Challenging Behavior and Disenrollment in Early Childhood: Results of a Survey of New Mexico Providers

7th Annual KIDS COUNT Conference
New Mexico Voices for Children
Albuquerque, New Mexico
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Who Are We?

UNM Cradle to Career Policy Institute

Our mission is to produce high-quality research, evaluation, and analysis that supports thoughtful and informed policymaking for children and families.
Who Are We?

Pegasus Legal Services for Children

A private, non-profit agency that serves the civil legal needs of New Mexico’s vulnerable children and youth. Pegasus promotes and defends the rights of children and youth to safe and stable homes, quality education and healthcare, and a voice in decisions that affect their lives.
Who Are We?

City of Albuquerque Family and Community Services

The Division of Child and Family Development is committed to supporting families by working toward self-sufficiency and raising a generation of healthy and self-realized children as a basic foundation for economic development.

The City of Albuquerque is proud to be one of the largest early childhood care and education providers in central New Mexico, with **25 Child Development Centers and 49 classrooms**:

- Early Head Start (13 classrooms)
  - Serving children ages birth to three
- Early NM PreK (3 classrooms)
  - Serving children age three
- NM PreK (15 classrooms)
  - Serving children age four
- Preschool (18 classrooms)
  - Serving children ages three to five
- **Total: 800 children cared for each day by 145 early learning professionals**
Project Elements

- Research suspension & expulsion practices of young children in New Mexico
- National research
- Survey of New Mexico early care and education professionals
- Develop recommendations
- Implement recommendations

Support early care and education professionals as they care for children with challenging behaviors
Early Learning Settings

- Licensed child care centers
- Licensed family home
- New Mexico PreK (PED)
- New Mexico PreK (CYFD)
- Head Start/Early Head Start
- IDEA Part B Special Education
- Registered home
- Licensed group home
- Non-licensed home
Definitions of Suspension/Expulsion

- Excluding a child from the classroom, whether by placing them in another part of the building, or excluding the child from the building;
- Sending a child home early or limiting the number of hours per day they can attend;
- Dis-enrolling a child because they are “not a good fit” with the program.
- Informal push-out, whereby the parent is encouraged to “voluntarily” withdraw the child by school officials, sometimes on the basis of disability.
Why Does This Matter?

- The early years are critical for building the foundations of learning, health, and wellness.
- School expulsion and suspension practices are associated with negative educational, health and developmental outcomes for children.
- Early expulsion can attach labels to very young children that follow them through school.
- Suspension and expulsion do nothing to teach appropriate behavior and deny children the opportunity to access and excel in early learning programs.
Why Does This Matter?

- Suspension and expulsion are stressful and negative experiences for families that can influence adverse outcomes across development, health, and education.

- Young students who are expelled or suspended are as much as 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not.
National Research

- Alarmingly high rates of suspension and expulsion in early learning settings.

- An increase in the use of restraint and seclusion in early learning environments.

- A growing number of children are “pushed out” of early learning settings (can take different forms)

- Student-teacher ratio, length of school day, and teacher stress are all predictors of expulsion.

- More prevalent among certain racial and gender groups, especially children of color and boys.
Early Childhood Expulsion and Boys

- Early childhood expulsion follows the patterns of K-12 expulsion: it disproportionately affects boys, and especially boys of color.

- Dr. Walter Gilliam found that early childhood educators watch black boys more closely for challenging behaviors, even when no challenging behaviors are present.

- Gilliam’s work identifies three main risk factors (“3 Bs”) for being expelled in early childhood: Being a **boy, black, or big** compared to other children in the classroom.
National Regulations and Rules

- Head Start and Early Head Start Performance Standards prohibit expulsion and limit suspension in Head Start programs (45 CFR § 1302.17)
  - Requires programs to take steps to support social, emotional, and other development of children who demonstrate behavioral issues, including consultation with mental health specialist before temporary suspension
National Regulations and Rules

- Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
  - Requires states to make various types of information available to families, the public, and providers, including policies regarding social-emotional health and positive behavioral intervention
  - States must devote portion of funds to at least one quality improvement activity, including behavior management strategies
    - Section 658G(b)(1)(C) of the CCDBG Act, 42 U.S.C. § 9858e(b)(1)(C)
Federal Civil Rights Laws

- **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**
  - prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin by recipients of federal financial assistance
- **Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972**
  - prohibits discrimination based on sex by recipients of federal financial assistance
- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**
  - prohibits discrimination based on disability by recipients of federal financial assistance
- **Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act**
  - prohibits disability discrimination in most private early childhood programs.
Special Education Law

- **Equity in IDEA – Amendment to IDEA, 34 C.F.R. §300.647**
  - Requires states to track disproportionate practices for identification, placement, and disciplinary actions for children with disabilities, including 3 to 5 year olds. Devos tries to delay.
  - Data collection to begin in 2020
  - authorizes schools to place children in interim alternative educational settings and includes provisions regarding manifestation determinations, placements as determined by the IEP team, appeals, and authority of the hearing officer.
  - PWN and due process of early intervention services
Other National Efforts

