Preschool Expulsion and Suspension: Policy and Practice Implications for Administrators, Teachers, and Teacher Education

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Presenters and Agenda

◆ Preschool Expulsion and Suspension: Overview and Implications for Administrators and Teacher Education—Dee Stegelin, Ph.D.-Institute for Child Success-Senior Fellow and Professor Emerita-Clemson University

◆ Teacher Strategies for Working with Children At-Risk for Suspension and Expulsion---Jill Shelnut, M.Ed., Lecturer-Early Childhood Education, Clemson University

◆ Policy Issues and Recommendations Related to Preschool Suspension and Expulsion—Mary C. Garvey, M.S.- Institute for Child Success-Director of Innovation and Inclusion
According to NAEYC nearly 9000 three- and four- year old children are expelled from their state-funded programs each year. This practice also impacts very young children, including infants and toddlers in childcare settings.

Parents and families are also effected by this disruptive practice.

The ACES research informs us about the increasing number of young children with traumatic life experiences in early learning settings.
Goals of this Presentation

• Provide information to professionals about this complex issue.

• Recognize the disparities in this practice that impact children by gender, size, race, and developmental needs.

• Discuss policy implications for school administrators, teachers, and parents.

• Share effective teacher strategies to eliminate this practice.

• Discuss the many policy issues related to preschool suspension and expulsion.
According to the Education Commission of the States (ECS) (2018), states are increasingly addressing this issue through state level legislation.

- Early research published in 2005 found that preschool children are expelled at three times the rate of children in Kindergarten through 12th grade. (Gilliam, W. S., 2005).

- Importantly, the majority of these young children, at least 42% of preschool children suspended, are identified as African American boys. (Gilliam, 2005; Dobbs, 2005).

- Preschool expulsion and suspension is reported in all ECE settings: childcare, preschool, Head Start and other publicly funded preschool settings.
Consequences of Preschool Expulsion and Suspension

- **Traumatic event for the child and the family**
  - Child’s self-esteem and sense of safety is damaged.
  - Family’s trust in the school is lessened.
  - Expelled preschooler is more likely to drop out of school later on.
  - Children with mental health issues may experience more serious health issues after expulsion.

- **Nationwide, over 65% of all parents are fully employed**
  - Suspension and expulsion disrupts the family’s life and parents’ work patterns
  - Many centers or schools using expulsion do not provide support for transition to another site.
  - Parents often do not receive support in addressing the child’s needs.
Brief Literature Review

• Limited research has been conducted on preschool suspension and expulsion, and there is a need to further study this phenomenon.

• Four studies are briefly reviewed.
Gilliam & Shabar (2005)

- Landmark study by the Yale Child Study Center researchers Gilliam and Shabar (2005) investigated rates and predictors of preschool expulsion and suspension in a sample of Massachusetts’s preschool teachers in a variety of settings (N = 119).
- During a 12-month period, 39% of teachers reported expelling at least one child, and 15% reported suspending.
- In this study, the rate of preschool expulsion was more than 34 times the Massachusetts K-12 rate and more than 13 times the national K-12 rate.
- In contrast, suspension rates for preschoolers were less than that for K-12.
Longstreth, Brady, & Kay (2013)

• A second important study, based on data from licensed service providers in Arizona, Longstreth, Brady, & Kay, (2013) focused on discipline policies and the issue of challenging child behaviors utilized in typical preschool settings in the U.S.

• This study is relevant to contemporary early childhood classrooms as an increasing number of children with behavioral issues are reported in early childhood settings. In addition, research confirms that children with challenging behaviors are also more likely to be suspended or expelled.
In a 2016 study, which received widespread media attention, Dr. Walter Gilliam and colleagues from the Yale Child Study Center focused on *implicit teacher bias* in preschool settings.

Researchers found that many preschool teachers have personal perceptions or biases about children and their behaviors *based on gender, race, and physical size.*
Knopf and Googe (2018)

- Focused on the prevalence of use of suspension and expulsion practices in licensed and registered child care providers in South Carolina.

- Are there differences in prevalence of reported use related to child care provider type (i.e. center-based or family/group child care home)?

