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**Prekindergarteners
Left Behind:**
Expulsion Rates
in State
Prekindergarten
Programs

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HIS BRIEF

summarizes the first study ever conducted on the rate of expulsion in prekindergarten programs. It includes data for the nation as a whole as well as data for the 40 states that fund prekindergarten. The findings are based on data collected in the National Prekindergarten Study (NPS).

Key Findings:

- **Prekindergarten students are expelled at a rate more than three times that of their older peers in the K-12 grades.**
- **Although rates of expulsion vary widely among the 40 states funding prekindergarten, state expulsion rates for prekindergarteners exceed those in K-12 classes in all but three states.**
- **Prekindergarten expulsion rates vary by classroom setting. Expulsion rates are lowest in classrooms located in public schools and Head Start, and highest in faith-affiliated centers and for-profit child care.**
- **The likelihood of expulsion decreases significantly with access to classroom-based behavioral consultation.**

Background:

High quality prekindergarten improves school readiness. It provides children with the cognitive, academic, social, and emotional skills they require to be successful in elementary school. The benefits of quality prekindergarten for children three- to four-years-old go beyond the first years of school. Research shows that children in prekindergarten programs aligned with the educational goals of early elementary school are more likely to graduate high school and be productive citizens. They are also less likely to have children during their teenage years or to become entangled in the criminal justice system.

In recent years, educators and policymakers have begun to recognize the benefits of good prekindergarten programs and, as a result, have been working to expand such programs. State-funded prekindergarten programs, operating in 40 states across the nation, now serve nearly 800,000 children each year. Governors, state departments of education, local school districts, and human service agencies are currently making crucial choices about how to best invest in their state's early education programs so that children entering kindergarten are prepared to succeed.

This study shows that getting children in the prekindergarten door is only the beginning. Vulnerable children get the most from early enrichment experiences, and the extensive early intervention literature shows that support for children and families well before prekindergarten can make a difference in the children's capacity to benefit. Among those children most in need of a school readiness experience are those with behavior problems. These children are most likely to exhibit continued learning and behavioral difficulties and to drop out of school. In addition, dealing with children with behavioral problems may divert teacher attention from the needs of other children in the class. Improving the ability of schools and teachers to manage children's behavior in prekindergarten can dramatically improve their academic and social success.

Children expelled from prekindergarten are much more likely to be ill-prepared for kindergarten and elementary school, and are likely to be among those most at risk for school failure. Expulsion is the most severe disciplinary sanction that an educational program can impose. For a student in kindergarten through 12th grade, expulsion is typically the last of a series of disciplinary actions that ultimately bars the student from attending any educational program in that school system. In other words, expelling a student is an action of last resort - it represents a complete cessation of educational services.

Understanding which children are being expelled begins to shed light on which children are more at risk and how expulsion may be prevented. This can help increase academic success for all children and improve the ability of schools to meet the standards outlined by No Child Left Behind.

Study Methods

Data were collected as part of the National Prekindergarten Study (NPS), a comprehensive data collection effort across each of the nation's 52 state-funded prekindergarten programs operating in the 40 states that fund prekindergarten. A random sample of 4,815 classrooms was selected to represent the more than 40,000 prekindergarten classrooms in the nation. Data were obtained from 3,898 teachers for a response rate of 81 percent. Data were obtained through a telephone interview with the lead teacher most responsible for the day-to-day operation of the sampled classroom. The NPS has a 1.97 percent overall margin of error.

Measures and procedures were piloted in a single-state study in Massachusetts in 2001. A total of 185 childcare programs were selected across the state. The resulting paper, "Prekindergarten Expulsion and Suspension: Rates and Predictors in One State," is due for publication in *Infants and Young Children* in April 2006.

Teachers were asked to report the number of children in their classroom expelled due to behavioral concerns during the previous 12 months. Children who were transitioned directly from the classroom to a 'more appropriate' setting (e.g., transitional classroom, therapeutic preschool program or special education) were not included. For every child expelled, teachers were asked to report the child's age in years, gender, and race or ethnicity (African-American, Asian, Latino, White [non-Latino] or Other. Please see the full report for more details.)