- U.S. Department of Education guidelines limit use of restraint and seclusion (2014)
State Efforts


- School District Policies to Prohibit Expulsion: Austin, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, El Paso, Houston, Minneapolis, and New York City

- Other efforts:
  - Measures to be taken before exclusion
  - Prevention-based mental health consultation
  - Supportive interventions when behaviors arise: mental health consultation
  - Technical assistance hotline
  - Tracking systems
- Children in child care centers, out of home care, and out of school time care shall receive positive discipline. NMAC 8.16.2
- The following practices are prohibited:
  - (a) physical punishment of any type, including shaking, biting, hitting, pinching or putting anything on or in a child's mouth;
  - (b) withdrawal of food, rest, bathroom access, or outdoor activities;
  - (c) abusive or profane language, including yelling;
  - (d) any form of public or private humiliation, including threats of physical punishment; or
  - (e) unsupervised separation.
2005 Yale study: estimated exclusion rates for all 50 states. NM ranked worst in the nation for preschool discipline (21 PreK expulsions / 1000). Estimated PreK rate was 14x the K-12 rate.

2014 Federal data indicates that students of color are retained in kindergarten at levels disproportionate to their peers:

- 4% of preschool students overall are retained in NM.
- 5% of African American children are retained.
- 6% of Native American children are retained.
The Survey

- Survey of Early Childhood Educators
- Assistance from Columbia University Team
- Emailed Survey
- Survey Open May 15th-July 16th, 2018
- Used Informal Networks, Stakeholders to Circulate
- Included All Types of EC Settings
Response

- Total of 336 Respondents
- Long Survey, With A Lot of Dropoff
- 225 Completed All or Almost All Questions
- Good Representation of Child Care and PreK (both public school and community-based)
- Less Robust for Head Start and Home-Based Care
- No Calculated Response Rate (Denominator Unknown)
Response

- Largest groups are public school PreK and child care settings

- Head Start and home-based care are most undersampled
Results

- Challenging Behavior is Common in Early Learning Settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Hitting, Throwing, Biting, Pushing/Shoving</th>
<th>Frequency of Threatening, Name-Calling, Mean/Angry Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not very common (0-1 day/week)</td>
<td>Not very common (0-1 day/week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly common (2-3 days/week)</td>
<td>Fairly common (2-3 days/week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very common (4-5 days/week)</td>
<td>Very common (4-5 days/week)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Frequency of Challenging Behavior

Frequency of Sad Behavior (Crying, Withdrawing, Not Participating)

- Not very common (0-1 day/week): 38.5%
- Fairly common (2-3 days/week): 36.3%
- Very common (4-5 days/week): 25.2%

Frequency of Refusal to Cooperate, Not Following Instructions

- Not very common (0-1 day/week): 29.2%
- Fairly common (2-3 days/week): 38.1%
- Very common (4-5 days/week): 32.6%
Results: Frequency of Challenging Behavior

Frequency of Worried, Easily Frightened, Scared Behaviors

- Not very common (0-1 day/week): 69.3%
- Fairly common (2-3 days/week): 21.7%
- Very common (4-5 days/week): 9.1%

Frequency of Refusing to Eat

- Not very common (0-1 day/week): 74.8%
- Fairly common (2-3 days/week): 15.7%
- Very common (4-5 days/week): 9.6%
Results: Frequency of Challenging Behavior

In Sum:
- EC Educators Perceive that Challenging Behaviors Are Common
- EC Educators Report Greater Frequency of Externalizing Behaviors, Versus Internalizing Behaviors
- To Consider: Externalizing Behaviors are Harder to Miss
Results: Impact of Challenging Behavior

- Challenging Behavior Has Significant Effects

- Impact on Other Children’s Ability to Learn or Explore
  - Little or no impact: 30.3%
  - Moderate impact: 38.9%
  - Quite a lot of impact: 30.8%

- Impact on Other Children’s Feelings of Security and Wellbeing
  - Little or no impact: 38.2%
  - Moderate impact: 39.1%
  - Quite a lot of impact: 62%
Results: Impact of Challenging Behavior

Impact of Challenging Behavior on Other Children’s Safety

- Little or no impact: 41.8%
- Moderate impact: 33.2%
- Quite a lot of impact: 25.0%

Impact on Teachers’ Ability to Attend to Other Children

- Little or no impact: 26.1%
- Moderate impact: 35.0%
- Quite a lot of impact: 38.9%
Results: Impact of Challenging Behavior

In Sum:
• Educators report that challenging behavior substantially impacts their work, across domains
• Somewhat lower perceived impact to other children’s safety
• Highest perceived impact to educators’ ability to attend to other children