- Findings indicated that center-based programs were more likely to report suspension/expulsion than were home-based programs (31% vs. 12%).

- This study also examined the frequency of challenging behavior by program type as well as other practices related to disciplinary decisions.

(See Googe & Knopf- ICS Brief: Exploring the prevalence of suspension and expulsion practices in child care settings in South Carolina, December 2018)
Disparities among Preschool Population

- The recent Gilliam study has implications for future research on disparities among the preschool population related to preschool expulsion and suspension.
  - Males are suspended or expelled at greater rates than females.
  - African-American and Latino males are at-risk.
  - Children physically larger are at-risk.
  - Children with behavioral challenges are at-risk.
  - Children with special needs are at-risk.
Implications of study for teachers

- Teachers and other professionals who work with young children need education and understanding about their own perceptions and biases about young children.
  - Teacher perceptions are often not realized.
  - Teacher biases seem to be more subtle and based on own experiences and influences.
  - Teacher biases need to be identified, understood, and addressed.
Summary of Research

• These studies reflect the complexity of preschool expulsion and suspension. Variables associated with the practice of expulsion and suspension are found in:
  
  1. Individual child profile: race, size, gender, and developmental status.
  
  2. Environmental factors: class size, teacher-child ratio, age ranges, and access to resources.
  
  3. Teachers’ perception of child: implicit bias, experience level, and self-awareness.
Implications for Administrators

- *Increase awareness and knowledge*: suspension/expulsion practices and knowledge of federal and state statutes.

- *Assess school and community resources*: screening, formal developmental assessment, and intervention for behavioral and mental health needs.

- *Provide professional development*: teachers and professional staff related to implicit biases and attitudes towards children.

- *Form a school-based team*: review, revise, and develop new policies related to challenging behaviors and school philosophy about suspension and expulsion: move toward exclusion of this policy.

- *Provide workshops for parents*: inform them of their rights and their child’s rights within the school setting as well as resources.

- *Create an inclusive school climate* that welcomes parents.
Expulsion and Suspension Policies

- Develop policies that *eliminate or severely* limit expulsion, suspension, or other exclusionary discipline.

- *Exclusionary measures should be a last resort* where there is determination of a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced by reasonable modifications.

- *Appropriate transitions* should be carried out as a team.

- *Additional procedural safeguards* provided for children with disabilities and special needs

- Ensure that *policies and practices are aligned* with State and Federal statutes.
“An after-school program run by Chicago Youth Centers has seen significant improvement in children’s behaviors since staff began working with Lauren Wiley, an early childhood mental health consultant.”

- Lauren observes in classrooms and listens to teachers, children, and parents.
- She assesses the CAUSES of the behavior and then works to find solutions.
- She opens communication between the administrators, teachers, and parents.
- The behavior is seen as a symptom of trauma, not as an act of violence or defiance.

https://hechingerreport.org/expelled-preschool/
Case Study: Danny

“A few years ago, 4-year-old Danny was on the verge of being expelled from a Chicago preschool for violent behavior when a woman named Lauren Wiley was called in to help.

“She met with the boy’s teacher, who thought he needed to be medicated for attention deficit disorder. But as Wiley listened, the teacher admitted she was angry at Danny, whose name has been changed to protect his identity. Her job was to keep her students safe, she said, and the boy’s aggression made her feel like a failure. Next, Wiley and the teacher met with Danny’s mom. As the teacher dropped her judgmental attitude, it came out that Danny had watched his father beat his mother and get taken away in handcuffs. No one had ever talked to the child about what he saw. He did not have ADD. He was reeling from trauma, and he needed his teacher to like him and want to help him, not to be rid of him. That began to happen when she heard his story.”

https://hechingerreport.org/expelled-preschool/
Implications for Teacher Education

In-Service Teachers Professional Development

- Social-Emotional Learning
- Mental health issues
- ACES and trauma
- Federal guidelines on expulsion and suspension.
- Implicit biases and our attitudes toward others
Pre-Service Teachers

• Include coursework and field-experiences that require student reflection on personal biases.

• *Diversify the teacher education* student candidate pool to include minority representation and males.

