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
June 26, 2019

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

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.

CRADLE TO CAREER
POLICY INSTITUTE

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

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.

PEGASUS
LEGAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

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**

ONE ALBUQUERQUE family & community services

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
    - Section § 658E(c)(2)(E)(i)(VII) of the CCDBG Act, 42 U.S.C. § 9858c(c)(2)(E)(i)(VII)
  - 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 identificaiton, placement, and disciplinary actions for children with disabilities, including 3 to 5 year olds. Devos tries to delay.
  - Data collection to begin in 2020
- IDEA 20 U.S.C. § 1415(k) (in Part B)
  - 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.
- IDEA 20 U.S.C. § 1439 (in Part C)
  - PWN and due process of early intervention services

Other National Efforts

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

- U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Policy Statement limit the practice of expulsion and suspension of young children (2014)

State Efforts

- State Legislation to Prohibit Expulsion: Arkansas, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee

- 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

New Mexico Regulations

- 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.

New Mexico Data

- 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
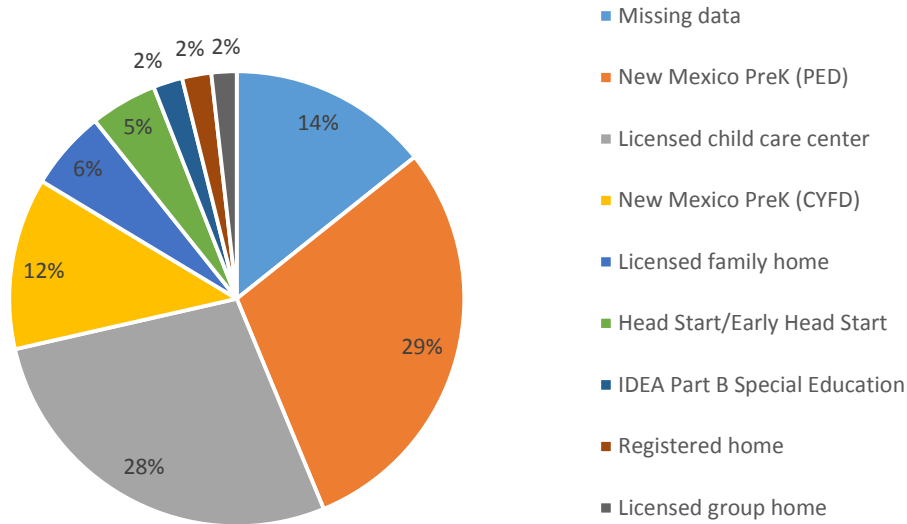
The Survey

- 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)
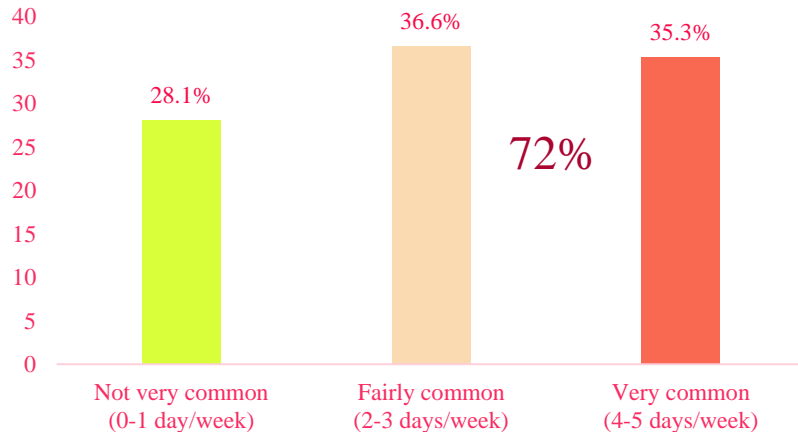
Response

Distribution of Care Settings

Legend:
- Missing data (14%)
- New Mexico PreK (PED) (29%)
- Licensed child care center (28%)
- New Mexico PreK (CYFD) (12%)
- Licensed family home (6%)
- Head Start/Early Head Start (5%)
- IDEA Part B Special Education (2%)
- Registered home (2%)
- Licensed group home (2%)

