

Standing Together Against Suspension & Expulsion in Early Childhood

Every year, as many as 8,710 3- and 4-year-old children may be expelled from or pushed out of their state-funded preschool or prekindergarten classroom.ⁱ A disproportionate number of these children are African American boys and girls, and these early childhood expulsions are happening at a rate more than three times that of their older peers in grades K–12.ⁱⁱ In child care centers, expulsion rates are 13 times what they are in K–12 classrooms, with as many as 39 percent of child care providers reporting at least one expulsion in the past year.ⁱⁱⁱ Many more children, both with and without diagnosed disabilities, across all early childhood settings and sectors, are suspended, with data reflecting severe racial disparities. Indeed, while African American children make up 18 percent of public school preschool enrollment, they represent 48 percent of preschoolers suspended more than once, leaving them with few supports and fewer options to ensure they are able to participate in high-quality early learning during this critical period in their development.^{iv}

In December 2014, the US Department of Health and Human Services and the US Department of Education jointly released a [policy statement](#) designed to start pushing these numbers and disparities down toward zero.

As some of the leading organizations addressing early childhood education, we stand united in support of the policy statement and its recommendations, believing deeply that it is our collective

responsibility to facilitate equitable access to high-quality, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive early childhood education that helps families and communities thrive. We must continue to shine a light on data that inform our decision making, while we work together to create systems, policies, and practices that reduce disparities across race and gender, preventing and eventually eliminating expulsions and suspensions in early childhood settings.

These efforts, whether they are focused on establishing clear policies and guidelines; increasing access to early childhood mental health consultation and crisis counseling; diversifying our teacher pipeline; ensuring that all early educators engage in meaningful professional development that supports them in being culturally responsive, cognizant of bias, and focused on relationship development; providing wrap-around services; or investing in meaningful family engagement, require a collaborative and sustained commitment that includes increasing supports and compensation for educators across settings and sectors – and every one of us has a part to play.

To lead the way, we look to the good work happening in states, communities, and classrooms across the country, and to the resources, recommendations, and supports being developed and shared by many of our own organizations.^v

We know that young children thrive in the context of stable, supportive relationships with adults who love, teach, and care for them. Expulsions and suspensions in early childhood education both threaten the development of these positive relationships and are a result of the lack of positive relationships between educators, families and children. Expelling preschoolers is not an intervention. Rather, it disrupts the learning process, pushing a child out the door of one early care and education program, only for him or her to be enrolled somewhere else, continuing a negative cycle of revolving doors that increases inequality and hides the child and family from access to meaningful supports.

We support all efforts to help our national, state, district, and classroom policies catch up to what we know is right—ensuring that all children have a safe space in which to play, learn, and grow.

This joint statement was drafted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), with support from the organizations that signed on. For more information, please email advocacy@naeyc.org.

[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
[American Federation of Teachers](#)
[American Psychological Association](#)
[Attendance Works](#)
[BUILD Initiative](#)
[Children’s Defense Fund](#)
[Child Care Aware of America](#)
[Center for Law and Social Policy](#)
[Defending the Early Years](#)
[Early Care and Education Consortium](#)
[First Focus](#)
[First Five Years Fund](#)
[FirstSchool](#)
[MomsRising](#)
[National Association for the Education of Young Children](#)
[National Association for Elementary School Principals](#)
[National Association for Family Child Care](#)
[National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education](#)
[National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators](#)
[National Association of State Directors of Special Education](#)
[National Black Child Development Institute](#)
[National Council of La Raza](#)
[National Education Association](#)
[National Head Start Association](#)
[National Urban League](#)
[National Women’s Law Center](#)
[Nemours Children’s Health System](#)
[New America](#)
[Save the Children](#)
[Save the Children Action Network](#)
[Zero to Three](#)

ⁱ This calculation is based on data indicating that there are 1.3 million children in state-funded pre-K (served in public school, Head Start, and community-based child care settings), according to NIEER’s 2014 State of Preschool report, and assuming a rate of expulsion of 6.7 out of 1,000 children in state-funded preK, according to the Gilliam study (Gilliam, W.S., 2005. *Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*. Policy Brief series no. 3. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development). Although this statement on expulsion and suspension—and much of the related work—has grown in part out of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) data, we do not cite only the OCR 2011–2012 report for several reasons: (1) OCR itself includes several cautions in analyzing the data due to the non-sampling error in self-reported data; (2) the OCR data are limited to public preschool programs (which may be part of state pre-K programs or may be separate from those programs); and (3) the fact that expulsion in preschool may not follow typical K-12 expulsion procedures and reporting requirements. Teacher surveys, like those used in the Gilliam study, may be a more reliable and accurate way to assess preschool expulsions and “push-outs,” versus the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data, which rely on a school district’s report of student counts.

ⁱⁱ Gilliam, W. S. (2005). *Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gilliam, W.S., & Shahar, G. (2006). Preschool and child care expulsion and suspension: Rates and predictors in one state. *Infants & Young Children*, 19, 228–45.

^{iv} US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2014). *Data Snapshot: Early Childhood Education Highlights*. Issue Brief #2.

^v For a partial list of available resources, please see the associated [Suspension and Expulsion in Early Childhood Resource Page](#).