



ASPE

Research BRIEF

Factors associated with reduced expulsion in center-based early learning settings: Preliminary findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)¹

By Pamala Trivedi, Laura Chadwick, and Kimberly Burgess

This brief provides new national estimates of recent early childhood expulsion rates in a range of center-based early learning settings using data from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), indicating how characteristics of early care and education (ECE) centers relate to the likelihood that children are denied services due to behavior. The analysis describes how access to comprehensive services, support for professional development for ECE teachers and staff, funding source (e.g., Head Start, public pre-K, private, etc.), and program sponsorship (e.g., non-profit, government sponsored, for-profit, etc.) relate to recent expulsion rates.

Key findings

- Over a three-month timeframe, almost one in ten (8.8 percent) of early care and education (ECE) centers surveyed denied services to children due to behavior.
- *Comprehensive services:* Overall, ECE programs that help families access *and* help families pay for comprehensive services expel children at lower rates than programs that do not.
- *Support for ECE teachers and staff:* ECE programs that provide support through mentors, coaches, or consultants *and* funding for formal professional coursework have lower rates of expulsion than programs that do not.
- *Funding and program type:* ECE programs with predominantly public funding and those with Head Start funding have significantly lower rates of recent expulsion than those run by for-profit entities.

¹ Authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of Rachael Fortune to the early framing and conceptualization of this analysis. We would also like to thank colleagues for their comprehensive review of previous versions of this brief, as well as their leadership in formulating research and policy that is contributing to the reduction of exclusionary practices in early childhood settings.

Research and Policy Context

High rates of suspension and expulsion of preschool children from early care and education (ECE) settings have prompted recent legislative and policy action across the country. Expulsion is defined as the complete and permanent denial of educational services to a child.^{2,3} In K-12 public school settings expulsion is used as the most severe disciplinary sanction, and is often regulated by state law. However, young children in public and private preschool settings are typically not subject to the same protections.

The adverse effects of out-of-school suspension and expulsion can be profound and long-lasting. No research indicates separating a child from educational services improves behavior. In fact, school age students who experience out-of-school suspensions or expulsions early in their elementary school years are more likely to experience academic failure, grade retention, become involved with the criminal justice system and maintain negative attitudes about school.^{4,5,6} Based on the science of early learning, the situation for young children who are expelled at even earlier stages is likely to be similar.

The architecture of early brain development is formed in the context of relationships with parents and other caregivers, teachers, and peers in communities.^{7,8} Understanding the critical role of the early years in setting the stage for positive or negative trajectories in school and life has been crucial to how expulsion research and policy has coalesced in recent years. Research in this area has consistently found that pre-K expulsion rates were attenuated by the level of support ECE teachers received, such as whether they had access to early childhood mental health professionals for behavioral consultations.^{9,10,11}

² Gilliam, W. S. (2005). Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center.

³ Gilliam, W. S. (2008). *Implementing policies to reduce the likelihood of preschool expulsion* (Advancing PK-3 No. FCD Policy Brief 7). New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/ExpulsionBriefImplementingPolicies.pdf>

⁴ Lamont, J. H., Devore, C. D., Allison, M., Ancona, R., Barnett, S. E., Gunther, R., Wheeler, L. S. (2013). Out-of-school suspension and expulsion. *Pediatrics*, 131(3), e1000–e1007.

⁵ Petras, H., Masyn, K. E., Buckley, J. A., Jalongo, N. S., & Kellam, S. (2011). Who is most at risk for school removal? A multilevel discrete-time survival analysis of individual-and context-level influences. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 103(1), 223.

⁶ Raffaele Mendez, L. M. (2003). Predictors of suspension and negative school outcomes: A longitudinal investigation. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2003(99), 17–33.

⁷ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (NRC/IOM). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. (J. P. Shonkoff & D. Phillips, Eds.). Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Retrieved from http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=9824&page=1

⁸ Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. (2015). *In brief: Early childhood mental health*. Retrieved from <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/InBrief-Early-Childhood-Mental-Health-1.pdf>

⁹ Gilliam (2005).

¹⁰ Hepburn, K., Perry, D., Shivers, E., & Gilliam, W. (2013). Early childhood mental health consultation as an evidence-based practice: Where does it stand? *Zero to Three*, 33(5), 10–19.

¹¹ Gilliam, W. (2007). Reducing behavior problems in early care and education programs: An evaluation of Connecticut's early childhood consultation partnership. *IMPACT Report. Farmington, CT: Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut*.

In a foundational study in 2005, researcher Walter Gilliam¹² surveyed all 40 states that offered state-funded pre-K, revealing that children under age five experienced expulsion from ECE settings at a rate 3.2 times that of school-aged children. Gilliam also found that Pre-K expulsion rates varied by center type, and rates were lowest in classrooms located in public schools and Head Start, and highest in religiously or faith-affiliated and for-profit centers. Follow-up studies conducted in three states^{13,14,15} indicated that young children are often expelled for behaviors that are considered normal for typically-developing children of this age, such as tantrums, classroom disruption, and toileting issues.