- Largest groups are public school PreK and child care settings
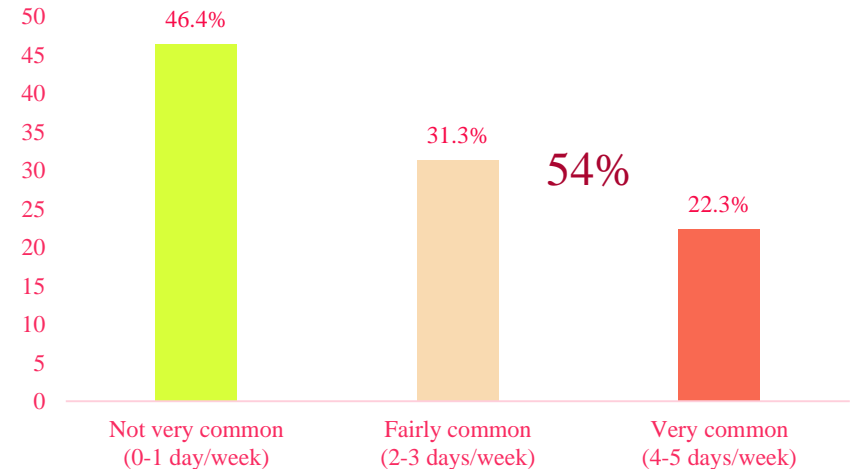
- Head Start and home-based care are most undersampled

Results

- ## Challenging Behavior is Common in Early Learning Settings

**Frequency of Hitting, Throwing, Biting, Pushing/Shoving**

28.1% — Not very common (0-1 day/week)	
36.6% — Fairly common (2-3 days/week)	
35.3% — Very common (4-5 days/week)	

72%

Frequency of Threatening, Name-Calling, Mean/Angry Words

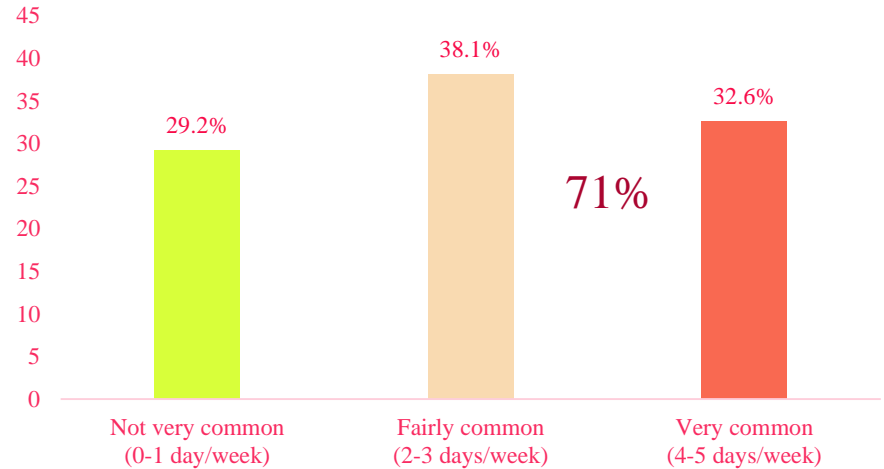|	
46.4% — Not very common (0-1 day/week)	
31.3% — Fairly common (2-3 days/week)	
22.3% — Very common (4-5 days/week)	

54%

Results: Frequency of Challenging Behavior

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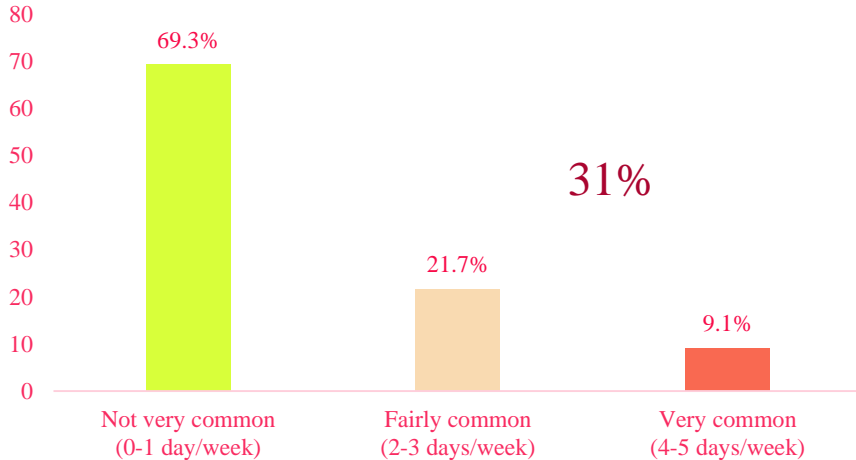