Impact on Teachers’ Wellbeing and Professional Confidence

- Little or no impact: 39.9%
- Moderate impact: 33.5%
- Quite a lot of impact: 26.6%

Bar chart showing the percentage of perceived impact on teachers' wellbeing and professional confidence.
Results: Prevalence by Age

- Our sample has more preschoolers than infants and toddlers

- Avg preschool class size of 16 / Avg # preschoolers w/ CB of 4 → we can estimate 20-25% exhibit challenging behaviors

- Among preschoolers, about 14% of those with challenging behaviors were disenrolled
Results: Disenrollment

The survey question asked EC educators to quantify, by age tier (infant, toddler, preschool), how many children with challenging behavior disenrolled because:

- Parents and staff agreed that the child must leave the program because it could not meet the child’s needs
- Parents told staff they were leaving because the program could not meet the child’s needs
- Staff told parents the child must leave because the program could not meet the child’s needs
Results: Disenrollment

- Larger number of preschoolers, in general
- Fewer staff-initiated disenrollments
- To consider: provider perspective only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disenrollment Scenarios</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents and staff agreed that the infant must leave the program</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and staff agreed that the toddler must leave the program</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and staff agreed that the preschooler must leave the program</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents told staff the infant was leaving the program</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents told staff the toddler was leaving the program</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents told staff the preschooler was leaving the program</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff told parents the infant must leave the program</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff told parents toddler must leave the program</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff told parents preschooler must leave the program</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of 73 providers who had disenrolled a child, 19% had via mutual agreement, 22% had via parent decision, 11% had via staff decision.
Results: Disenrollment by Care Type

Number of Providers Reporting at Least One Child Disenrolled Due to Challenging Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider Type</th>
<th>Mutual agreement</th>
<th>Parent decision</th>
<th>Provider decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home-based care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start/EHS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA Special Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed child care center</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYFD PreK</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED PreK</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Highest numbers in child care centers (28% of the sample)
- PED PreK is the same % of the sample and has significantly lower numbers
Results: Disenrollment by Care Type

Percentage of Providers Reporting at Least One Child Disenrolled Due to Challenging Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CYFD PreK</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed child care center</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA Special Education</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-based care</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start/EHS</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED PreK</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- This includes all disenrollment scenarios
- IDEA Special Education is 2 out of 5 respondents
- These differences are statistically significant (ANOVA)
### Results: Disenrollment by Care Type

Percentage of Providers Reporting at Least One Child Involuntarily Disenrolled Due to Challenging Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licensed child care center</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYFD PreK</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-based care</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED PreK</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA Special Education</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start/EHS</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td><strong>11%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- This includes only staff-initiated disenrollment (formal expulsion)
- Child care centers emerge as main sites for formal expulsion
- Public schools and Head Starts drop off to single-digit or zero
- Differences are statistically significant
## Results: Where Disenrolled Children Go

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child transferred to another licensed/registered setting, including public school</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child transferred to a special education preschool classroom</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child went to informal setting like family or friend’s home</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent decided to stay home with child rather than search for other care</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents had not found or decided on new care setting</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>251</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Request assistance from other staff</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend/facilitate connection to EI/special education</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request a consultation with an early childhood mental health specialist</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer to child’s pediatrician</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request for parent to pick up child early</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Barriers

- Frustration with parents and families
  - 1/3 of the sample reported parents are in denial or not interested in services
- Lack of support from their programs/employers
- Staffing shortages/too many kids
- Referral processes
### Results: What Would Help?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased access to early childhood mental health specialists who can visit my classroom/program and provide individualized consultation and support</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased opportunities for group training on how to support young children’s social-emotional development</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased support for families, such as staff to help families access services that address housing, mental health, substance abuse problems and other challenges</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A curriculum that has a strong focus on children’s social-emotional development</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional staff</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Open-Ended Comments: Strategies

- Unique solutions mentioned in comments
- Working with families on “Peaceful Parenting” philosophies
- Writing a letter to family pediatrician
- Constructing a “calm down” area in the classroom
- Using specific social-emotional learning curricula: Kimochis, Love and Logic
- In-class systems to help regulate behavior and emotions
  - Token system, visual schedules, soccer/stop light system (yellow is warning)
Percentage of Providers Reporting They Have Received Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Care Setting Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IDEA Part B special education</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start/EHS</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYFD PreK</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed child care center</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PED PreK</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-based care</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>38%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Final Comments

- Feeling helpless, unsupported, frustrated and untrained
- "This is the major cause of burnout for our staff"
- Bodily harm and bruises
- More frequent than in past years, "more anger and stress at early ages"
- "Times have changed ... more children are being born as drug-addicted, fetal alcohol syndrome, grandparents raising them, parents in prison."
- Families need help, children need consistency
Limitations

- Small sample
- Self-selected survey-takers
- Head Start and home-based care under-represented
- No family perspective
Questions Welcome

For full report, please visit ccpi.unm.edu ➔ Publications