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) released national data¹⁶ that revealed trends consistent with Gilliam's¹⁷ work and preliminary findings from states on exclusionary discipline. The OCR data indicated that suspension rates remain particularly high for preschool-aged children, and that African American and Hispanic boys are much more likely to be suspended than White boys or girls of any race. While 46 percent of all boys in preschool are Hispanic or African American, they constitute 66 percent of all boys suspended in preschool. Young boys are four times more likely to be suspended than young girls. Following the release of the OCR data, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released a [joint policy statement](#)¹⁸ to prevent and severely limit expulsion and suspension practices in early learning settings. The 2014 federal policy statement also supported a broader federal effort to improve school climates and discipline, and was accompanied by investments in the professional development of the early childhood workforce and in resources to better support children and families. In the reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 (CCDBG; P.L. 113-186) Congress included new language indicating that states could use funds to support professional development efforts in child care settings aimed at addressing expulsion and suspension practices, and promoting children's social-emotional and behavioral development. The law also indicates that states must communicate policies that support children's social-emotional development, including expulsion

¹² Gilliam (2005).

¹³ Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). (2014). Reducing out-of-school suspensions and expulsion in the District of Columbia Public and Charter Schools. Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/doc/228189145/OSSE-report-and-recommendations-on-reducing-out-of-school-suspensions-and-expulsions-in-the-District-of-Columbia-Public-and-Charter-Schools>

¹⁴ Hoover, S. D., Kubicek, L. F., Rosenberg, C. R., Zundel, C., & Rosenberg, S. A. (2012). Influence of behavioral concerns and early childhood expulsions on the development of early childhood mental health consultation in Colorado. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 33(3), 246–255.

¹⁵ Gilliam, W. S., & Shahar, G. (2006). Preschool and child care expulsion and suspension: Rates and predictors in one state. *Infants & Young Children*, 19(3), 228–245.

¹⁶ US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR). (2014). *Data Snapshot: Early Childhood Education* (Civil Rights Data Collection No. Issue Brief No. 2). Washington, DC: US Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-early-learning-snapshot.pdf>

¹⁷ Gilliam (2005).

¹⁸ US Department of Health and Human Services, & US Department of Education. (2014). *Joint statement on expulsion and suspension policies early childhood settings*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

and suspension policies. The federal Head Start program has had a long-standing expectation that grantees will prohibit the use of expulsion with enrolled children.

The revised [Head Start Program Performance Standards](#), released in September 2016, codified this expectation by expressly prohibiting the use of expulsion and requiring programs to severely limit the use of suspension. Several states and communities have formulated policy responses to this issue over the last few years; these local actions often restrict or ban expulsion and out-of-school suspensions in early learning settings, and expand supports for ECE teachers and staff to promote the social-emotional development of children and build staff capacity to understand and handle challenging behavior.¹⁹

The OCR data²⁰ used to identify high rates of preschool suspension and expulsion are limited to programs housed in public schools; ECE programs that are not located in public school settings (e.g., Head Start not located in public schools, private preschools and child care) are not included in the OCR data. This study extends beyond public school programs to assess expulsion rates among all ECE centers, using a nationally-representative sample from the NSECE. In addition, this study examines how different characteristics of ECE programs, particularly those expected to reduce expulsion, such as professional development supports and comprehensive services, relate to rates of these exclusionary practices. Due to data limitations, the current study does not add to the OCR findings on disparities in expulsion rates.

Purpose and Approach

This analysis uses data from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) to examine characteristics of ECE providers and whether they expelled infants, toddlers, and young children due to their behavior. The NSECE is a set of four integrated, nationally representative surveys conducted in 2012. Data from the Center-Based Providers Survey were analyzed for this brief, so the findings do not include home-based providers. In the NSECE, a center-based program is defined as a set of all ECE services to children birth through five years, not yet in kindergarten, provided by an organization at a single location. There may be multiple kinds of services offered by a center, and it may be housed in the community or as part of a larger entity, such as a public school, commercial chain, or small private facility at a single location. The NSECE data represents 129,000 center-based programs serving 6.98 million children.²¹ For this survey, center directors and instructional leaders of ECE providers were identified from a larger sampling frame comprised of state and national administrative lists.²² On the NSECE, questions about expulsion were asked in the following way: “*In the past three months, have you told a*

¹⁹ US Department of Health and Human Services (2016). *State and local action to prevent expulsion and suspension in early learning settings*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services.

²⁰ US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) (2014).

²¹ National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2014). *Fact Sheet: Characteristics of center-based early care and education programs* (No. OPRE Report No. 2014-73b). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/characteristics_of_cb_fact_sheet_final_111014.pdf

²² For more information about the NSECE sampling frame, please see: National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2013). *National Survey of Early Care and Education: Summary data collection and sampling methodology* (No. OPRE Report No. 2013-46). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nsece_summarymethodology_toopre_102913.pdf

parent that you would not care for a child anymore because of problems with the child's behavior?" In this analysis, we explored whether provider characteristics are associated with the answers ECE directors and instructional leaders provided in response to this question. This data does not provide information about the characteristics of the children who were denied services.

This descriptive analysis should not be interpreted as demonstrating the effect of provider characteristics on expulsion rates, or implying causality. Instead, these findings describe the relationships between program characteristics and rates of expulsion.

Results

Of the entire sample of centers surveyed for the NSECE, 8.8 percent of providers indicated that they had denied services to a child due to behavior in the past three months. Rates of expulsion were lower for centers that help families access comprehensive services; for those that provide support for ECE teachers and staff; for those with predominately public funding or Head Start funding; and for those run by non-profit or government entities.

