



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

SPOTLIGHTING PROGRESS IN POLICY AND SUPPORTS

A 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.

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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.¹

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 teachers, providers, 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. Since then, States and local communities around the country have also started to take action. From **Colorado 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 teachers and providers.

This document summarizes the Federal policy recommendations released in December 2014, and profiles 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 their 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:

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

State and Local Innovators

- Arkansas
- Chicago
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Maine
- New York City
- Ohio
- Washington
- Washington, D.C.

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

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.

Increased nationwide awareness of early expulsion and suspension, combined with the child poverty rate, ongoing social-emotional and behavioral health concerns for Arkansas’ youngest, and promising results from the State’s early childhood mental health consultation program (Project PLAY), 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 National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) ranks Arkansas as 5th in the nation for access to pre-K among three-year olds and 12th among four-year olds. The ABC program meets 9 of 10 of NIEER’s quality benchmarks. 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.

Arkansas also has 2,313 licensed child care centers and family child care homes in the State, of which 1% are nationally accredited. In 2015, Arkansas’ Minimum Child Care Licensing Requirements were revised, in part, to enhance their support for children’s social-emotional development. For example, the new rules lowered teacher-child ratios for children under 36 months of age and required child care programs to use curricula that promote social-emotional development.

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).”

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 area’s 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.²

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 prompted additional action. 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.*

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

Continuing Progress-Next Steps

Arkansas’ workgroup to address expulsion and suspension plans to continue the important progress made to date. In particular, they have committed to rolling-out several new initiatives in 2016, including:

- Embedding new non-suspension/expulsion policies in the participant agreement for child care centers accepting child care vouchers to align with ABC’s existing policy.
- Adding content on expulsion/suspension prevention in the annual CCDF policy test that providers are required to take.
- Requiring parent notification of non-expulsion policies.
- Hosting a series statewide training events on the theme that ‘Quality Programs Support All Children’ to promote a better understanding of the issue by the workforce.
- Providing child care program directors with training resources to build teacher capacity.
- Developing and disseminating tools for centers that wish to voluntarily adopt stronger non-suspension/expulsion policies, such as sample center-level policies and self-assessment tools.
- Providing the workforce with a stronger professional development path in the social-emotional domain, including training on the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social-Emotional Competence.
- Launching a new suspension and expulsion data tracking and technical assistance system for the State ABC preschool program.

² Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) is a multi-level preventive intervention that teams mental health professionals with people who work with young children and their families. ECMHC builds the capacity of teachers, providers and families to address challenging behavior and promote social-emotional development, and includes the strengthening of teacher-family relationships, skilled observations, modeling and coaching, the identification of children with or at-risk for behavioral, developmental or mental health difficulties, and linkages to additional support services for children, families, or teachers. ECMHC has demonstrated impacts for improving children’s social skills, reducing challenging behaviors, reducing preschool suspensions and expulsions, improving child-adult relationships, increasing family-school collaboration, increasing classroom quality (i.e. CLASS scores), and reducing teacher stress, burnout, and turnover.

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 their 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.

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."

Supports to Providers and Teachers

CPS paired their 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.

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.

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, their work to better support schools, teachers, students, and their families in this important area, continues. Next steps include:

Analyzing their data to assess the impact of their 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.

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 providers 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 peer 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 with the intent to reduce challenging behavior and prevent suspensions and expulsions.
 - Access an early childhood mental health consultant or other specialist as needed.

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.”*

Supports to Providers and Teachers

To meet the increased requirements for child care providers, Colorado expanded professional development opportunities. Online courses are available through Colorado’s Professional Development Information System, funded through the State’s Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant. The Colorado Office of Early

Childhood, Mental Health Unit develops and disseminates resources to create and sustain socially and emotionally healthy environments and relationships in child care settings.

Colorado's Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Specialist program, funded with State general funds since 2006, is also a valuable tool for child care providers. However, 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. The measure passed both chambers unanimously and was signed by the Governor in March of 2016.

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.

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 identified from the pilot communities was reduction in expulsions when child care programs had access to the service. The success of the pilots led to funding for the statewide ECMH Specialists program in 2006.

Colorado also has a strong network of stakeholders who have rallied together on multiple issues to champion the needs of young children and those who care for them, 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 was a long-standing workgroup on early childhood expulsions, comprised of children's advocacy groups, academics, State departments, and community non-profits. This group submitted recommendations to the Colorado Office of Early Childhood when the child care rule revisions were underway, encouraging the increased use of mental health consultation as a means to reduce expulsions.

