Supporting Children’s Social and Emotional Needs and Reducing Early Childhood Expulsions

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Councilmember Charles Allen has been a member of the D.C. council for close to one year and represents Ward 6. For over a decade, Allen has worked in Ward 6 neighborhoods - helping bring about school reforms, working with small businesses, and improving the community.

Allen is a member of the Council's Committees on Education, Transportation and the Environment, and Business, Consumer, and Regulatory Affairs. He serves on the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Transportation Planning Board and was named an Early Learning Fellow by the National Conference of State Legislatures. He also serves on the NCSL's standing committees on Education, Natural Resources & Infrastructure, and Law, Criminal Justice, & Public Safety.
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Phillip S. Strain, Ph.D.
University of Colorado Denver
“The Way One Defines A Problem Will Determine In Large Measure The Strategies Used to Solve It”

- Nicholas Hobbs (1965)
The Problem

- Expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings about 3 to 34 times greater than in K-12!
  - And this does not include “soft” suspension and expulsion

- Expulsion and suspension used disproportionally with, among others, Black males, American Indian, Native-Alaskan, and Hispanic Children

- High probability that removals serve to exacerbate child challenging behaviors they are designed to fix (as demonstrated by multiple removals)

- High probability that negative emotional, financial, and connectedness consequences accrue to affected families

- And, to state the obvious, if you are not there, there is no chance of reaping the benefit of early care and education
Problem Explanations

(L.E.=Lots of Evidence; S.E.=Small Amount of; M.E.=Medium Evidence)

- Children’s challenging behaviors are the product of skill deficits (LE)
- Children displaying evidence of mental health issues primarily from exposure to violence (SE)
- Early care and education systems stretched too thin (adult:child ratios, length of day, number of dollars) (ME)
- Adult skill deficits at play (including bias) (LE)
- Adults displaying evidence of mental health/stress issues (SE)
- Systemic permissiveness regarding disinviting children and families (ME)
- A combination of above (LE)
There’s Good News as Well!

Colorado’s Work to Reduce Expulsions from Public-Funded Child Care
2006
Baseline:
10 in 1,000
rate of expulsion and probability of using an EBP for challenging behavior: 4%

2008
Multi-Level Assault on the Problem

2011
Follow-up:
4 in 1,000 rate of expulsion and probability of using an EBP for challenging behavior: 18%
Multi-Level Assault on the Problem

1. Cross-sector state team (Child Care, Head Start, Public Pre-K, ECSE, Mental Health, Child Welfare, Higher Ed) building PD system around Pyramid Model (Career Ladder, QRIS, Director Requirements, Higher Education Courses, Common Language and Training Across Agencies)

2. Model centers that agreed to zero-reject immediately and to provide fidelity and outcome data (80% fidelity in two years, average 70% reduction in children at-risk)

3. Certification of coaches (60) for state-wide coverage (based on coachee’s behavior change)

4. Adoption of evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies (Pyramid Model in this case) (and elimination of state-support for non EBPs)

5. Permitting EC MH consultants to bill for PD directed to providers

6. Scale-up of model centers via community collaboration dollars
The Pyramid Model: Promoting Social and Emotional Competence and Addressing Challenging Behavior

- **Universal Promotion:** All Children
- **Secondary Prevention:** Some Children
- **Tertiary Intervention:** Few Children

- **Effective Workforce**
- **Nurturing and Responsive Relationships**
- **High Quality Supportive Environments**
- **Targeted Social Emotional Supports**
- **Intensive Intervention**
- **Assessment based intervention that results in individualized behavior support plans**

High Quality early childhood environments promote positive outcomes for all children. Supportive responsive relationships among adults and children is an essential component to promote healthy social emotional development.