Finding 1: Centers providing comprehensive services have lower rates of recent expulsion

Comprehensive services. Some early learning programs promote child development by offering a range of comprehensive services and supports to children and their families, beyond early education services and basic care for children. For example, Head Start is required by statute to provide services in the areas of health, oral health, mental health, nutrition, and family engagement, as well as individualized services for children with disabilities. Such services are important to the overall well-being and development of children and families, and also ensure that children receive the individualized supports they may need. Other ECE centers may offer some degree of comprehensive services that either 1) build staff capacity to directly provide services to children or to make community-based referrals; or 2) bring other professionals and resources into early childhood settings to collaborate with ECE staff. Table 1 provides examples of child and family services often included in the category of comprehensive services.

Table 1: Examples of Comprehensive Services in ECE^{23,24,25}

- ***Support for infant and early childhood mental health***, including screening for social-emotional development, access to mental health consultants and behavior specialists.
- ***Support services for families***, including connecting families to housing, food, and other economic or social supports; parenting supports, and resources and referrals for parental mental health, including maternal depression and abuse prevention and treatment.
- ***Support for children with or at-risk for disabilities***, including developmental screening, facilitating connections to Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA parts B and C), providing therapeutic services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy or other services for children with identified needs, and educational interventions that promote the inclusion of children with disabilities or delays.
- ***Preventive health and dental care services***, such as assistance with connecting families to a medical home or health insurance, or providing dental screenings or vaccinations.

The NSECE center-based providers were asked about several comprehensive services and supports, specifically: health screening, developmental assessments, therapeutic services, counseling services to children and parents, and social services to parents, or including specialists on staff with expertise in meeting the needs of particular populations of children in their centers. These specialists could include therapists serving children with disabilities, such as speech and language or occupational therapists, or those who teach English as a second language. During the NSECE survey, center directors were asked if they helped children and families get any of these services, either by providing the services on-site or by providing referrals. Some ECE centers are co-located with or nested within other social service organizations, and helping children and families access comprehensive services does not always occur through formal referral, but may involve working informally with partners or with sponsor organizations. The NSECE survey asks separate questions for each type of comprehensive services and supports. For those centers that said they help families and children get any of the comprehensive services, the NSECE survey asked whether the centers helped pay for these services and supports and whether they helped families and children get services by providing verbal or written referrals. However, these questions about payment and referrals for services were asked as follow-up questions in relation to *any* of the comprehensive services, and were not asked about each service separately.

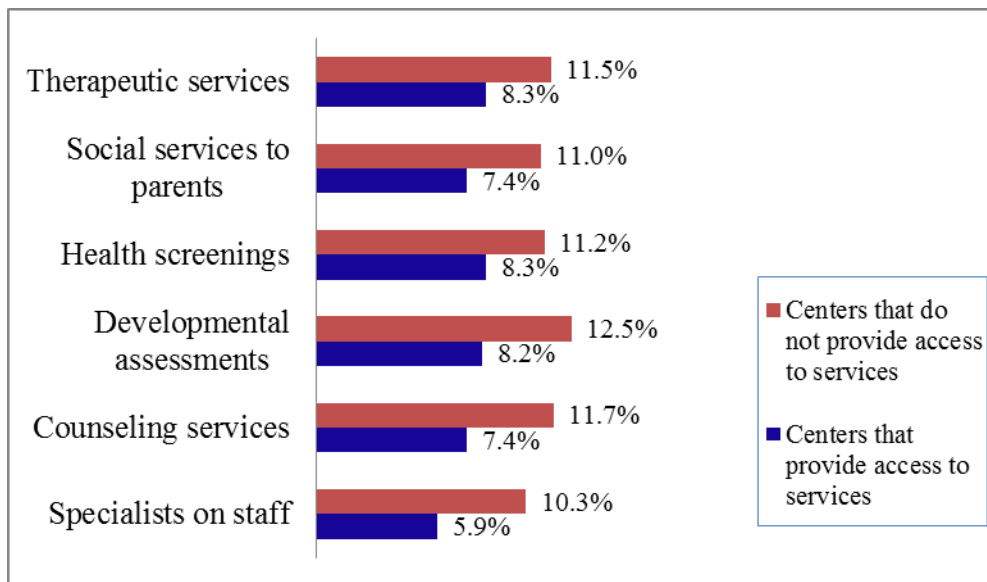
²³ Johnson-Staub, C. (2012). *Putting it together: A Guide to financing comprehensive services*. CLASP: Policy solutions that work for low-income people. Retrieved from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/A-Guide-to-Financing-Comprehensive-Services-in-Child-Care-and-Early-Education.pdf>

²⁴ Johnson-Staub, C., & Schmit, S. (2014, May). *More than assessments: Supporting developmental screening in early childhood education settings*. Presented at the National Smart Start Conference, Greensboro, NC. Retrieved from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/smartstart-screening-2014-DRAFT.pdf>

²⁵ Zaslow, M., & Tout, K. (2014). *Reviewing and clarifying goals, outcomes, and levels of implementation: Toward the next generation of Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), US Department of Health and Human Services.

