

Position Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Prevention in Early Childhood Settings

The Office of Early Learning (OEL) supports Florida's children and their families, as well as the early learning coalitions, child care providers and early childhood educators who serve them across the state. OEL receives funding from the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) to administer the School Readiness Program statewide. CCDF requires states to collect and disseminate consumer education to families, providers, and the public that includes state policies regarding the social-emotional and behavioral health of young children and expulsion of preschool-aged children (birth through five) in early childhood settings receiving CCDF assistance.¹ Additionally, Florida Administrative Code requires all school readiness providers to have policies in place regarding the expulsion of children in their care.²

This position statement is an adaptation of the joint policy statement from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services that recommends prevention and limitation of expulsion and suspension practices in all early childhood settings. The joint policy statement emphasizes (1) clear, appropriate and consistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behavior, (2) racial, gender and cultural equity applied across all early childhood settings and (3) preschool inclusion practices implemented when a child's misbehavior is related to the child's disability.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy statement is to provide guidance and best practices for early learning programs focused on developing program policies that promote positive behavior interventions and that aim to prevent and/or limit the practice of expulsion of young children as a disciplinary tool. This policy statement is intended to:

- Promote positive and developmentally appropriate classroom environments;
- Prioritize the social-emotional and behavioral health of young children;
- Encourage developmental screenings for all children, with referrals as indicated;
- Support parent involvement in the development of their children while in early learning programs;

¹ § 658E(c)(2)(E)(i)(VII), Child Care Development Block Grant Reauthorization of 2014

² Rule 6M-4.620, Florida Administrative Code

- Encourage the professional development of early childhood educators regarding alternatives to expulsion, suspension or dismissal;
- Encourage collaboration with early childhood mental health consultants and interventionists;
- Promote the expansion of data collection and analysis related to expulsions, suspensions or dismissals including:
 - Reason for expulsion or suspension
 - Adherence to and effectiveness of child's behavior plan
 - Screening results
 - Referrals for services and resources
 - Supports and alternatives offered to the child's family

Overview

An expulsion occurs when a child's enrollment is terminated due to a challenging behavior or health condition negatively affecting the learning environment. Suspensions (and other limitations in services) include all other reductions in attendance, either by requiring the child to cease attendance for a specific amount of time or reducing the number of days or amount of time that a child may attend.³ Expulsions and suspensions threaten the development of supportive and positive relationships with caregivers, which are necessary for children to thrive. Additionally, they are not effective as a behavior intervention. The removal of children from the early learning environment disrupts the learning process and continues a negative cycle by preventing access to meaningful supports for both the child and family.⁴

High rates of suspension and expulsion in early childhood settings are closely connected to adverse outcomes for children.⁵ Removing a child from an early childhood setting has the potential to hinder social-emotional and behavioral development. Additionally, young children who experience school removal are at an increased risk for other negative outcomes, including

³ *Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards*, Standard 2.2.0.8: Preventing Expulsions, Suspensions and Other Limitations in Service

⁴ National Association for the Education of Young Children, Joint Statement *Standing Together Against Suspension & Expulsion in Early Childhood*

⁵ Gilliam, W.S., & Shahar, G. (2006). Preschool and child care expulsion and suspension: Rates and predictors in one state. *Infants and Young Children*, 19, 228-245.

academic failure, grade retention, juvenile delinquency and incarceration.⁶ Quality early childhood settings create cognitively enriching experiences that contribute to healthy development and academic success later in life. Some of these children may have undiagnosed disabilities or behavioral health concerns and may be eligible for services under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). However, expelling a child reduces the likelihood they will receive the evaluations necessary to identify these disabilities, determine eligibility, and gain access to these important support services.

Research demonstrates that expulsion practices are disproportionately administered across race, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status (SES). Consequently, minority boys from low SES backgrounds are at the greatest risk of school removal.⁷ This finding is critical as expulsions pose a potential threat to individual civil rights from discriminatory practices targeting children based on race, gender or disability status.

