



Preschool Suspension and Expulsion

Promoting Better Outcomes Through Research-Based Alternative Strategies

Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth | Policy Brief | February 2018

Sarah Kirschbaum, Caitlin McCollister, Jennifer Drake-Croft, Linda O'Neal



Executive Summary

The future prosperity of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. When Tennessee invests wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. The first years of life are especially important because early experiences shape how the brain is built, establishing either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development that follows. A strong foundation in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes.

Access to a safe, stable and nurturing preschool environment gives children the opportunity to establish a strong foundation for future learning. Due to increasing rates of suspension and expulsion, however, many children are denied access to a quality preschool experience. Suspension and expulsion at this age particularly compromises brain development and future school engagement and exacerbates inequality by setting certain children on negative trajectories (U.S. DOE/HHS, 2014).

Implementation of evidence-based strategies at the school, classroom, and individual student levels drastically reduce incidences of suspension and expulsion. Consistent use of these strategies in Tennessee will ensure that more preschool aged children get the educational opportunities they deserve and need for future success.

The Problem: Preschool Suspension & Expulsion

Research shows that preschoolers are expelled at rates three times that of K-12 students (Gilliam, 2005). Moreover, specific groups of children – most notably African-American boys – are suspended and expelled at vastly disproportionate rates (U.S. DOE/HHS, 2014). Given the critical impact of quality early childhood education on brain development, this is a cause for concern for all Tennesseans. Preschool-aged children who are removed from the classroom see lasting negative outcomes across development, health, and education that impact families and communities at large (U.S. DOE/HHS, 2014). Although suspension and expulsion are widely used in schools across the U.S., **there is no evidence that suggests suspension or expulsion increases the safety of a school or reduces future problem behaviors** (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Risk Factors

Pre-Kindergarten suspension and expulsion occurs in communities and contexts across the country. There are some common classroom qualities, however, that increase the risk for suspension and expulsion.

- **Class Size:** Classes with a higher student to teacher ratios are more likely to have higher rates of suspension and expulsion (Gilliam, 2005).
- **Length of Day:** Preschools that have longer hours have higher rates of suspension and expulsion (Gilliam & Shafar, 2006).
- **Teacher Stress:** Teachers with fewer years of experience and higher stress levels are more likely to use suspension and expulsion as a form a discipline (Richards, 2012).

Class size, length of the school day, and teacher stress can all impact suspension and expulsion rates

Although these factors increase the likelihood of suspension and expulsion, they are not direct causes. The true causes of suspension and expulsion are negative school climates; lack of focus on prevention; unclear and inconsistent expectations and consequences to address disruptive student behaviors; and a lack of commitment to fairness, equity and continuous improvement (U.S. DOE/HHS, 2014).

Fairness Across Places

In this country, we believe that all Americans should have the same opportunities. But the reality is that many groups, such as boys, African Americans, and children with disabilities, are overrepresented among suspended or expelled preschool children (Gilliam, 2014; St. George, 2012). Although there are higher rates of suspension and expulsion for children in these groups, there is no evidence that individuals in these groups exhibit more extreme behaviors (Wallace et al. 2008; Skiba & Williams, 2014). It is vital that we renew our commitment to a just society by devoting more resources to policies that ensure fairness and address inequity in our schools.

Suspension and expulsion lead to negative outcomes that disproportionately impact specific groups

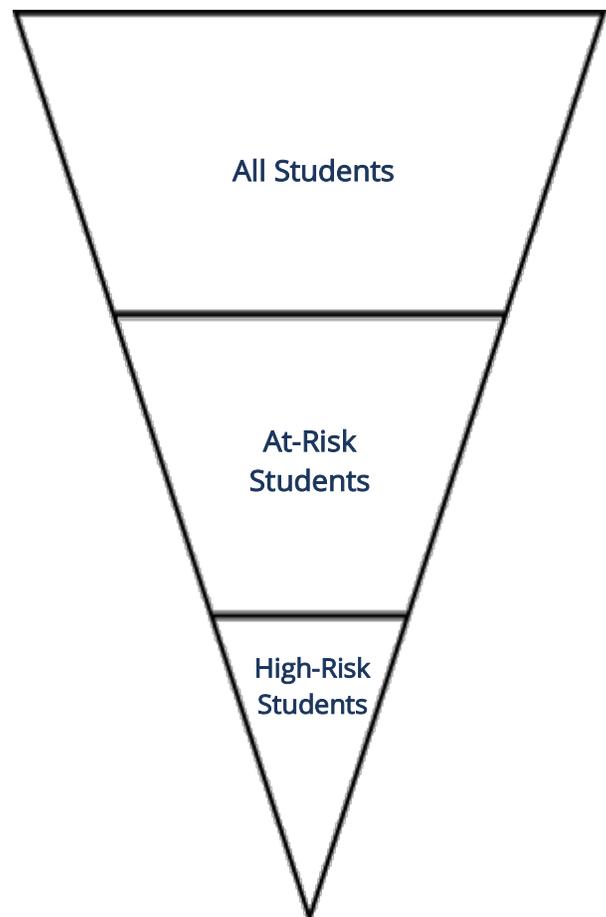
Research-Based Alternative Strategies

Research has identified multiple evidence-based strategies to reduce rates of preschool suspension and expulsion. Creating positive school climates where these strategies are regularly employed will help keep all children in school (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