Since the NSECE asked about providing each of the comprehensive services separately, we were able to assess the relationship between types of comprehensive services provided and whether centers expelled children. Almost nine in ten centers (88.5 percent) helped children and families access at least one comprehensive service. As shown in Figure 1, for each of these services, centers that helped families access services engaged in expulsion significantly less frequently than those that did not help families access these services. For example, more than one quarter (27 percent) of centers had at least one specialist on staff. Centers that *do not* have a specialist on staff are almost twice as likely to engage in exclusionary practices. More than one in ten (10.3 percent) centers without specialists on staff recently expelled a child, compared to 5.9 percent of centers with at least one specialist on staff.

Figure 1: Recent expulsion rates by type of comprehensive services provided

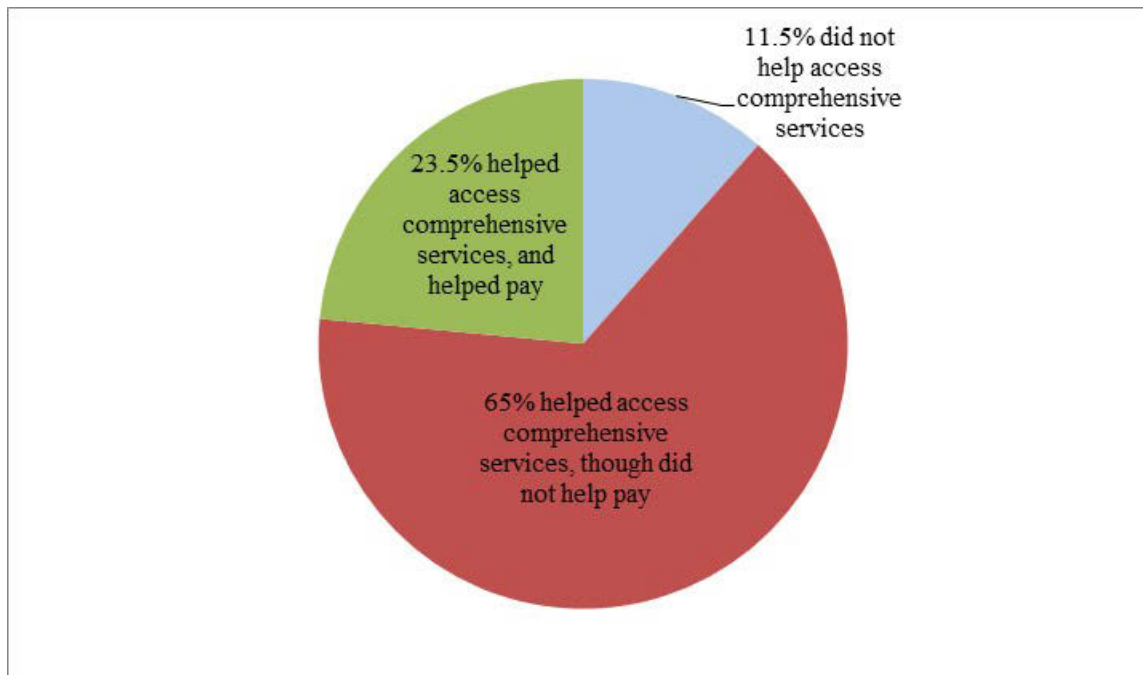


Note: Differences between each pair are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Unweighted N=7,719, except for "Specialists" where unweighted N=7,420.

A large share of centers (45 percent) help children and families access five types of comprehensive services (therapeutic services, social services to parents, health screenings, developmental assessments, and counseling services).²⁶ Centers that helped families get these five services were significantly less likely to have denied care to a child due to behavior (5.8 percent, compared to 11.5 percent) than centers that provided no help to children and families in accessing these services.

It is also possible that centers that help pay for services may have lower recent expulsion rates. Figure 2 divides centers into three categories: 1) centers that do not help families access comprehensive services; 2) centers that help families access comprehensive services, but don't help families pay for additional services; and 3) centers that help families access comprehensive services and also assist families in paying for additional services.

²⁶ The NSECE did not ask whether families are expected to pay or receive formal referrals for specialists already on staff at a center, therefore our analysis was not able to account for this.

Figure 2: Share of centers that help families access comprehensive services

Note: Unweighted N=7,633.

As demonstrated in Figure 2, nearly one-quarter of centers help families access comprehensive services and help families pay for services. These centers are significantly less likely to have engaged in expulsion practices—only 2.8 percent denied services to a child due to behavior in the past three months. In contrast, more than 11 percent of the centers that did not help families access or did not help pay for services engaged in expulsion. These data suggest that the level of support programs offer to families matters. Centers that offered a higher level of support to families in getting their needs met, in the form of providing services *and* helping to pay for additional services were less likely to expel children. This relationship holds even after accounting for other characteristics of centers such as funding sources.

Finding 2: Centers providing on-site professional development and support for staff have lower rates of recent expulsion

In addition to facilitating access to comprehensive services, many ECE centers work to improve quality by providing support for ECE staff members who care for young children. Providing staff training to improve their ability to address children's behavioral issues, for example, may reduce expulsion rates. In 2015, The Institute of Medicine (IOM) National Research Council released a report²⁷ that found caring for young children with a range of individual challenges requires a high level of knowledge, skills and competencies. The report finds that these can be developed through intensive pre-service preparation programs, training, and in-service professional development, such as coaching and mentoring, consultation, and other opportunities to engage in reflective practice embedded in the workplace setting.