62%
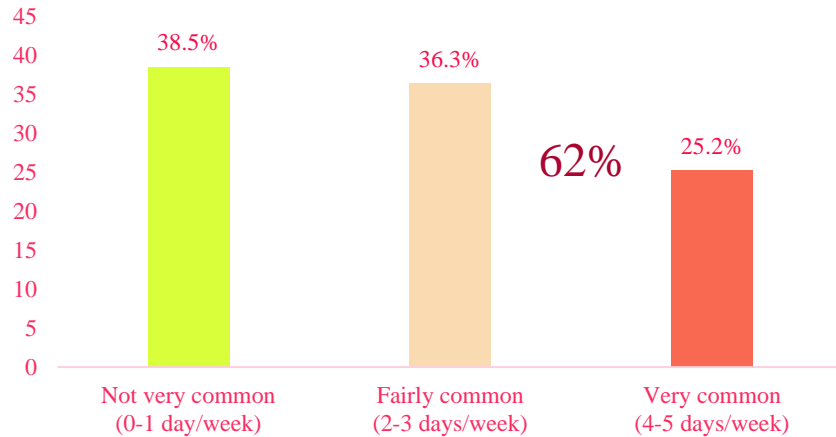
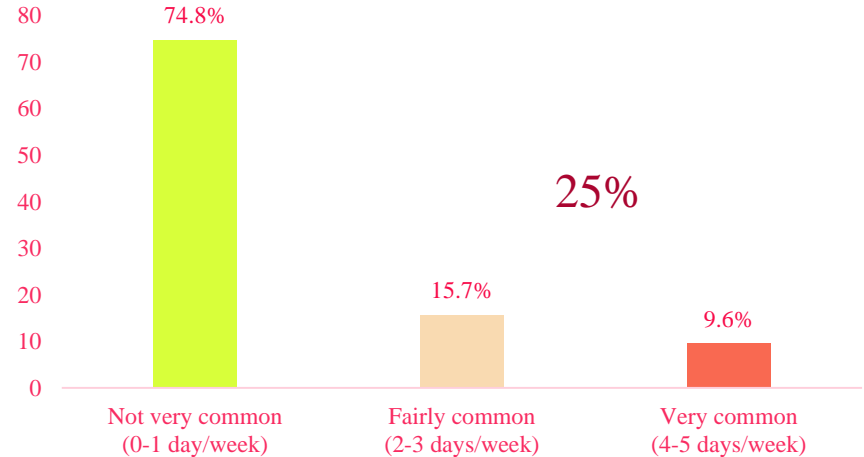Frequency of Refusal to Cooperate, Not Following Instructions

71%

Results: Frequency of Challenging Behavior

Frequency of Worried, Easily Frightened, Scared Behaviors

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

31%

Frequency of Refusing to Eat

74.8% — Not very common (0-1 day/week)
15.7% — Fairly common (2-3 days/week)
9.6% — Very common (4-5 days/week)

25%
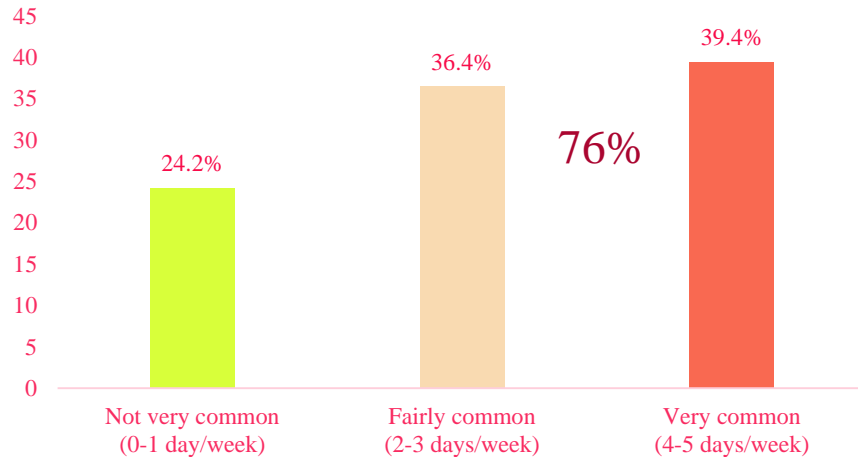
Results: Frequency of Challenging Behavior