Additional action was spurred by capitalizing on the State's early childhood mental health strategic plan, HHS' and ED's policy statements around expulsion and suspension, the reauthorization of the Child Care Development Fund, and the policy paper *Young Minds Matter: Supporting Children's Mental Health through Policy Change*.

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 providers have the tools they need to support all children, including:

- Administering a rigorous evaluation study of the rate of suspension and expulsion from child care programs, including disaggregating data by race, gender, and family economic status;
- Disseminating recent data, disaggregated by race and gender, of out-of-school suspension rates for children in Kindergarten through 3rd grade, which indicates disproportionality for boys, and specifically African American boys;
- Establishing an early childhood mental health consultation infrastructure hub to ensure financing, consistency of practice, support, and evaluation for all Colorado's EMCH consultants;
- Increasing access for child care providers to the infant and early childhood mental health training modules being created by the Colorado Association for Infant Mental Health;
- Promoting the Endorsement for Culturally-Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant Mental Health®, which recognizes competency in early childhood mental health and working with infants, toddlers and their families.

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®.

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.

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 their families, teachers, and caregivers. ECCP® is an evidence-based and nationally recognized 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, caregivers and providers to build their capacity to meet the social-emotional and behavioral needs of young children in their care. ECCP® does this by providing consultation which includes support, education, reflective practice, and other key consultation delivery strategies.

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 findings also indicating significant decreases in challenging behavior in the classroom.

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 their 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.³ 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 providers to whom the suspension and expulsion restrictions apply, to include a broader array of providers who utilize federal and State funding. This effort would be coupled with more access to supports for providers, including early childhood mental health consultation.

³

Gilliam, W.S. (2005). *Prekindergartners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center. Available at: www.fcd-us.org/PDFs/NationalPreKExpulsionPaper03.02_new.pdf. [Also appears in abbreviated form under the same title as *Foundation for Child Development Policy Brief Series*, No. 3. Available at: www.fcd-us.org/PDFs/ExpulsionFinalProof.pdf]

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.

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.

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

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 providers and 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, 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 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.

EarlyLearn NYC is the City's birth to five initiative which merges child care, Head Start and Universal Pre-Kindergarten 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.

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.*"

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 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 capacity of Pre-K for All programs to:

- Build strong relationships with children and families
- Differentiate children’s social emotional learning
- 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 reflected 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 their public preschool program over the last several years. Most recently, their 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 found that 11.6% had experienced a suspension or expulsion prior to the administration of the survey.⁴

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, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (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 **doubles** funding for ECMH capacity in the State and **more than triples** the number of ECMHC 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.

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.

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 will fund 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 Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, 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 or 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 providers 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 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 (ECMH) 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 Governor Kasich 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.

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- 35%. Of these, 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 nine out of the ten 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 providers had asked a child to leave the program due to behavioral concerns in the past five years. These 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 their 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. Top prevent expulsions and suspensions, ECEAP providers are required address preventive practices including:

- *Supporting classroom teachers*
- *Planning to meet individual needs of child*
- *Engaging community resources*
- *Choosing an alternative schedule or setting*

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.

Transitions to an alternative setting, planned jointly by staff and parents, are not considered expulsion. Their 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 providers, Head Start and Early Head Start teachers and State pre-K teachers. In 2013, using funding from their 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 keep 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 providers.

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 their 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 their professional development efforts, accompanied by messaging that high quality programs, do not expel or suspend.

Data collectors and coaches also heard from early learning providers 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 their 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 in the summer.

WASHINGTON, DC

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.

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..."*

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 1st 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 Office of the State Superintendent 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 act 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 is a national leader in access and funding public pre-K, early care and education leaders and legislators in DC report that future work will be focus on: 1) expanding the expulsion and suspension policies to higher grades; 2) addressing equity issues; 3) expanding the number of high quality programs; and 4) implementing a robust consumer information tool that better supports parent choices and informs the public about the quality of early care and education program.

Conclusion

As is demonstrated across these profiles, States and communities are beginning to implement policy solutions and enhance supports to teachers and providers 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, **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—or taking the lead from- families, teachers, and the advocacy community** to ensure that their voices are heard and that the policies and practices that are 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.