

Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion Practices in New Mexico



Over the past decade, New Mexico has incrementally increased funding for and access to early childhood services. Research shows that quality early childhood programs benefit a child's development and have lifelong positive impacts. However, children who present challenging behaviors can lose access to these programs through exclusion practices that range from expulsion to forms of soft exclusion¹. The practice of exclusion often means that children most in need of early childhood services miss out on its benefits.

Key Findings of The Survey²

- On average, 25% of preschoolers present challenging behaviors
- About 33% of providers had a child disenroll due to challenging behaviors in the last year (includes soft exclusion)
- 11% of providers reported expelling a child due to challenging behaviors in the last year
- Many children who present challenging behaviors have identified special needs, are experiencing poverty, come from families experiencing domestic violence or come from families experiencing involvement with the criminal justice system
- Challenging behaviors impact other children's safety, the ability of providers to attend to the needs of other children, the ability of other children to learn and explore, other children's feelings of well-being and security, and educators' feelings of well-being and confidence
- More than 66% of respondents said increased training on socio-emotional development would help, as would increased access to early childhood mental health consultation and increased support for families to access needed services
- Most respondents had never received a consultation or coaching visit from an early childhood mental health professional

¹ Examples of "soft exclusion" include providers asking parents to pick up their children early or keep them at home, providers informing parents that the program is not a good fit for the child and providers informing parents that the program is not able to meet the child's needs.

² In order to gather data on suspension and expulsion, Pegasus Legal Services for Children and the New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership partnered with the UNM Cradle to Career Policy Institute (CCPI) to survey early childhood services providers in New Mexico. CCPI surveyed a variety of early childhood providers in New Mexico including home-based care, Head Start, early IDEA, licensed child care centers, CYFD PreK and PED PreK. 336 respondents filled out the survey and 225 respondents completed all questions on the survey. The full survey report is available at:

<http://ccpi.unm.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Suspension%20and%20Expulsion%20Final%20Report.pdf>



Proactive Policy Steps in Other States

- **Colorado** provides social-emotional intervention supports for children and provides access to early childhood mental health providers as needed, while requiring that 20% of continuing education is on the topic of social-emotional development.
- **Arkansas** outlines steps that must be taken prior to implementing exclusionary practices and provides a technical assistance hotline, training in social-emotional development and an expulsion data tracking system. Arkansas has also increased funding for early childhood mental health services.
- **Connecticut** limits most out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of PreK students and has a data system that tracks how providers address challenging early childhood behaviors. Connecticut also implemented a mental health consultation program that is universally available to all early childhood programs.

Actions for New Mexico to Address Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion

Get better data

Implement a data system that collects information on suspension and expulsion practices in early childhood services. Currently, there is no state-wide data collection on early childhood exclusion in New Mexico. The data system should 1) include all early childhood education and care services in the state, 2) track formal suspension and expulsion as well as other forms of exclusion and 3), track where children end up after disenrollment.

Expand early childhood mental health services

Ensure that early mental health care services are accessible, services are available within a reasonable time frame, and that there is a sufficient early mental health workers to support all early care and learning providers in New Mexico.

Increase training opportunities to address challenging behaviors

Trainings will help providers to respond to challenging behaviors by 1) engaging appropriately and with families; 2) learning how to appropriately care for children with trauma, adverse childhood experiences; or addiction issues in the home; 3) implementing strategies for responding to challenging behaviors; 4) identifying undiagnosed autism and caring for children with autism; 5) responding safely to biting, spitting, hitting and throwing; and 6) responding appropriately to anxiety in young children.