Prekindergarten expulsion rates are compared to expulsion rates for public school students in grades kindergarten through 12. K-12 data were obtained from the Elementary and Secondary School Survey: 2000, conducted by the U.S. Department of Education.

Pre-K Expulsion Rate Triple the Rate of Expulsion Among K-12 Students

The prekindergarten expulsion rate was 6.7 per 1,000 prekindergarteners enrolled. Based on current enrollment rates, an estimated 5,117 prekindergarten students across the nation are expelled each year. This rate is 3.2 times higher than the national rate of expulsion for K-12 students, which is 2.1 per 1,000 enrolled.

Four-year-olds were expelled at a rate about 50 percent greater than three-year-olds. Boys were expelled at a rate over 4.5 times that of girls. African-Americans attending state-funded prekindergarten were about twice as likely to be expelled as Latino and Caucasian children, and over five times as likely to be expelled as Asian-American children.

In this sample of state-funded prekindergarten teachers, 10 percent reported having expelled at least one child in the previous 12 months. Of those teachers, about 80 percent expelled one, 16 percent expelled two, 3.5 percent expelled three, and 0.4 percent expelled four.

Acknowledgements

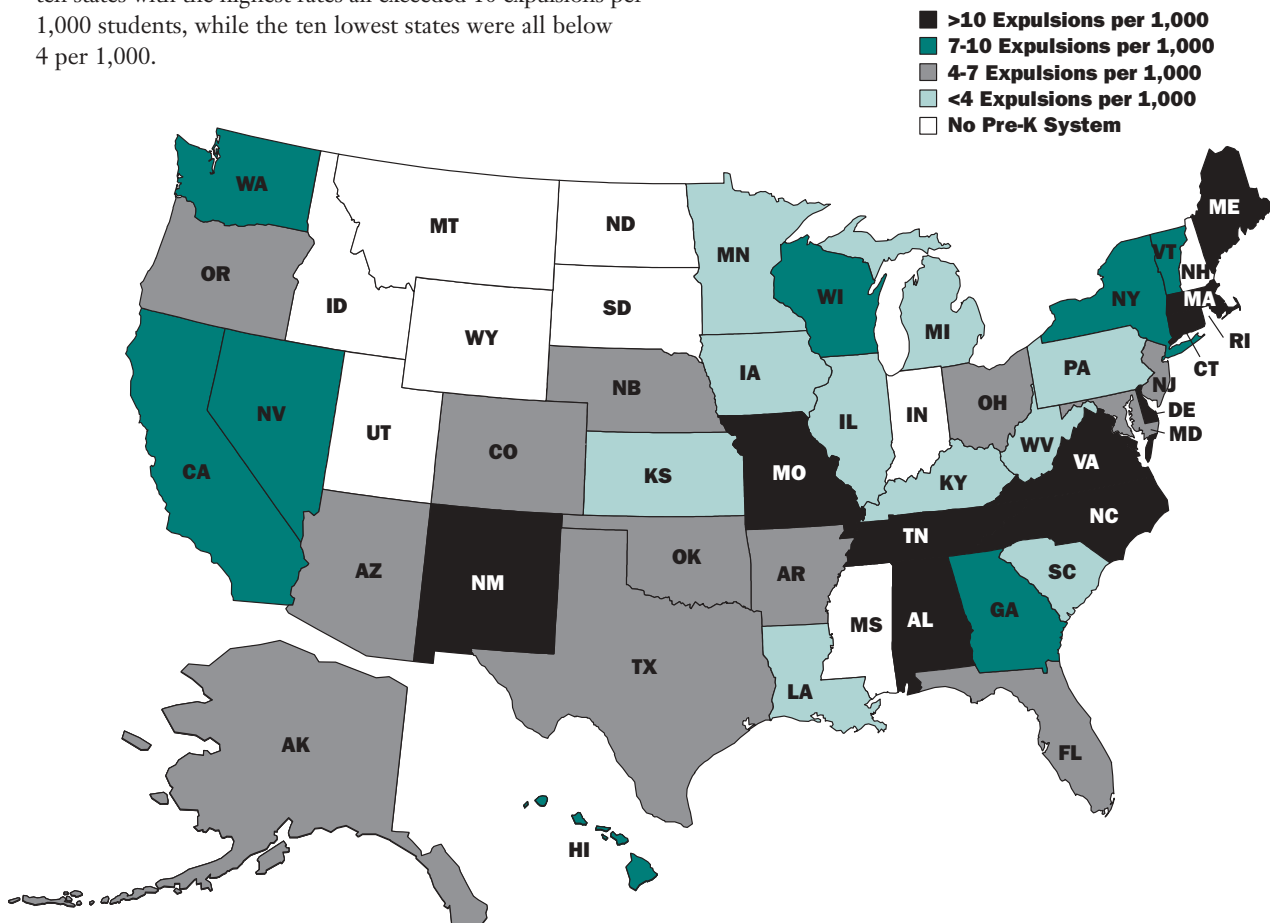
This policy brief, supported by the Foundation for Child Development, the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, and the Schott Foundation for Public Education, summarizes findings presented in the paper, "Prekindergarteners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Systems" by Walter S. Gilliam. The complete paper is available on-line at http://www.fcd-us.org/PDFs/NationalPreKExpulsionPaper03.02_new.pdf, and was funded by the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation. The paper is based on analyses of data from the National Prekindergarten Study (NPS), by Walter S. Gilliam and Crista M. Marchesseault of the Edward Zigler Center for Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University. The NPS was funded by grants from the Foundation for Child Development and the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), with funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The opinions expressed in this brief do not necessarily reflect those of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) or The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Expulsion Rates Vary Significantly by State