Frequency of Impulsive Behavior (hyperactivity, trouble engaging appropriately)

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

30.3%	38.9%	30.8%
Little or no impact	Moderate impact	Quite a lot of impact

70%
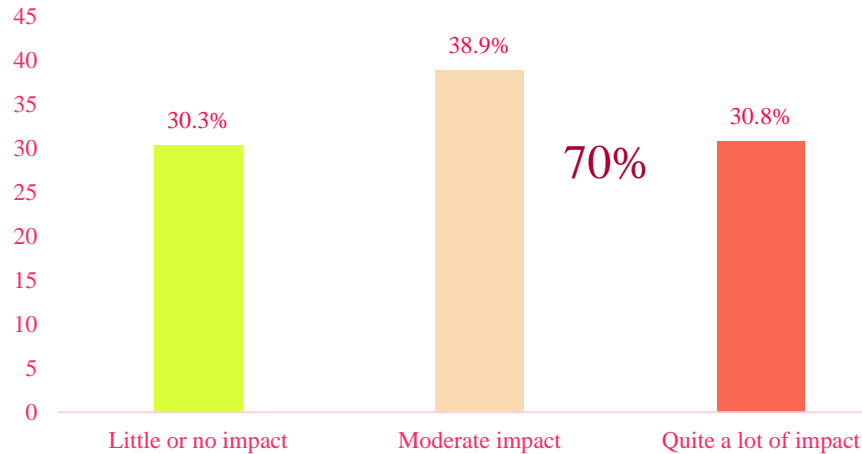
Impact on Other Children's Feelings of Security and Wellbeing

38.2%	39.1%	22.8%
Little or no impact	Moderate impact	Quite a lot of impact

62%
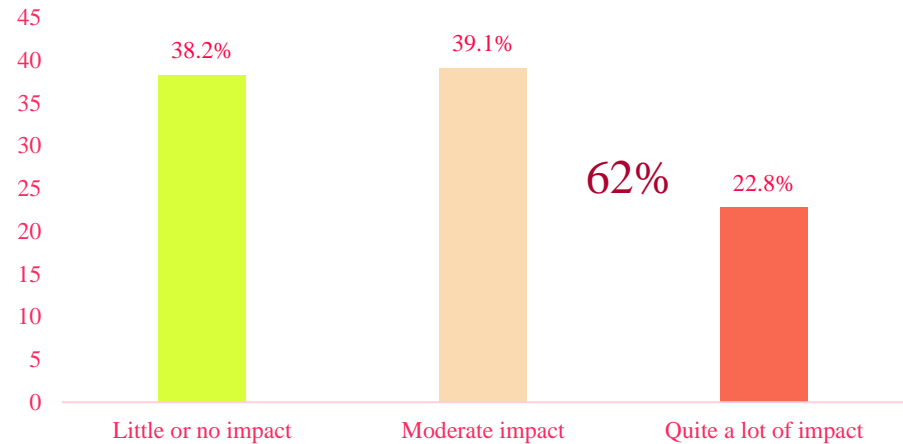
Results: Impact of Challenging Behavior