• Place teacher education students in *practicum settings that vary widely*: SES, race, language, and developmental status and ability.

• Promote *reflective practice* that strengthens the emerging teacher’s ability to *self-correct*.
Resources for Professionals


Transition

- Teacher Strategies for Working with Children At-Risk for Suspension and Expulsion---
  - Jill Shelnut, M.Ed.-Lecturer, Early Childhood Education, Clemson University
Teacher Strategies for Working with Children At-Risk for Suspension/Expulsion

Jill C. Shelnut
Clemson University
Case study: Adam
Four-year-old Adam is in his first year of preschool. He loves his teachers and is always excited to come to school, yet his teachers describe his behavior as “out of control.” At times he screams, curses at his classmates and teachers, and destroys classroom materials and other children’s artwork—all seemingly without cause. Unbeknownst to his teachers, Adam has been witnessing domestic violence and experiencing physical abuse since birth. Furthermore, Adam’s mom works the night shift and his dad works the day shift at the same 24-hour diner. Because of his parents’ schedules, there are times when Adam wakes in the morning and finds himself home alone.
What about Adam?

- What are some of the behaviors that Alex displayed in his preschool classroom?
  - Screaming
  - Cursing
  - Destroying others’ property
  - “Out of control” at times
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What about Adam?

- Why do you think he is displaying these behaviors?
  - Fear
  - Confusion
  - Lack of consistency
  - Lack of trust
  - Adults model these behaviors at home
  - No one is helping him find a solution
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What about Adam?

- How will this trauma negatively impact him as a learner?
  - Undermine his ability to learn
  - Difficulty creating healthy attachments
  - Trouble forming supportive relationships
  - Hard to follow classroom expectations
  - Potentially lead to being suspended or expelled...
Four-year-old Adam is in his first year of preschool. He loves his teachers and is always excited to come to school, yet his teachers describe his behavior as “out of control.” At times he screams, curses at his classmates and teachers, and destroys classroom materials and other children’s artwork—all seemingly without cause. Unbeknownst to his teachers, Adam has been witnessing domestic violence and experiencing physical abuse since birth. Furthermore, Adam’s mom works the night shift and his dad works the day shift at the same 24-hour diner. Because of his parents’ schedules, there are times when Adam wakes in the morning and finds himself home alone.
Will Adam’s joy and excitement about school continue if he continues being disciplined for his behavior?
Preschoolers’ Reactions to Trauma

- Over- or under-reacting to sensory input (physical contact, bright light, sudden movement, loud sounds)
- Increased distress
- Anxiety, fear, and worry about safety of self and others
- Worry about recurrence of the traumatic event
- New fears
- Statements and questions about death and dying
### Preschoolers’ Reactions to Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separation anxiety toward teachers/caregivers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Regression in previously mastered stages of development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of developmental progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreating the traumatic event (talking, playing, drawing)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty sleeping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased somatic complaints</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changes in behavior (e.g., appetite, unexplained absences, angry outbursts, decreased attention, withdrawal)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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What are some ways teachers could support a child such as Adam?
## Recommendations / Best Practices: Preschool Teachers

**Create and maintain**

Consistent daily routines for classrooms.
- Use daily calendars, visual schedules, and photos of the class routine.

**Tell**

Children when something out of the ordinary will occur.
- Provide warning in advance to prepare young children for changes.

**Offer**

Children developmentally appropriate choices.
- Empower children by allowing them to make choices about food, seating, etc.

**Anticipate**

Difficult periods and transitions during school days.
- Offer extra support for children during these times.
Recommendations / Best Practices: Preschool Teachers

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Be</th>
<th>Create and use</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Teach children breathing techniques and mindfulness activities.</td>
<td>- Reenacting them through play or through interactions with adults.</td>
<td>- But, be sensitive to children’s individual triggers.</td>
<td>- Connect feelings to actions.</td>
</tr>
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Classroom Idea

- Display photos of your students.
- Using Post-It notes:
  - Place a **GREEN** sticky note on the photos of children with whom you have connected.
  - Place a **YELLOW** sticky note on the photos of children whom you feel you know, but not very well.
  - Place a **RED** sticky note on the photos of children with whom you have not yet connected or do not know much about.
- Make an effort to connect with your RED and YELLOW students.
- These students are likely to be the ones who need the most support.
Engage and include families in the program or school in caring and nonjudgmental ways.