Although expulsion rates varied widely among the 40 states funding prekindergarten programs, the rate of expulsion for state-funded prekindergarten exceeded the rate of expulsion in K-12 classes in all but three states (Kentucky, South Carolina, and Louisiana).

New Mexico had the highest rate of expulsion from state-funded prekindergarten programs, 21.1 children per 1,000 enrolled. With no teacher-reported expulsions, Kentucky had the lowest expulsion rate for state-funded prekindergarten. The ten states with the highest rates all exceeded 10 expulsions per 1,000 students, while the ten lowest states were all below 4 per 1,000.

At least part of this variability may be due to differences in the way state prekindergarten programs are structured. The seven states with an exceptionally wide variety of settings, including a high proportion of classrooms in child care centers not affiliated with either the public schools or Head Start, all have prekindergarten expulsion rates that exceed the national average.

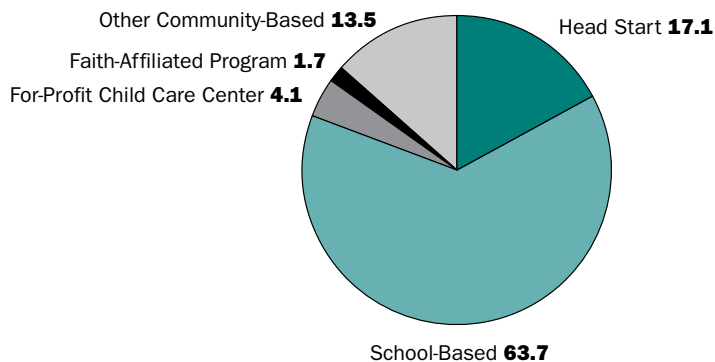


Setting Matters: Public Schools and Head Start Expel the Least

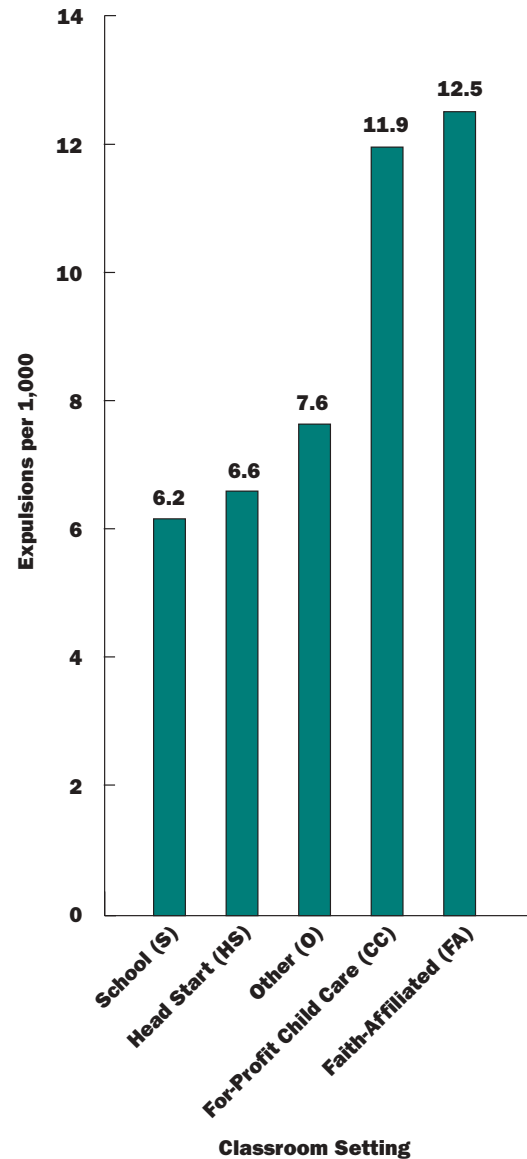