²⁷ Allen, L., Kelly, B. B., & National Research Council (NRC). (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children birth through 8: A unifying foundation*. National Academies Press. Retrieved from <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a>

Practice-based approaches: Coaching, mentoring, and consultation. Coaching and mentoring involve a collaborative partnership between an ECE professional and a senior education professional that engages adult learning principles and facilitates ways to grow on the job. Recent reviews of coaching in early childhood classrooms concluded that this practice is positively linked to improvements in observed quality and teacher practices, lower attrition rates, and more independent problem-solving by teachers.^{28,29,30} Consultation with a specialist, such as in infant and early childhood mental health consultation (I-ECMHC), improves the social-emotional and behavioral health of young children³¹ and demonstrates positive impacts such as: 1) reductions in children’s problem behavior and increases in their social skills;^{32,33,34,35} 2) prevention of expulsions;^{36,37,38,39} and 3) reductions in teacher stress and turnover.^{40,41} Gilliam⁴² found that pre-K expulsion rates were related significantly to teacher access to a mental health consultant in the classroom.

Among providers surveyed for the NSECE, 52.3 percent provided staff with in-service, practice-based professional development through mentors, coaches, or consultants in their classrooms. Although our initial analysis indicated these centers were significantly less likely to engage in expulsion (7.7 percent vs. 10.5 percent), further analysis indicated that expulsion was significantly less common only among those centers that provide both access to practice-based professional development and funding for coursework, as shown in Figure 3.

²⁸ Allen, Kelly & NRC (2015).

²⁹ Aikens, N., & Akers, L. (2011). *Background review of existing literature on coaching*. Mathematica Policy Research.

³⁰ Ismer *et al*, 2011.

³¹ The RAINE Group (2014). *Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation protects our national investment in early care and education*. Retrieved from http://indigoculturalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/RAINE-ecmhc_infographics_finalF_Proof5.pdf

³² Conners-Burrow, N. A., Whiteside-Mansell, L., Mckelvey, L., Virmani, E. A., & Sockwell, L. (2012). Improved classroom quality and child behavior in an Arkansas early childhood mental health consultation pilot project. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 33(3), 256–264.

³³ Davis, A., & Perry, D. F. (2014). *Healthy Futures Year four evaluation of early childhood mental health consultation*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development.

³⁴ Gilliam, W. S. (2007). *Early Childhood Consultation Partnership: Results of a random-controlled evaluation. Final Report and Executive Summary*. New Haven, CT: Child Study Center, Yale University School of Medicine.

³⁵ Perry, D. F., Allen, M. D., Brennan, E. M., & Bradley, J. R. (2010). The evidence base for mental health consultation in early childhood settings: A research synthesis addressing children’s behavioral outcomes. *Early Education and Development*, 21(6), 795–824.

³⁶ Davis & Perry (2014).

³⁷ Gilliam (2005).

³⁸ Gilliam (2007).

³⁹ Perry, D. F., Dunne, M. C., McFadden, L., & Campbell, D. (2008). Reducing the risk for preschool expulsion: Mental health consultation for young children with challenging behaviors. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 17(1), 44–54.

⁴⁰ Perry, D. F., Allen, M. D., Brennan, E. M., & Bradley, J. R. (2010). The evidence base for mental health consultation in early childhood settings: A research synthesis addressing children’s behavioral outcomes. *Early Education and Development*, 21(6), 795–824.

⁴¹ Davis & Perry (2014).

⁴² Gilliam, W. S. (2005).

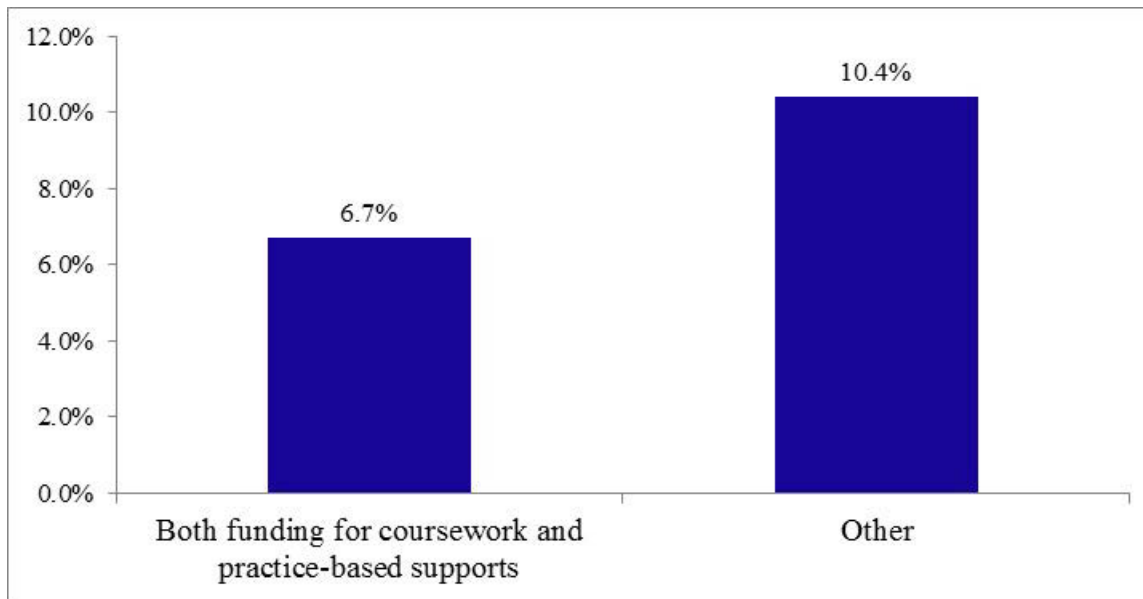
Support for formal coursework. In addition to field-based professional development, such as mentoring, coaching, and consultation, many ECE centers provide support for professionals to engage in college coursework or offsite training that builds knowledge and competencies needed to serve young children. Although research indicates that coursework alone has limited impacts on teacher outcomes, when it is linked to on-site professional development opportunities, it can improve teacher competencies and their ability to support discrete areas of student learning.^{43,44} Offering staff paid time off to complete coursework or offering funding for courses has been demonstrated to alleviate financial stress among ECE staff, which may in turn have benefits for children in their classrooms.⁴⁵