Additionally, child expulsions greatly contribute to increased family stress.⁸ In some cases, families of children who are expelled do not receive assistance identifying an alternative placement or there are barriers to accessing other programs. This often results in a lapse in service, leaving families – *especially working families* – with difficult choices and few options.

Another practice related to expulsion and suspension are dismissals of children from early childhood settings. However, unlike expulsion and suspension, which are typically the result of behavior related to the child, dismissals occur as a result of parental actions or behavior. As such, dismissals should be addressed separately from the child’s behavior or the provider’s discipline policy.

⁶ American Academy of Pediatrics (2013). Policy statement: Out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *Pediatrics*, 131(3), 2012-2015.

⁷ Graves Jr., S.L., & Howes, C. (2011). Ethnic differences in social-emotional development in preschool: The impact of teacher child relationships and classroom quality. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26(3): 202-214.

⁸ Jones, D.E., Greenbert, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(11): 2283–2290.

Reasons for dismissal commonly cited by providers include, but are not limited to:

- Documented habitual disregard for drop off and pick up times
- Documented habitual disregard for sick child policies
- Documented abusive behavior toward staff or other parents
- Documented pattern of chronic absences without documentation of illness or any special circumstances
- Failure to comply with medical and immunization requirements
- Documented consistent non-payment of fees

Expulsion and Suspension Prevention Policy Guidance

OEL and the early learning coalitions will provide ongoing supports to providers for creating safe, healthy, and developmentally appropriate environments. Additionally, OEL strongly encourages providers and local regional supports to unite in providing quality early learning experiences for all children. Therefore, the appropriate resources and policies should be in place to prevent and/or limit the expulsion or suspension of young children.

Current best practice encourages the use of infant/early childhood mental health consultation (IECMHC) for children with challenging behaviors to help reduce the rate of children suspended or expelled from child care programs. IECMHC services offer a practice of reflective supervision, which enables teachers to support the classroom as whole while also addressing the unique needs of the child. Consultation services provided to teachers as well as to children and parents are associated with significant improvements in overall classroom behavior and child development.⁹

OEL also encourages early learning programs throughout Florida to include positive behavior intervention strategies and alternatives to suspension or expulsion of young children within their discipline or expulsion policies. The following indicators are suggested approaches early learning coalitions and child care providers may use to promote positive behavioral support for the social-emotional development of young children.

⁹ Upshur, C., Wenz-Gross, M., & Reed, G. (2009). A pilot study of early childhood mental health consultation for children with behavioral problems in preschool. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 24(1): 29-45.

Quality Indicators for ELC's Expulsion and Suspension Prevention Policies and Practices

1. Provides families with information and assistance in locating and recognizing quality early learning programs that are inclusive and supportive of all children.
2. Provides developmental screenings for children, which include identification of social-emotional risk factors.
3. Refers families to resources and services within the community as indicated by screening results.
4. Supports quality professional development and training opportunities on topics including, but not limited to: development of discipline and expulsion policies, use of developmentally appropriate practices, supporting children and families in trauma, cultural responsiveness, implicit bias, family engagement, social-emotional development and well-being, creating an emotionally safe classroom and environment and age-appropriate behavior expectations.
5. Supports families and providers by providing technical assistance through the Warm-Line with information and resources on social-emotional learning, positive behavior supports and early childhood mental health.
6. Connects providers with social-emotional learning specialists, inclusion specialists or mental health consultants to work toward establishing a specialized care team. Works with specialized care team to observe and intervene with a child displaying challenging behaviors. Assists providers with involving the family in developing a behavior support plan for their child and connects the family to agencies, supports or community resources as needed.
7. Assists providers in documenting steps taken in a child's behavior support plan before expulsion or suspension from an early learning program is initiated or a provider transfer is requested.
8. Requests providers who expel a child or request a child's withdrawal to provide the coalition a copy of the child records, which may include: documentation of the reason for the expulsion or suspension; copy of the child's behavior support plan; result of screenings; referrals for services; or guidance and consultation offered to the family, including consideration of enrolling the child with another provider.
9. Conducts a systematic data review of children dismissed from programs and

- investigates reasons for dismissal to determine which, if any, were expulsions.
10. Assists the child and family with transition, if the child is referred to a new provider.