Impact of Challenging Behavior on Other Children's Safety
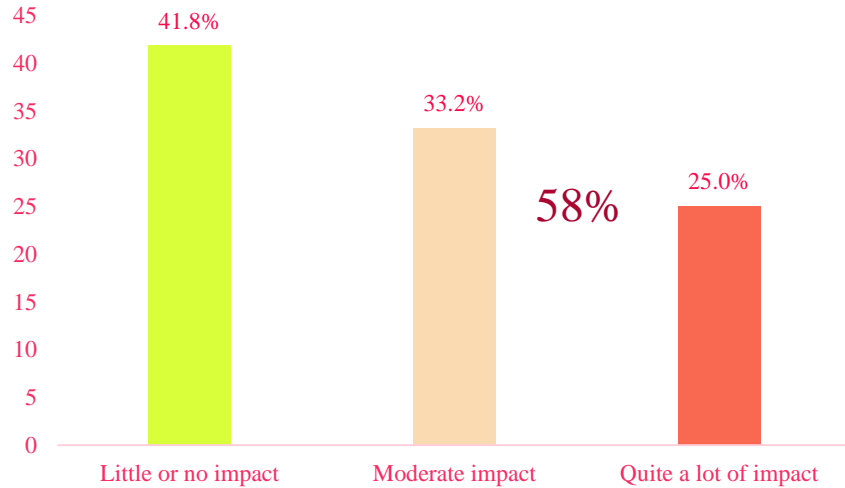
Impact on Teachers' Ability to Attend to Other Children
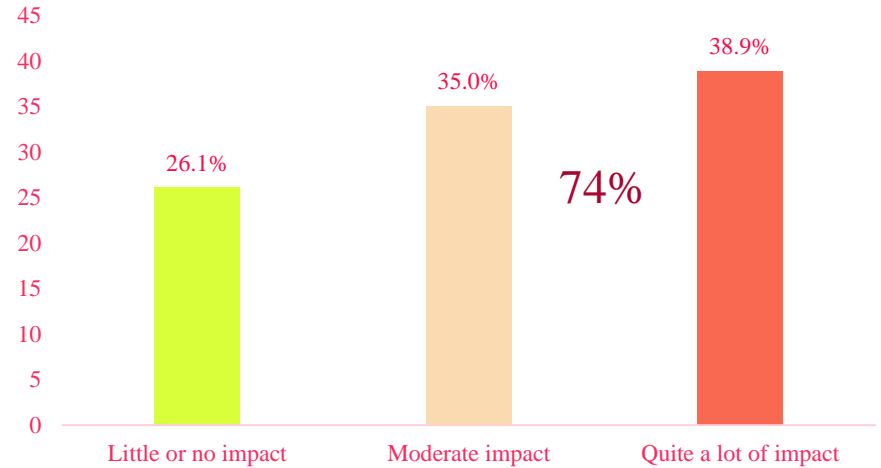
Results: Impact of Challenging Behavior

Impact on Teachers' Wellbeing and Professional Confidence

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

Results: Prevalence by Age

Total preschoolers in survey sample — 4406
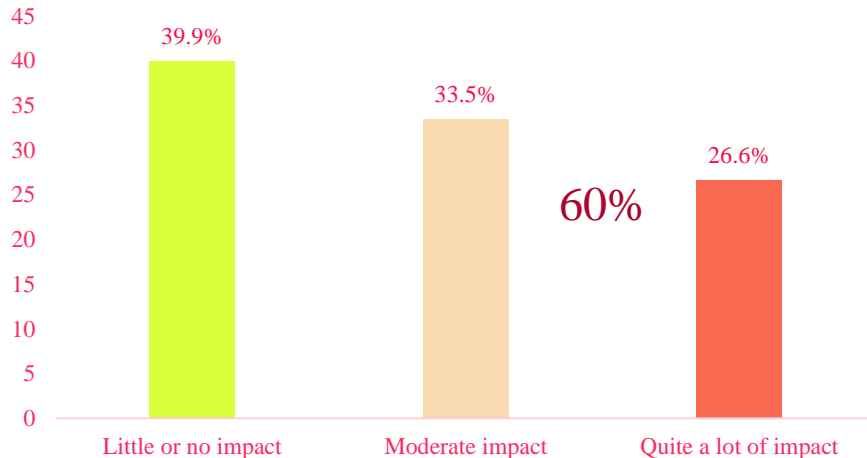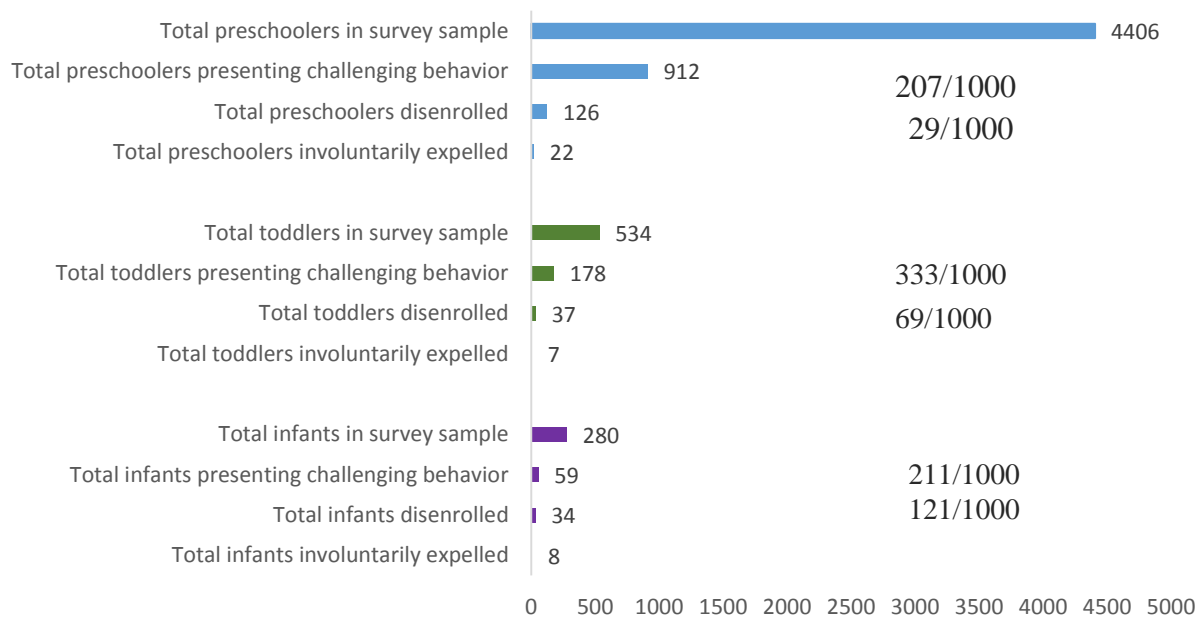Total preschoolers presenting challenging behavior — 912
Total preschoolers disenrolled — 126
Total preschoolers involuntarily expelled — 22