The NSECE survey asked providers about support for formal coursework, including whether they offered paid time off for staff to participate in college courses or off-site training, and if the staff were provided with funding to participate in this coursework. Sixty-two percent (62.3 percent) of centers provide staff with funding for college courses or other offsite training, and 41.7 percent of centers provide staff with paid time off for coursework or training. According to NSECE data, and consistent with research about the value of standalone, formal coursework that is not linked to field-based training, support for coursework alone was not related to a difference in the share of centers that recently expelled children. However, more than one-third (39.5 percent) of centers provided both funding for college courses or other offsite training *and* staff with mentors, coaches, or consultants in their classrooms. Consistent with previous research, the NSECE data show that centers that provided funding for courses as well as access to mentors, coaches or consultants had a significantly lower rate of expulsion (6.7 percent, compared to a rate of 10.4 percent among centers that did not provide both types of support for staff). Rates of expulsion were not statistically significantly different among the other three groups.

⁴³ Neuman, S. B., & Cunningham, L. (2009). The impact of professional development and coaching on early language and literacy instructional practices. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(2), 532–566.

⁴⁴ Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., Hamre, B. K., Justice, L. M., & Pianta, R. C. (2010). Consultation for teachers and children's language and literacy development during pre-kindergarten. *Applied Developmental Science*, 14(4), 179–196.

⁴⁵ Child Care Services Association. (2013). *Working in early care and education in North Carolina: 2012 workforce study*. Chapel Hill, NC: Child Care Services Association.

Figure 3: Recent expulsion rates and professional development and support for staff

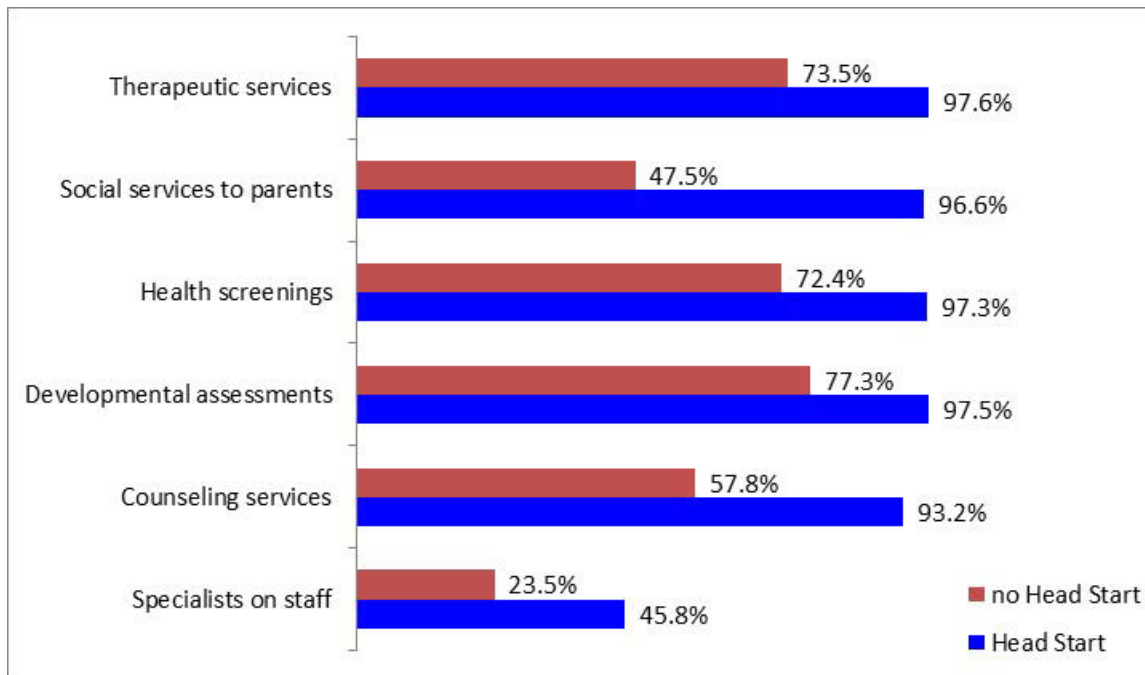
Note: Difference is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Unweighted N=7,470.

Finding 3: Centers with Head Start funding, and those with predominantly public funding, have significantly lower rates of recent expulsion.