Correspond often through email and telephone.

Hold regularly scheduled meetings.

Invite families into the classroom to volunteer.
Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings

The purpose of this policy statement is to support families, early childhood programs, and States by providing recommendations from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED) for preventing and severely limiting expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings.
Policy Resources

• **Stepping Stones to Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards** - assist programs in establishing disciplinary and expulsion/suspension policies

• **Birth to Five Watch Me Thrive** - enhance developmental and behavioral screening practices in early learning settings

• **National Center on Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Center for the Social Emotional Foundation for Early Learning (CSEFEL), and the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI)** - bolster staff training on social-emotional and behavioral support for very young children
Additional Teacher Recommendation

• If a child in your classroom is working with an outside specialist (such as a trauma specialist or a child therapist), ask for the family’s permission to invite the specialist to the classroom so that you can collaborate together to better support the child.
Policy Issues & Recommendations Related to Preschool Suspension & Expulsion
ICS Mission

The success of all young children.
ICS Recommendations

- Fair and appropriate policies
- Invest in and support highly skilled workforce
- Universal developmental and behavioral screening
Recommendations Continued

- Specialized supports for administrators & educators
- Strengthen family partnerships
- Set goals & track data
What Does it Mean to Be Fair and Appropriate?

Policies implemented *without* bias

- Minimize exclusionary practices
- Exclusionary as last resort only in cases of violence
Racial Bias Inherent in Preschool Expulsion

The Adultification of Black Children

“A social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children in the absence of knowledge of children’s behavior and verbalizations.”

The Danger in Adultification

Black Girls Need Less:

Exclusionary Discipline Outcomes

Pre-K Suspension & Expulsion Legislation

Source: 50States.com Blank Outline State Maps <https://www.50states.com/maps/>
Overview and Common Themes

- Legislation since 2014
- Includes pre-K through grade 3
- Specifies “out-of-school-suspension”
- **Exceptions**: threats to health and/or safety
The Need for a Highly Skilled Workforce

Invest in educators with trainings:

- Implicit Bias
- Equity and Inclusion
- Cultural Humility

Support educators:

- 1:10 teacher student ratios
- Monitor & minimize stress
- Fair compensation
EQUITY

- Social justice
- Diversity and inclusion
- Opportunity
- Fairness
- Ownership
- Justice
- Equality
- Money
- Equal
- Choice
- Happiness
- Freedom
- Investment
- Team
- Agency
- Harmony
- Safety net
- Level playing field
- Quality education
- Equal opportunity
- Starting off in the same place
- Compensated
- Symbiotic
- System that works
- Misunderstood
- Access
- Voice
- Wealth
- Policy
- Power
- Power
- Choice
- Money
- Goal
- Better
- Wakanda
- Firm
- Reciprocated
- Living wage
What is Equity?

The state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair.

Trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives

Source: Race Equity & Inclusion Action Guide Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014
How Can We Best Prepare for Aggressive/Disruptive Behaviors?

Implement universal development and behavioral screenings, so that we know what is truly happening and can provide children with what they need.
Equity vs. Equality: Meeting Children Where They Are

Equity ≠ Sameness

Picture Source: Race Equity & Inclusion Action Guide Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014
Another Look: Equity vs. Equality

Removal of Systemic Barriers

Picture Source: Internet/unknown source
The Benefits of Specialized Supports

Mental Health Consultants & Behavior Coaches

Identify Needs

Manage/Prevent Behavior & Promote Development
Strengthen Family Partnerships

- Identify Concerns
- Collaborate on Solutions
- Share Strategies
Commit to Learning More

- Set goals and track data
- Identify disparities
"[Inequity and bias] generate a feeling of inferiority as to [a child's] status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

~adapted from Chief Justice Earl Warren and the Brown v. Board decision
Protecting Childhood
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS