

ANNOUNCEMENT

Subsidized Child Care Services - S-17 #05
Child Care Certification Services- C-17#04
Early Intervention Services - EI-17#02
FC/PRF- 17#03
Early Learning Services – KS-17#04
ELS-17#03

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SUBJECT: Reduction of Expulsion and Suspension in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania

TO: Pennsylvania Early Learning Programs

FROM: Suzann L. Morris, MPA 
Deputy Secretary, Office of Child Development & Early Learning

PURPOSE:

The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED) released a [policy statement](#) recommending that states develop policies and practices to significantly limit the practice of expulsion and suspension of young children in all early childhood programs (2014). This announcement provides the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) response to the HHS & ED federal policy. This announcement incorporates key principles and recommendations for implementing family engagement across systems and within programs as outlined in the Policy Statement on [Family Engagement from the Early Years to the Early Grades](#) (2016). This Announcement and OCDEL Announcement *Inclusion of All Children in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania* are intentional companion Announcements to support quality early childhood programs.

The purpose of this announcement is to:

1. Raise awareness of the HHS and ED policy statements,
2. Provide guidance to OCDEL funded programs regarding appropriate behavior support practices and the reduction of expulsion and suspension of young children,
3. Provide guidance to OCDEL funded programs in how to support family engagement in an inclusive manner that respects the cultural and individual preferences of families,
4. Identify resources available to local programs to support staff and prevent expulsion, and
5. Specify implementation steps to be taken at the local and state level.

BACKGROUND:

HHS and ED provide federal funding to a wide variety of Pennsylvania early childhood programs and initiatives, including Child Care Works; Child Care Certification; Early Head Start; Head Start; Early Intervention (EI); Home Visiting Programs, and Keystone STARS. As a recipient of these federal funds, OCDEL is acting on the recommendations to develop and disseminate a program policy statement to early childhood programs who are recipients of these funds through OCDEL. This OCDEL announcement also applies to programs receiving state funding including Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, and Family Centers (which receives both federal and state funding).

Recent data indicate that expulsions and suspensions occur at high rates in preschool settings and are associated with negative educational and life outcomes. In addition, racial and gender disparities often exist in these practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Although the national incidence data specifically addresses preschool, this announcement and the recommended strategies are intended to also prevent suspension and expulsion of infants and toddlers.

For the purposes of this announcement, expulsion is the complete and permanent removal of a child from an early childhood program because of challenging behavior or non-infectious health condition. Suspension is an action that is administered as a consequence of a child's inappropriate behavior and requires that a child not be present in the classroom or the program for a specified period of time (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). All of the following actions are included in this definition of suspension:

1. Excluding a child from the classroom, whether by placing him/her in another part of the building, or excluding the child from the building;
2. Sending a child home early or limiting the number of hours per day (s)he can attend; or
3. Un-enrolling a child because (s)he is "not a good fit" with the program.

DISCUSSION:

OCDEL's vision is to support families and their children, from prenatal through school age, by using data, research, and stakeholder guidance to assure high-quality services. Through our mission, OCDEL is committed to provide families with access to high-quality services and the supports needed to participate in play and learning activities that will prepare children for school and life success.

Suspension and expulsion does nothing to teach appropriate behavior and denies children the opportunity to access the benefits of an early childhood program. In

January 2014, HHS and ED developed recommendations and guidance for improving school climate and discipline. This information, contained within [Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline](#), includes the following objectives:

1. Create positive climates and focus on prevention.
2. Develop clear, appropriate, and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive behaviors.
3. Ensure fairness, equity, and continuous improvement. (p. 1)

These objectives apply equally to all settings that serve young children and require support for the adults, as well as the children, in those settings.

Research indicates that family engagement in a child's learning and development impacts lifelong health, developmental, and academic outcomes, and that families are children's first and most important teachers, advocates, and nurturers. The term "family" is inclusive of all adults who interact with early childhood systems in support of their child, to include biological, adoptive, and foster parents; grandparent; legal and informal guardians; and adult siblings. Family engagement also includes processes for families to participate in the development of the policies and procedures of an organization as well as in the individual educational planning for their child.

Establishing positive relationships with families requires that providers are culturally and linguistically responsive to the children and families they serve. Culture refers to integrated patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. When families are invited to share information about their children and their experiences, providers gain a better understanding of children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds and learning preferences. Cultural and linguistic responsiveness also requires that systems, programs and personnel recognize their own cultures and biases, and work to value differing cultures and languages.

To foster commitment to a positive climate and strong relationships with families, early childhood educators have access to the following resources to address the behavioral and social needs of the children and prevent expulsion and suspension:

1. Collaboration among early childhood and other social service programs serving families with young children including EI, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC), Behavioral Health, Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support (PAPBS) Network, and other services;

2. Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood (including the Partnerships for Learning); and
3. Professional Development and Technical Assistance available through the OCDEL Professional Development Systems.

NEXT STEPS:

OCDEL shall take the following steps in order to promote practices that support the implementation of appropriate and positive behavior support practices and reduce and eventually eliminate the incidence of suspension and expulsion:

1. Provide individualized support from the appropriate OCDEL team that may include on site coaching and consultation, for OCDEL funded early childhood programs to help reduce and eliminate suspension and expulsion. Early childhood programs will receive support when they complete the following steps:
 - a. Maintain documentation of children who have been or are at high risk of being suspended or expelled due to behavioral or health challenges; and
 - b. Request support by reporting to OCDEL all incidents of children at high risk for expulsion or suspension or have been asked to leave care. Early Childhood programs requesting support from OCDEL will make the report by calling 1-800-692-7288. This process will become available by August 1, 2017.
2. Provide written guidelines for implementing this announcement.

Local programs identified in the “Background” section of this Announcement shall take the following steps in order to promote the implementation of appropriate and positive behavior support practices and to reduce the incidence of suspension and expulsion:

1. In collaboration with program staff and families, develop and implement a written program policy on:
 - a. How staff are to implement positive behavior strategies,
 - b. Ensuring that all families and program staff are aware of available resources, including:
 - i. Referral to EI, ECMHC, Behavioral Health, and other community-based services, to help maintain the child in their current early childhood program; and
 - ii. Family-oriented resources regarding child development, behavior, social development and other topics.
 - c. Training activities and supports based on the current needs of the early childhood staff and the children and families they serve including

implementing Program Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PW PBIS) with the support of and as described by the PAPBS Network.

- d. Creating culturally sustaining practices such as:
 - i. Hiring practices that promote a diverse staff,
 - ii. Training staff to be culturally sustaining and linguistically responsive,
 - iii. Strategically analyzing the effects of implicit biases within program, and
 - iv. Investing and engaging in partnerships with diverse family leaders and community organizations.
2. In collaboration with program staff and families, establish written procedures to reduce the incidence of suspension or expulsion. Written procedures shall include:
- a. Process for the prevention or resolution of behavioral issues that could lead to expulsion or suspension, including how staff are to engage with families and request assistance from program leadership and/or state or community resources.
 - b. Support for staff to engage in two-way communication with the child's family on challenges and successes.
 - c. Processes for providing resources to the caregivers and families of children who are facing behavioral challenges.
 - d. Specific procedures for a child with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) who is at risk of suspension/expulsion to ensure that the early childhood education (ECE) program contacts the EI program for assistance before the child and family are asked to un-enroll from the ECE program.
 - e. Specific to a child with an IFSP/IEP, the EI Program shall ensure the following procedures:
 - i. A request from an ECE program to the child's EI program for assistance in preventing suspension/expulsion shall result in the EI program responding to the ECE program via phone or email within 48 hours and holding an IFSP or IEP team meeting within ten EI program calendar days* from the date of the request for assistance from the ECE program.
 - ii. If behavior was not previously identified as a special consideration on the IFSP or IEP prior to this request for assistance, EI must include the information in the IFSP/IEP at this time.
 - iii. The parent's procedural safeguards are followed in relation to placement changes.

- f. If a child who has not previously been enrolled in EI is at risk of suspension/expulsion, the child's family must be referred to EI and may be referred to the OCDEL ECMHC Program (if the ECE program is eligible) before the ECE program asks the family to un-enroll from the program. Documentation of the referral must be maintained in the child's record.
 - g. If a child is referred to EI, and the child is found not eligible for EI, the EI program shall coordinate with their local behavior health partners and other community resources to assist families and the ECE program in identifying services for which the child, family and/or program might be eligible.
 - h. Families and early childhood professionals may refer to EI and other services for young children by contacting CONNECT at 1-800-692-7288.
 3. Share the written behavior policies and procedures described above with families and have them sign to indicate their receipt of this information. This should occur before enrollment in an ECE program and on an annual basis thereafter.
 4. Develop a process to record suspension and expulsions within the ECE program.

In any case in which a particular program requirement, whether promulgated at the federal, state or local level, exceeds the protections for children and families found in this announcement, the more protective requirement shall be implemented.

** Preschool EI calendar is the number of days and the length of days in a preschool calendar which extends over an entire 12-month program year. Please work with your local Preschool EI program regarding this timeline.*

RESOURCES:

PA Keys to Quality Professional Development System and Technical Assistance System www.pakeys.org.

OCDEL Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project
www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_ECMH

Early Intervention Technical Assistance Program
www.eita-pa.org

Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support (PAPBS) Network
www.papbs.org

Families and early childhood professionals may refer to EI and other services for young children by contacting CONNECT at 1-800-692-7288.

[*Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings: A Program Leader's Guide to Supporting All Children's Success*](#). The interactive guide includes resources on supporting social-emotional development, reducing challenging behavior, recognizing the role of cultural differences and implicit biases, and more. A self-assessment survey is included to help provide a tailored roadmap to navigating the guide. <http://preventexpulsion.org/>

REFERENCES:

Morrison, G. M., & Skiba, R. J. (2001). Predicting violence from school misbehavior: Promises and perils. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38, 173–184

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<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education, (2014). *Guiding Principles A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf>

U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, (2015). *Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Settings*. <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/earlylearning/joint-statement-full-text.pdf>

U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, Administration for Children and Families (2016) *Policy Statement on Family Engagement from the Early Years to the Early Grades*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/files/policy-statement-on-family-engagement.pdf>