Systems and policies promote and sustain the use of evidence-based practices.
Contact Information & Resources

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- http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/
- http://challengingbehavior.org/
- http://www.pyramidmodel.org/
Council of the District of Columbia
Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act of 2015

Councilmember Charles Allen, Ward 6
Member, DC Council Committee on Education
Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act of 2015

• Prohibits the suspension or expulsion of a student of pre-kindergarten age from any publicly funded pre-kindergarten program
• Establishes annual reporting requirements on suspensions and expulsions data for all grades
• Introduced by Education Committee Chairman David Grosso
• Co-Introduced by Councilmembers Allen, Orange, Nadeau, Alexander, McDuffie, Cheh, Evans, Bonds, Silverman, and Chairman Mendelson
Diagnosing The Problem
Pre-Kindergarten Suspensions Often Result From Age-Appropriate Behaviors Or Adult Actions

Many pre-kindergarten students are suspended for:

- temper tantrums
- classroom disruption
- repeated vulgarity
- bathroom mishaps
- repeated tardiness
- dress code violations
Understanding the School-to-Prison Pipeline

• In 1994, discipline in school settings began to change profoundly with the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act.
• “Zero Tolerance” discipline policies greatly limit the discretion of school administrators in individual cases.
• Many school districts employ discipline policies that push students into the criminal justice system—a phenomenon known as the school-to-prison pipeline.
• With blanket penalties and increased enforcement of student misconduct, the suspension rates increased dramatically.
Suspensions Disproportionately Target The Students Who Need Preschool Most

• According to Walter Gilliam, the director of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at the Yale University Child Study Center, who has done research on preschool student discipline:

"If you have a preschool program and you expel the children who need it the most, you're sabotaging your rate of return. No child is more in need of school-readiness-boosting preschool experience than a child who is being expelled or suspended from preschool... We would never send a child home because that child was struggling at reading. We would never send a child home if that child was struggling with math. Why would we send a child home for struggling with social-emotional skills?"
Preschool Suspensions Disproportionately Affect Children of Color And Boys

- African American children represent 18% of preschool enrollment but represent 48% of preschool children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension.
- Boys represent 82% of preschool children suspended multiple times although they represent just 54% of enrollment.

Legislative Solutions
Many Jurisdictions Have Already Put Policies In Place To Limit Or Ban Suspension For Students In Early Grades

- Chicago Public Schools Board of Education
- Minneapolis Public Schools
- Baltimore Public Schools
- State of California
- Dayton Public Schools Board of Education
- New York City Department of Education
- Buffalo Public Schools Board of Education
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- Syracuse City School District
- Rochester School District
- State of New Jersey
- State of Washington
- District of Columbia
Working With Charter School Leaders On Autonomy Concerns

• The DC Public Charter School Board testified that they focus on transparency and information sharing to reduce suspension and expulsions in charter schools rather than strict mandates or requirements.

• They asked to consider delaying this legislation for a year as the charter sector is making progress in reducing preschool suspensions and/or amend the definition of suspension and allow for further flexibility in the exceptions to protect students from injury and disruptive behaviors.

• They also asked that the Council continue to work with the PCSB to find more resources for charter schools to hire and train mental health professionals and behavioral specialist that can help support students before discipline becomes necessary.
Legislative Compromises: What Changed?

• “Suspension” redefined less broadly to mean removing a student for an entire school day. New definition would allow schools to send students home to de-escalate or to leave the classroom for a therapeutic setting.

• Exceptions were revised to eliminate possession of weapons or drugs/alcohol as grounds for pre-k suspension. Those circumstances indicate problems in the home environment which suspension would only exacerbate. Best addressed by Child & Family Services Agency.

• “Bodily injury” redefined to give school leaders more flexibility to suspend students who willfully harm classmates.

• Reporting requirements increased to include in-school suspensions and voluntary transfers; added reporting categories for English Language Learners and “at risk” students.
A First Step In Banning Most Suspensions For All Students?

• Many advocates testified in support of amending the legislation to include students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Exclusionary discipline practices for non-violent infractions such as tardy arrivals, dress code violations, and disruptive behavior exacerbate the achievement gap, leaving the kids who need the most support even further behind.

• Advocates asked for additional requirements for DC to provide technical assistance to public schools that are suspending and expelling students at a higher rate than their peer schools. Support for additional staffing to facilitate alternative discipline measures such as classroom removal and restorative justice.
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• An archived version will be available shortly, please visit: ncsl.org/research/human-services/supporting-children-s-social-emotional-needs-and-reducing-prekindergarten-expulsions.aspx

• Learn more about the Early Learning Fellows Program ncsl.org/research/human-services/early-learning-fellows-program.aspx

• Learn more about NCSL’s Early Care and Education project: ncsl.org/research/human-services/early-care-and-education.aspx

• Connect with the Early Care and Education staff:
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