A Multi-Tier Approach

A prevention-based, multi-tiered model that provides appropriate academic, behavioral and social support for students at different levels helps prevent suspension and expulsion (McIntosh, Chard, Boland, & Horner, 2006; Lane, Oakes & Menzies, 2010). Because teachers have limited time during the day to manage responsibilities, this tiered system – called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) – is a critical tool for addressing challenging behaviors collaboratively and efficiently (Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013).

- **Tier 1** provides positive support for **all students** at the school level. Examples include developing a consistent academic curriculum and culturally responsive systems of behavior support (McIntyre, Gresham, DiGennaro, & Reed, 2007). (See additional examples below.)
- **Tier 2** provides targeted-support for **at-risk students** at the classroom and small group levels. Examples include behavioral contracting, self-monitoring support, and positive peer reporting for students with behavioral challenges (Menzies, Lane, Lee, 2005).
- **Tier 3** provides intensive support for **high-risk students** at the individual level. Examples include cognitive behavioral counseling, behavior intervention plans, and intensive wraparound services for students with significant learning and behavior challenges and their families (Eber, Breen, Rose, Unizycki, & London, 2008).



School-Level Best Practices

- **Conflict Resolution:** Teaching students positive methods to resolve conflicts (such as peer mediation) can result in fewer suspension and expulsions (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).
- **Parental Involvement:** Instead of blaming parents for the child's behavior, schools that form a partnership with parents see more positive behavioral outcomes (Barclay & Boone, 1997).
- **Early Identification:** Schools should make a conscious effort to identify which students are in need of the most support and proactively provide that support (Forness et al., 1996).
- **School and District-Wide Data Systems:** Strong systems for collecting and tracking school discipline data (e.g. number of office referrals) are necessary in order to evaluate progress toward reducing suspension and expulsion (Skiba et al., 1997; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996).
- **Schoolwide Discipline and Behavioral Planning:** A schoolwide discipline and behavior plan builds consistency and fosters communication (Colvin, Kame'enui, & Sugai, 1993).
- **Functional Assessments and Individual Behavior Plans:** When appropriate, mental health and behavioral consultations can lead to effective individual behavior plans. Meeting the needs of students who need individualized support will reduce rates of suspension and expulsion (Broussard & Northup, 1995).

Adopting research-based strategies to promote positive behavior in schools and classrooms is an effective way to reduce suspensions and expulsions

Classroom-Level Best Practices

In addition to best practices at the school level, teachers can implement powerful, research-based strategies to encourage positive behavior in the classroom (Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013).

- **Opportunities to Respond:** Increasing students' opportunities to respond during academic tasks increases engagement among students (Sutherland & Wehby, 2001).
- **Active Supervision and Proximity:** Clearly explaining and modeling appropriate behavior, regularly scanning the classroom, and engaging students directly through proximity and direct interactions are effective methods teachers can employ to promote student success (Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013; Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000).

- **Behavior-Specific Praise Statements:** Increasing the amount of praise in the classroom is another effective, evidence-based strategy to increase student engagement and minimize behavior disruptions (Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000).

Conclusion

Access to high quality educational opportunities in early childhood is essential for the future prosperity of all Tennesseans, but preschool suspension and expulsion are increasing problems across our country. In order to reduce rates of suspension and expulsion, teachers and schools need clear, research-based alternative strategies. Adopting these strategies at the school, classroom, and individual student levels are effective ways to keep children in the classroom, ensure equity, and help build a strong educational foundation for future generations.

