

BUILDING BETTER BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Expulsion and Suspension in Preschool Settings

More than 5,000 preschool students are expelled each year in the United States – a rate that is more than three times higher than that of their K-12 peers.¹ And nearly 5,000 preschool students were suspended once in the 2011-2012 academic year, while 2,500 were suspended more than once.² Racial disparities exist in rates of expulsions and suspensions. While African American students make up 18% of preschool enrollment, they make up 42% of preschool suspensions.³ In Philadelphia, a 2004 survey conducted by Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) showed 48% of early childhood programs reported having suspended or expelled at least one child over the course of a year due primarily to behavioral concerns, such as poor emotional regulation and aggression.⁴

Research has found that the likelihood of expulsion decreases significantly with access to classroom-based behavioral consultation.¹ Childcare teachers, however, often do not have the resources necessary to support children with challenging behaviors.

The Consequences of Expulsion and Suspension

Early childhood education sets the foundation for a child's future success. High-quality preschool programs improve elementary school readiness and provide important cognitive, academic, social and emotional skills that are necessary for success in elementary school and beyond.¹ Pre-kindergarten programs have been shown to have substantial benefits in reducing crime, raising earnings and promoting education.⁵ Children that attend a pre-kindergarten program are more likely to graduate high school and are less likely to have children during their teenage years or become involved in the criminal justice system.¹ But without support during these early years, a child is more likely to drop out of school, eventually receive welfare benefits and commit crime.⁶

According to a joint letter by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education, expelling or suspending 3- and 4-year-old children sets their trajectories in a negative direction, even before their first day of kindergarten. Not only does expulsion or suspension hinder a child's social-emotional development during a highly formative period, but it also removes them from the early learning programs and enrichment environments that are known to contribute to academic success.⁷

Social-Emotional Competence

Young children's ability to manage their emotions and behaviors is an important prerequisite for school readiness and academic success.⁸ In fact, children's emotional, social and behavioral skills are often as important for school success, if not more so, than their cognitive and academic skills because social interactions, attention and self-control affect readiness for learning.⁹ A lack of social-emotional

competency can lead to escalating academic problems and antisocial behavior.⁹ In fact, early social competence serves as a marker for important long-term outcomes, such as education, employment, criminal activity, substance use and mental health.⁹

Previous efforts to embed social-emotional supports in childcare settings have been effective in fostering social-emotional competencies and improving language skills in children.¹⁰ Successful programs have also focused on parents and teachers. One such intervention used the Incredible Years: Parent Training Program and Teacher Training Program in 34 Head Start classrooms. This program taught positive discipline strategies, effective parenting skills and ways to strengthen children's social skills.⁸ Children in the intervention group showed significantly greater reductions in behavior problems than children not receiving the intervention.⁸

Social and emotional competence is a critical component to positive child outcomes. Therefore, it is imperative that early childhood educators be equipped with the knowledge and support to foster social and emotional development in all children.

A Philadelphia Experiment to Build Better Behavioral Supports

In response to the high incidence of behavior challenges and the impact of poor social-emotional skills on school readiness, researchers at PolicyLab at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC) are currently developing a system of services that would enable childcare centers in

Philadelphia to be fully inclusive. This pilot research project has three main goals:

1. To determine the incidence of children with behavioral challenges in childcare centers in Philadelphia in order to inform provider agencies in the city.
2. To develop a scalable and sustainable strategy model that integrates social-emotional and behavioral supports with early childhood education in select high-quality childcare settings.
3. To create a business model that leverages childcare and mental health funding streams to increase the school readiness for children in all categories of behavioral need.

This model program will take place in a fully inclusive high-quality childcare facility that serves children with typical behavioral needs, children with emerging behavioral disorders and children with significant behavioral disorders. The program will utilize public funding from both early learning and mental health resources. This model will be based on the assumption that children in all three categories of behavioral need benefit from inclusive environments that have social-emotional and educational objectives.

The integrated model will maximize the effectiveness of previously siloed educational and mental health interventions by designing opportunities for early childhood education, Early Intervention and early childhood mental health professionals to work together with parents to identify children with behavioral disorders, support social and emotional maturation and reduce behavioral challenges. The program will use consistent language, expectations and supports in both the childcare and home environments. The facility will provide social and emotional supports and a positive behavior curriculum in the daily classroom routine as well as individualized clinical parent child supports and services by clinical mental health providers from the City of Philadelphia's Community Behavioral Health (CBH) for eligible children.

Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), which has been selected as the project's social-emotional framework, is a three-tiered model that provides school-wide support for all children, classroom-level support and individualized

support for children with greater behavioral challenges. PBIS uses a training model that occurs on-site and maximizes the use of in-classroom coaching.

The project will provide education and coaching for parents at the childcare center on ways to build social-emotional skills at home. Much learning will take place from their child's participation in the classroom so equipping families with the same key information regarding social-emotional skills and support is crucial.

Clinton Global Initiative America: Commitment to Action

The Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) America Commitment to Action is to expand this effort by using lessons learned from the pilot center and scaling the model to four additional childcare centers over the next three years. This commitment to action, which will build a network of trainers and expertise in the region, includes an evaluation component to assess effectiveness and identify key elements that support success. The evaluation will inform next steps for the city of Philadelphia as it pursues universal pre-kindergarten.

About Clinton Global Initiative America

Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) America brings together leaders from the business, philanthropic, nonprofit, and government sectors to develop solutions that encourage economic growth, support long-term competitiveness, and increase social mobility in the United States. CGI America's annual convening is designed to be a working meeting that promotes collaboration. Each CGI America participant makes a Commitment to Action: a new, specific, and measurable plan that supports increased economic growth and opportunity. To date, CGI America participants have made more than 500 commitments, which have improved the lives of nearly 2.4 million people.

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POLICYLAB AT THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF PHILADELPHIA

The mission of PolicyLab at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) is to achieve optimal child health and well-being by informing program and policy changes through interdisciplinary research. PolicyLab is a Center of Emphasis within The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute, one of the largest pediatric research institutes in the country.

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