Funding source, program sponsorship and auspice are related to rates of expulsion.⁴⁶ As mentioned earlier in the brief, Head Start centers, as well as many other publically-funded ECE programs, are subject to program requirements that influence the level of comprehensive services provided and what types of professional development and support for ECE teachers and staff are available. Because of the strong emphasis on comprehensive services and professional development in the Head Start Program Performance Standards, it could be that lower recent expulsion rates among centers providing these services is actually driven by their status as Head Start programs.

As shown in Figure 4, most centers that have Head Start funding help families access comprehensive services such as therapeutic services, social services to parents, health screenings, developmental assessments, and counseling services. Centers with Head Start funding are also more likely to have specialists on staff than centers without Head Start funding, and more likely than other centers to provide professional development support for teachers and staff. Approximately 70 percent of centers with Head Start funding provide the combination of coursework and practice-based professional development support discussed earlier, compared to only 32 percent of centers without Head Start funding.

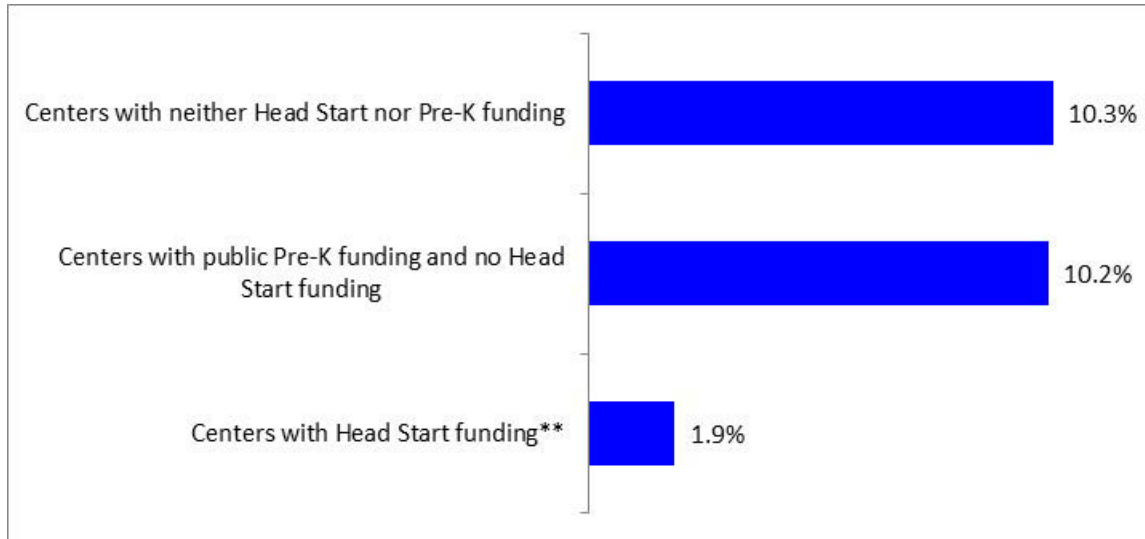
⁴⁶ The NSECE asked centers whether they were non-profit, for-profit, or governmental (“auspice”), and additionally asked whether non-profits and governmental centers were sponsored by another organization, defined as an organization that “may provide funding, administrative oversight or have reporting requirements; however, organizations that are solely funding sources should not be considered sponsors.” Programs could report multiple sponsors, although most programs reported only one.

Figure 4: Provision of comprehensive services in centers by Head Start funding

Note: Differences between each pair are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Unweighted N=7,771.

Because centers with Head Start and other government funding are more likely to provide these comprehensive services, we wanted to test how these descriptive findings would play out in a multivariate model. In a multivariate model that includes primary sources of funding, including Head Start funding, we continue to find that centers that help families access comprehensive services and help pay for these services are statistically significantly less likely to expel.

Funding Source. To examine how expulsion rates were related to revenue sources, we first divided centers by whether they reported Head Start or public pre-K funding. Centers often receive multiple sources of funding; therefore it is not possible to completely separate them into mutually exclusive categories. Almost one in five (17.2 percent of centers) received Head Start funding; slightly more (21.7 percent of centers) reported public pre-K funding but no Head Start funding; and 61.1 percent reported neither Head Start nor public pre-K funding. As shown in Figure 5, the NSECE data demonstrate that centers with Head Start funding reported significantly lower rates of expulsion than other centers. Among centers without Head Start, rates of expulsion did not significantly vary between centers that reported some public funding and centers that reported no public funding.