207/1000
29/1000

Total toddlers in survey sample — 534
Total toddlers presenting challenging behavior — 178
Total toddlers disenrolled — 37
Total toddlers involuntarily expelled — 7

333/1000
69/1000

Total infants in survey sample — 280
Total infants presenting challenging behavior — 59
Total infants disenrolled — 34
Total infants involuntarily expelled — 8

211/1000
121/1000

0 500 1000 1500 2000 2500 3000 3500 4000 4500 5000

- 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

Disenrollment Scenarios	Occurrences
Parents and staff agreed that the infant must leave the program	11
Parents and staff agreed that the toddler must leave the program	16
Parents and staff agreed that the preschooler must leave the program	50
Parents told staff the infant was leaving the program	15
Parents told staff the toddler was leaving the program	14
Parents told staff the preschooler was leaving the program	54
Staff told parents the infant must leave the program	8
Staff told parents toddler must leave the program	7
Staff told parents preschooler must leave the program	22

- Larger number of preschoolers, in general

- Fewer staff-initiated disenrollments

- To consider: provider perspective only

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

	Mutual agreement	Parent decision	Provider decision
Home-based care	3	3	1
Head Start/EHS	0	2	0
IDEA Special Education	1	1	0
Licensed child care center	24	22	16
CYFD PreK	7	11	5
PED PreK	7	10	2
Total	42	49	24

- 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

CYFD PreK	46.9%
Licensed child care center	44.7%
IDEA Special Education	40.0%
Home-based care	25.0%
Head Start/EHS	20.0%
PED PreK	18.2%
Total	32.5%

- 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

Licensed child care center	21%
CYFD PreK	16%
Home-based care	4%
PED PreK	3%
IDEA Special Education	0%
Head Start/EHS	0%
Overall	11%

- 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

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

Results: Strategies

Request assistance from other staff	62%
Recommend/facilitate connection to EI/special education	58%
Request a consultation with an early childhood mental health specialist	40%
Refer to child's pediatrician	35%
Request for parent to pick up child early	30%

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?

Increased access to early childhood mental health specialists who can visit my classroom/program and provide individualized consultation and support	68%
Increased opportunities for group training on how to support young children's social-emotional development	70%
Increased support for families, such as staff to help families access services that address housing, mental health, substance abuse problems and other challenges	67%
A curriculum that has a strong focus on children's social-emotional development	46%
Additional staff	40%

Open-Ended Comments: Strategies

- <u>Unique solutions mentioned in comments</u>

- 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)

Results: EC Mental Health Consultation

Percentage of Providers Reporting They Have Received Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Care Setting Type	
IDEA Part B special education	83%
Head Start/EHS	62%
CYFD PreK	46%
Licensed child care center	44%
PED PreK	33%
Home-based care	6%
Total	38%

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