Quality Indicators of Provider's Expulsion and Suspension Policies and Practices

1. Develops discipline and expulsion policies that aim to prevent or limit expulsion and suspension practices.
2. Creates a plan to foster a positive learning environment and connected school community.
3. Relies on screening, assessments, and developmental standards to establish and teach clear behavior expectations appropriate for the ages and abilities of all children in care.
4. Clearly communicates positive learning environment goals, behavior expectations, discipline policies and expulsion policies to families, staff and community partners.
5. Provides all staff with access to professional development and training on topics including, but not limited to: development of discipline and expulsion policies, use of developmentally appropriate practices, supporting children and families in trauma, cultural responsiveness, implicit bias, family engagement, social-emotional development and well-being, creating an emotionally safe classroom and environment and age-appropriate behavior expectations.

6. Develops specific guidance for staff that outlines steps to be taken when a child exhibits challenging behaviors. Examples of guidance include, but are not limited to, assessing the classroom environment for contributing factors that might be unintentionally reinforcing the behavior or requesting technical assistance from the ELC Warm-Line services.
7. Establishes or works with coalition to identify a specialized care team (specialists, staff and the child's family) and create a behavior support plan for a child displaying challenging behaviors.
8. Requests specialized care team to review and document positive behavior intervention strategies taken and progress made in the child's behavior before any type of expulsion, suspension, or change of provider is initiated. If concerns persist, specific referrals are provided.
9. Assists the child and family with transition, if the child is referred to a new provider.

Conclusion

Preventing or limiting the practice of expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings requires dedicated collaboration between early learning coalitions, child care providers, families, and state and community agencies/partners. This collaboration of stakeholders is crucial to addressing challenging behaviors and fostering positive social-emotional and behavioral development. These skills are the foundation for a child's academic and life success and are more accurate in predicting later academic achievement than cognitive skills or family background.¹⁰ OEL emphasizes the importance of strong stakeholder partnerships that nurture the development of social-emotional and behavioral health and promote positive behavior intervention support strategies as an alternative to expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings. OEL is committed to supporting these partnerships and striving to create the opportunity for all children to succeed, regardless of background, race, gender or developmental need.

¹⁰ Fox, L., & Smith, B. J. (2007). Issue Brief: Promoting social, emotional and behavioral outcomes of young children served under IDEA. *Challenging Behavior*

Definitions

Developmentally appropriate: Term describing an instructional tool, strategy or practice that is tailored to the age of a given child, his or her individual needs and abilities, and his or her cultural and social norms and expectations.

Developmentally appropriate practices: An approach to teaching based on child development research and effective early learning strategies that are developmentally appropriate and promote young children’s optimal learning and development.

Developmental screenings: A tool that examines a child’s development and identifies whether the child is developing at a normal pace or if there is an indication of a disability or need.

Dismissal: Removal of a child from a learning program due to factors other than the child’s behavior.

Early childhood mental health consultation: A problem-solving and capacity-building intervention implemented within a collaborative relationship between a professional consultant with mental health expertise and one or more individuals, primarily child care center staff, parents, and others with expertise or knowledge of the child.

Expulsion: Terminating the enrollment of a child or family in a learning program due to challenging behavior or health condition.

Quality early learning programs: Early learning programs that provide developmentally appropriate, safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments and age appropriate curriculum for young children.

Specialized care team: Team composed of early learning coalition staff, early childhood education providers and teachers, parents, specialists or consultants who develop a behavior support plan of individualized supports for children with challenging behavior or other challenges that affect that child’s learning or the learning environment.

Suspension: Reductions in the amount of time a child may attend the regular learning program. Examples of “suspension” could include the following consequences for behavior challenges: asking a family member to pick up a child immediately and/or asking a child to not return to school for a specific period.

