parent leaders as the peacekeeper in that school building. So these parents are actually trained in a lot of our restorative practices. They might volunteer or work in some of our school piece rooms where they might do things like mediate conversations between students and teachers, hold a talking circle between students who are having a conflict, things like that.

So that's one way that we're doing it. We're also doing a number of things through what's called a parent university here in Chicago Public Schools. So, a lot of our kind of new trainings that we're rolling out there is focused on these types of discipline issues, restorative practices, our new policy.

Jordana Ash: And I would just add that calling in a mental health consultant or engaging parents when a center or a provider is already considering expelling a child is too late. It's too late for anyone to really come up with a good solution at that time. It's a very charged issue. It's a complicated issue. There's lots of feelings and real-life considerations involved once a child is becoming sort of in the focus for either suspensions or expulsions.

So, what I would suggest, is building those relationships prior to the advent of challenging behaviors so that if you have mental health consultants and they can visit regularly with your centers and communities, so that they're a known entity, they're seen as a resource for all kinds of typical behavior concerns, as well as challenging behaviors, that then they have relationships to access and to be part of planning when a problem may arise, so that calling the mental health consultant in -- and often times, we've heard stories when really what a center or a provider wants to do, is just to kind of get the okay that, yes, that's the only option.

And really, we want to be called in way before that, so that we're partnering in an authentic way with parents and providers in the best interest of that child.

Shantel Meek: Great. Thank you so much to both of you for sharing all this really great knowledge and giving it some concrete examples of what this looks like at the State and local level.

We didn't get to all the questions, but we will definitely be looking and considering all of them. Just a reminder the third and fourth webinars in this series are in the next couple of weeks. The dates are highlighted in red. Next week, we'll focus on prevention and intervention, and the last week will focus on data.

So, thank you again to everyone for joining the webinar today, and have a great day.

Jordana Ash: Thank you.

(END)