Five pre-kindergarten classroom settings across the nation were identified: school-based that are not funded by Head Start (64 percent of classrooms), Head Start (17 percent), for-profit child care (4 percent), faith-affiliated (2 percent), and other community-based programs (13 percent). Teachers in schools and Head Start locations expelled prekindergarten children at the lowest rates (6.2 and 6.6 per 1,000 respectively). Teachers in faith-affiliated settings (12.5 per thousand), for-profit child care centers (11.9 per 1,000), and other community-based settings (7.6 per 1,000) were significantly more likely to report expelling a prekindergarten student.

Although school-based prekindergarten teachers reported the lowest rate of expulsion (6.2 per 1,000), the rate of prekindergarteners expelled in schools is still nearly three times higher than the rate of expulsion for K-12 students, which is 2.1 per 1,000.

Program Setting (percentage)



Expulsion Rates by Setting



Note. FA, CC, & O > HS & S; HS > S.

Classroom-Based Behavioral Consultation Associated with Lower Rates of Expulsion

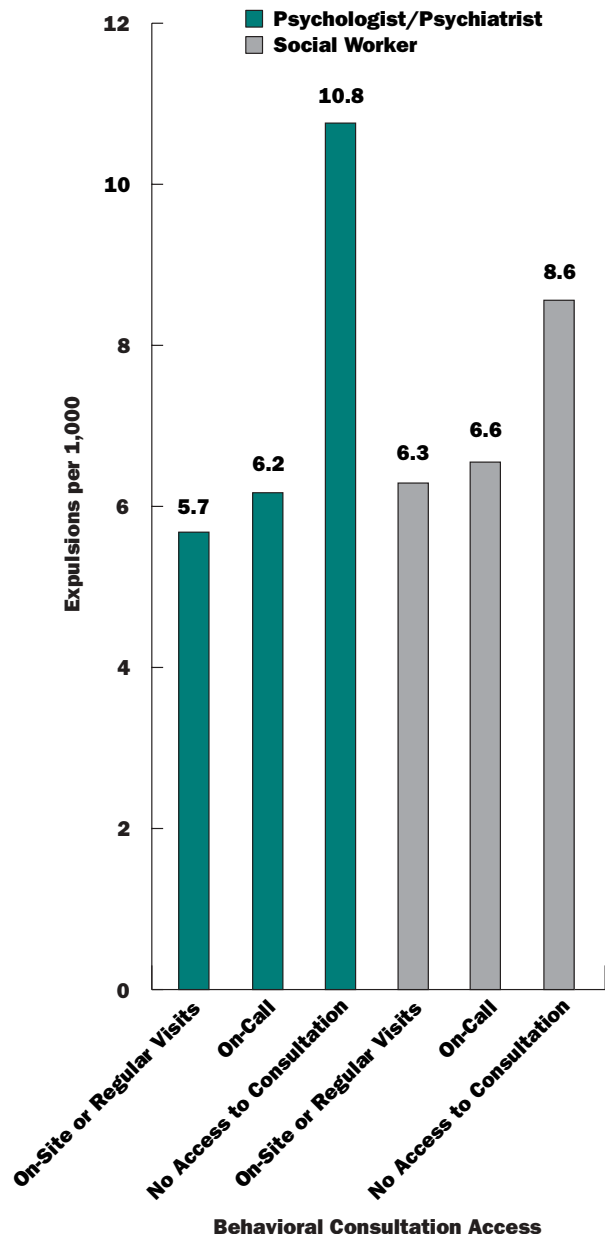
Classroom-based behavioral consultation appears to be a promising method for reducing prekindergarten expulsion. When teachers reported having access to a behavioral consultant who was able to provide classroom-based strategies for dealing with challenging student behaviors, the likelihood of expulsion was lower.

