

ACTION 3.17

Eliminate or minimize the use of suspension and expulsion in birth-through-third grade classrooms. Assess, identify, and address needs; screen for disabilities and refer for supports; include cultural competency into disciplinary policy; and recognize the impact of trauma on many children.

ELIMINATE or MINIMIZE SUSPENSION and EXPULSION



Suspension and expulsion in the early grades contributes to chronic absence, social-emotional health concerns, and other issues that impact children’s learning and success in school. Exclusionary practices in early learning environments have the **potential to set children on a path of negative developmental outcomes**. As they progress through school, they are more likely to experience poor academic outcomes, increased behavior challenges, and are at higher risk for dropout and criminal-legal system involvement.

Suspensions and expulsions result in children being away from developmentally supportive learning environments. When a child is suspended or expelled, they fall behind in learning, their development of social and emotional skills may be hindered, and the experience of being excluded can create feelings of alienation from school environments. Exclusion also causes substantial harm to family economic stability because parents may lose their jobs while searching through the long waiting lists among the few alternatives for care. In many cases, the increased household financial and emotional stress leads parents to adopt harsh and punitive parenting practices, which then increases young children’s display of behavioral challenges.

WHAT WE KNOW

There is clear evidence, nationally and in North Carolina, that **students of color, particularly Black students, are disproportionately suspended and expelled starting as young as preschool**. There are even disproportionate rates among students based on gender and ability status. Research also shows that **implicit bias plays a role in creating these disparities**. They found that race and gender matter for preschool teacher’s expectations of challenging behaviors. Teachers more closely observe Black students, and especially Black boys, to watch and punish for challenging behaviors. Additionally, when the preschool teacher and child were of the same race, knowing about family stressors led to increased teacher empathy for the preschooler and decreased how severe the behaviors appeared to the teacher. However, when the teacher and child were of a different race, the same family information seemed to overwhelm the teachers and the behaviors were perceived as being more severe. This finding confirms the importance of ensuring that we are training and hiring a diverse pool of early childhood educators that are representative of the students they serve.

BLACK CHILDREN ACCOUNT FOR 18% OF CHILDREN ENROLLED in preschool but are 43% OF CHILDREN SUSPENDED and 38% OF CHILDREN EXPELLED from preschool.

Dive Into the Data

Explore the need for actionable data indicators related to practices that can reduce suspension and expulsion such as [social emotional screening, referrals and services](#) on the [Pathways Data Dashboard](#).

WHAT WE NEED

North Carolina’s Division of Child Development and Early Education has provided [guidance to prevent, severely limit, and work toward eventually eliminating the expulsion and suspension](#). Among their recommendations is the suggestion that early childhood programs implement evidence-based practices to prevent challenging behavior including, conference with the family, and consultation with early childhood mental health specialists, behavioral consultants, and licensed therapists. NC’s Partnership for Children of Cumberland County and the NC Pre-K Committee [created minimum expectations for NC Pre-K sites to prevent the suspension and/or expulsion of children with unique needs/challenging behaviors](#).

HOW TO SUPPORT

Early learning educators need capacity building resources and supports that enable them to respond to challenging behaviors with developmentally supportive practices and recognize signs of developmental delay that require early intervention. One example is NC’s Child Care Resource & Referral Council statewide [Healthy Social Behaviors Initiative](#) that helps teachers in any licensed child care center serving children ages 0 to 5 years old.

There is hope for change on the horizon, as many states, including North Carolina, take on the challenge of reducing and hopefully eliminating suspension and expulsion from early learning environments.

INITIATIVES WORKING IN THIS AREA



The [Healthy Social Behaviors Project](#) supports early childhood educators in birth-five classrooms in licensed child care centers to develop prosocial early childhood learning environments that help to prevent suspension and expulsion related to challenging behaviors. Behavior Specialists, Pyramid Model Fidelity Coaches and an Education Specialist serve all 100 counties across NC. Utilizing the evidence-based Teaching Pyramid Model as its framework, the project offers consultation and individualized coaching to support teachers’ development of nurturing and responsible relationships, high quality supportive environments, targeted social and emotional supports and intensive interventions for those children needing additional supports to develop social-emotional competencies.

The [NC Pyramid Model Leadership Team](#) is tasked with



creating alignment and collaboration amongst pyramid implementers (DPI Preschool Exceptional Children, DHHS Infant-Toddler Program (Part C), Healthy Social Behaviors (HSB) in Child Care), as well as advocating for a more comprehensive and seamless implementation in NC. The Team’s vision is to ensure that the NC birth to eight system promotes social emotional well-being for families with young children, beginning at birth, particularly those with or at risk for disabilities, and to assure children and families have access to anti-biased, inclusive, and natural learning environments. They aim to achieve this vision by: promoting and sustaining high fidelity implementation of high-quality Pyramid Model practices through a comprehensive professional development network, prioritizing intentional family collaboration and empowerment, intentionally addressing systemic inequities in early childhood intervention and education, and supporting monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure fidelity and outcomes.

[Visit the Pathways Action Map](#) to learn more about initiatives leading efforts to advance this action.