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Resources: Expulsion and Suspension Prevention Toolkit Links

[DCF Licensing Standards on Child Discipline/Expulsion Policy](#)

[ACF Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings](#)

[DHHS Summary Spotlighting Progress in Policy and Supports](#)

RODNEY MACKINNON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING

250 MARRIOTT DRIVE • TALLAHASSEE, FL 32399 • 850-717-8550 • Toll Free 866-357-3239 • www.FloridaEarlyLearning.com

[Standing Together Against Suspension & Expulsion in Early Childhood | National Association for the Education of Young Children | NAEYC](#)

[CSEFEL: Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning Training Modules](#)

[DCCECE Infographic "Don't Suspend and Expel"](#)

[Expulsion Prevention Teacher Checklist](#)

[Provider Expulsion Guidance Policy](#)

Attachment: Expulsion and Suspension Prevention Practices for Providers/ELCs

	Quality Indicators of Provider's Expulsion and Suspension Policy	ELC Quality Indicators for Expulsion and Suspension Prevention Policies	Links to Information and Resources
1.	Develop discipline and expulsion policies that aim to prevent or limit expulsion and suspension practices	4- Professional Development, 5- Provide information and resources on social and emotional development and mental health, 6- Assists with family engagement and behavior support plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stepping Stones for Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance • Standards, Standards 2.2.0.6 & 2.2.0.8 • Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline
2.	Creates a plan to foster a positive learning environment and connected school community.	4, 5	<p>School Climate: Academic and Social Behavior</p> <p>Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline</p> <p>Guide for Improving School Climate and discipline</p>
3.	Relies on screening, assessments, and developmental standards to establish and teach clear behavior expectations appropriate for the ages and abilities of all children in care.	2, 4, 5	<p>Birth to Five Watch Me Thrive</p> <p>Tips to Promote Social Emotional Health</p> <p>Teaching Social and Emotional Skills</p> <p>The Center for Social, Emotional foundations of Early Learning (CSEFEL)</p> <p>Technical Assistance Center for Social Emotional Interventions (TACSEI)</p> <p>Challenging Behaviors and Expulsion for Child Care</p>
4.	Clearly communicate positive learning environmental goals, behavior expectations, and discipline and expulsion policies to families, staff and community partners.	4, 5	<p>Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers</p> <p>Guiding Principles: A resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline</p>
5.	Provides al staff with access to professional development and training	4, 5	National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning

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	on developmentally appropriate practices, supporting families and children in trauma, cultural responsiveness , implicit bias, family engagement, creating an emotionally safe classroom environment, and age-appropriate behavior expectations.		The Center for Social, Emotional foundations of Early Learning (CSEFEL) Early Learning: Resources for Trainers 15 Minute In-Service Suites: Engaging Interactions and Environments Maryland Social Emotional foundations for Early Learning Training Modules NAEYC: Engaging Diverse Families Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness
6.	Develop specific guidance for staff that outlines steps to be taken when a child exhibits challenging behaviors. Examples of guidance include assessing the classroom environment for contributing factors that might be unintentionally reinforcing the behavior or requesting technical assistance from the ELC Warm Line services.	4, 5, 6	The Center for Social, Emotional foundations of Early Learning (CSEFEL) Technical Assistance Center for Social Emotional Interventions (TACSEI) Challenging Behaviors and Expulsion for Child Care
7.	Establishes or works with coalition to identify a specialized care team (specialists, staff, and the child’s family) and create a behavior support plan for a child displaying challenging behaviors.	4,5,6, 8 & 9 – review of expulsion and suspension data and investigation of reasons for expulsions and suspensions	National Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Setting Young Children Up for Success Integrating Early Childhood Mental Health with the Pyramid Model Using the Pyramid Model to Address Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood Settings
8.	Requests specialized care team to review and document positive behavior intervention strategies taken and progress made in the child’s behavior before any type of expulsion, suspension, or change of provider is initiated. If concerns persist, specific refers are provided.		Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline Expelling Expulsion in Early Childhood Settings Stepping Stones to Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards, Standards 2.2.0.6

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			& 2.2.0.8
9.	Assists the child and family with transition if the child is referred to a new provider.	10 – assist the child and family with transition	Challenging Behaviors and Expulsion from Child Care