References

- Barclay, K. H., & Boone, E. (1997). Inviting parents to join in the educational process: What research tells us about parent involvement. *Community Education Journal* 24(1-2), 16-18.
- Broussard, C. D., & Northup, J. (1995). An approach to functional assessment and analysis of disruptive behavior in general education classrooms. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 10, 151-16
- Colvin, G., Kame'enui, E. J., & Sugai, G. (1993). Reconceptualizing behavior management and schoolwide discipline in general education. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 16, 361-381.
- Eber, L., Breen, K., Rose, J., Unizycki, R. M., & London, T. H. (2008) Wraparound as a tertiary level intervention for students with emotional/behavioral needs. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(6), 16-22.
- Forness, S. R., Kavale, K. A., MacMillan, D. L., Asarnow, J. R., & Duncan, B. (1996). Early detection and prevention of emotional or behavioral disorders: Developmental aspects of systems of care. *Behavioral Disorders*, 21, 226-24
- Gilliam, W. S. (2005). Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/explore/policy_docs/prek_expulsion.pdf
- 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.
- Gilliam, W. S. (2014). What could make less sense than expelling a preschooler? Psychology Benefits Society. American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://psychologybenefits.org/2014/12/13/preschool-expulsions/>
- Johnson, D. -W., & Johnson, R. T. (1996). Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in elementary and secondary schools: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 66, 459-506.
- Lane, K. L., Oakes, W. P., & Menzies, H. M. (2010). Systematic screenings to prevent the development of learning and behavior problems: Considerations for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. *Journal of Disabilities Policy Studies*, 21(3), 160-172
- Lane, K. L., Menzies, H. M., Oakes, W. P., & Kalberg, J. R. (2012). Systematic screenings of behavior to support instruction: From preschool to high school. New York, NY: Guilford Press
- Lane, K.L., Menzies, H.M., Ennis, R.P., Bezdek, J., (2013). School-wide systems to promote positive behaviors and facilitate instruction. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*. 7(3), 6-31
- Lewis, T. J., Colvin, G., & Sugai, G. (2000). The effects of pre-correction and active supervision on the recess behavior of elementary students. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 23(2), 109-121.

- McIntosh, K., Chard, D., Boland, J., & Horner, R.H. (2006). A demonstration of combined efforts in school-wide academic and behavioral systems and incidence of reading and behavioral challenges in early elementary grades. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 8*, 146-154.
- McIntyre, L.L., Gresham, F. M., DiGennaro, F. D., & Reed, D. D. (2007) Treatment integrity of school-based interventions with children in the journal of applied behavior analysis 1991-2005. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 40*(4), 659-672. doi: 10.1901/jaba.2007.659-672
- Menzies, H. M., Lane, K. L., & Lee, J. M. (2009) Self-Monitoring strategies for use in the classroom: A promising practice to support productive behavior for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *Beyond Behavior, 18*(2), 27-35
- Richards, J. (2012). Teacher stress and coping strategies: A national snapshot. *The Educational Forum, 76*(3), 299-316. doi:10.1080/00131725.2012.682837
- Schimke, A. (2015). New push to quantify, prevent preschool expulsions in Colorado. Chalkbeat Colorado. Retrieved from http://co.chalkbeat.org/2015/02/19/new-push-to-quantify-prevent-preschool-expulsions-in-colorado/#.VwK_2BMrKYW
- Skiba, R. J., Peterson, R. L., & Williams, T. (1997). Office referrals and suspension: Disciplinary intervention in middle schools. *Education and Treatment of Children, 20*(3), 1-21.
- Skiba R. & Peterson R. (2000). School discipline at a crossroads: From zero tolerance to early response. *Exceptional Children. 66*(3).
- Skiba, R. J., & Williams, N. (2014). Are Black kids worse? Myths and facts about racial differences in behavior. Indiana University. Retrieved from http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/African-American-Differential-Behavior_031214.pdf
- St. George, D. (2012). Suspended from school in early grades. The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/suspended-from-school-in-early-grades/2012/02/02/gIQA3H0X9Q_story.html
- Sutherland, K. S., & Wehby, J. H. (2001). Exploring the relationship between increased opportunities to respond to academic requests and the academic and behavioral outcomes of students with EBD: A review. *Remedial and Special Education, 22*(2), 113-121.
- Sutherland, K. S., Wehby, J. H., & Copeland, S. R. (2000). Effect of varying rates of behavior-specific praise on the on-task behavior of students with EBD. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 8*(1), 2-8
- Tobin, T., Sugai, G., & Colvin, G. (1996). Patterns in middle school discipline records. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 4*(2), 82-94.
- U.S. Department of Education/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2014). Policy statement on expulsion and suspension policies in early childhood settings. (Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>)
- Wallace Jr., J. M., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C. M., & Bachman, J. G. (2008). Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Differences in School Discipline Among U.S. High School Students: 1991-2005. *Negro Educational Review, 59*(1/2), 47-62
- Zeanah, C.H. & Melmed, M. E. (2015). Suspensions and expulsions in preschool. The Hill. Retrieved from <http://thehill.com/opinion/op-ed/228845-suspensions-and-expulsions-in-preschool>