Access to a behavioral consultant who was able to come to the classroom in response to a request initiated by the teacher was better than no access at all, but the lowest rates of expulsion were reported by teachers who had an ongoing, regular relationship with a behavioral consultant – either because the teacher and consultant were located in the same building or because the consultant paid regular visits to the classroom at least monthly.

In classrooms where the teacher had no access to a psychologist or psychiatrist, 10.8 prekindergarteners per 1,000 were expelled. In classrooms where the teacher had access that was either on-call or ongoing, the rates were much lower (6.2 and 5.7 per 1,000, respectively). Unfortunately, only 22.9 percent of teachers have regular access to a psychologist or psychiatrist, and 16.8 percent have no access at all. Access rates for social work consultants are only slightly better.

Differences in access to behavioral consultation may also help explain why Head Start programs and public schools have lower expulsion rates than prekindergarten programs in other settings. Head Start programs and public schools are more likely to have the resources and/or be required to make a counselor available to individual students as well as to the entire classroom.

Expulsion Rates by Access to Behavioral Consultation



Note. For both psychologist/psychiatrist and social worker, No Access > On-Call > On-Site or Regular Visits.

Summary and Main Findings

All prekindergarten teachers need preparation and support to work with young children. Some young children come to prekindergarten programs with a range of behavioral problems that interfere with their ability to benefit from an educational program. These problems include difficulties in paying attention and interacting with teachers, adults and peers in appropriate ways.

The main findings of this study are:

- Prekindergarten students are expelled at a rate more than three times that of their older peers in the K-12 grades.
- Although rates of expulsion vary widely among the 40 states funding prekindergarten, state expulsion rates for prekindergarteners exceed those in K-12 classes in all but three states.
- Prekindergarten expulsion rates vary by classroom setting. Expulsion rates are lowest in classrooms located in public schools and in Head Start, and highest in faith-affiliated centers and for-profit child care.
- The likelihood of expulsion decreases significantly with access to classroom-based behavioral consultation from mental health professionals.

Recommendations

State-funded pre-K programs should:

- Prohibit expulsion of children from prekindergarten.
- Develop clear policies regarding supports for prekindergarten students with behavioral problems such as ensuring that they have access to alternative services, providing individual behavioral aides for children, and alternative programs with small group sizes and highly trained personnel.
- Require teachers to receive systematic and in-service training to address children's behavioral problems.
- Ensure that all children enrolled in state-funded programs receive the same level and quality of support services regardless of classroom setting.
- Coordinate with, better utilize, and replicate successful early intervention approaches to help vulnerable children better transition to the prekindergarten classroom environment.

Researchers should:

- Focus on understanding why boys and African-Americans are at greatest risk for prekindergarten expulsion and how prekindergarten programs can best respond to these disparities.
- Investigate the effectiveness of teacher preparation and on-the-job professional training to improve the ability of teachers to teach children from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
- Explore the potential for behavioral consultation to prevent prekindergarten expulsion through experimental studies in real-world situations. Consultative services should include effective classroom management methods as well as providing services directly to children with severe behavioral problems and their families.



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