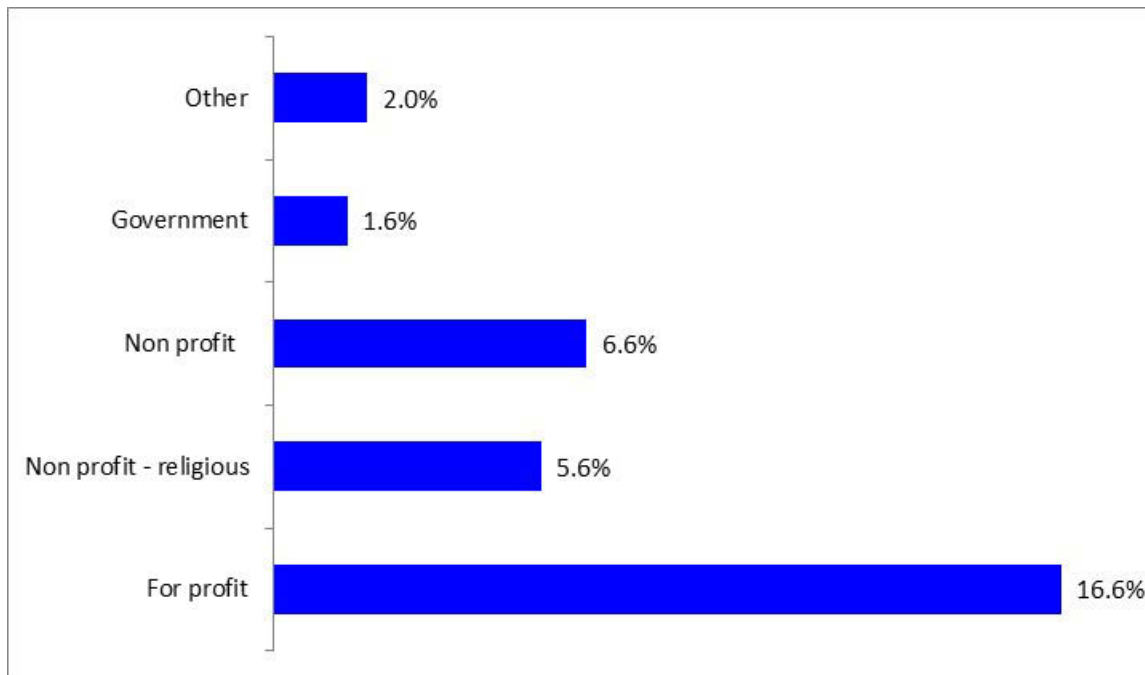
Figure 5: Recent expulsion rates in centers with Head Start or public pre-K funding

**Difference from the other two groups is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Finding 4: For-profit ECE programs generally have higher rates of recent expulsion than those run by government or non-profit entities.

Nearly one-third (32.1 percent) of centers reported that they were for-profit. A small percentage of centers (6.5 percent) reported that they were non-profit with religious sponsorship, while close to half (43.8 percent) were non-profit and without religious sponsorship. One in seven centers (14.2 percent) said they were run by a government agency. As shown in Figure 6, for-profit centers had the highest rate of expulsion, at 16.6 percent, significantly different than all other types of centers. Centers that are run by government agencies, or the ‘other’ category are not different from each other, but are significantly lower than all the other groups. Centers that are non-profit, and non-profit religious are not significantly different from each other, but have significantly higher expulsion rates than either government-run or centers that fall in the ‘other’ category, and significantly lower than for-profit centers. In contrast, previous research has found higher expulsion rates for religiously affiliated centers. For-profit centers had significantly greater rates of expulsion than all of the other groups.⁴⁷ A multivariate model was constructed that includes auspice—whether or not a center is for-profit, non-profit or receives government funding—as well as comprehensive services and supports for staff, and we continue to find that for-profit centers are significantly more likely to expel. This finding indicates a need for further research.

⁴⁷ Gilliam (2005)

Figure 6: Recent expulsion rates by center auspice or sponsorship

Note: Three groups are statistically significantly different from each other at the 95% confidence level: 1) For profit; 2) Nonprofit and Nonprofit – religious; 3) Other, and 4) Government. Differences within groups are not statistically significant. Unweighted N=7,719.

Discussion and implications

This analysis of the NSECE data indicates that some of the research-based practices that are related to positive child, family, and teacher outcomes are also associated with lower recent expulsion rates. These practices (providing comprehensive services and supporting early educators) are also embedded in program requirements for Head Start, and utilized more broadly in high-quality ECE settings. As might be expected given these requirements and prior research, Head Start funding, and public funding more broadly, is associated with lower recent expulsion rates in ECE centers. Similarly, centers run by government or non-profit entities are less likely to recently deny services to children due to behavior than for-profit centers.

Head Start programs, which are expressly prohibited from expelling young children due to behavior, and offer substantial support to program staff and families to assist with challenging behavior, can serve as a model for other ECE programs that seek to eliminate expulsion, or who are struggling to provide services for children who exhibit challenging behaviors. In addition to enacting policies to reduce expulsion, states and communities can disseminate information about early childhood expulsion, promote comprehensive services and supports for children and families, and invest in professional development for the early childhood workforce. Many states are promoting the provision of comprehensive services and professional development supports

through their child care licensing standards or in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS).^{48,49,50, 51}

Building the infrastructure to better support the social and emotional development of young children—and in turn eliminate ineffective disciplinary practices—depends on strong partnerships at multiple levels. This research suggests that for the rates of expulsion to decrease ECE teachers and staff need support in how they manage challenging behavior and work inclusively with the full range of young students that they serve. Efforts to enhance the skills of ECE administrators and staff in building relationships with families, and connecting families to the external resources they need may help address a range of health, mental health, and social service issues and prevent the exclusion of children from ECE centers.

Limitations

There are several limitations and considerations that should be acknowledged with respect to this analysis. Some of these limitations relate to the survey data available in the NSECE. First, the NSECE survey question about centers' denial of services to young children due to behavior is framed in terms of the "last three months." Previous data collected in this area has typically asked about this practice within the last year. Therefore, any calculations of rates of expulsion obtained from the NSECE should be understood in the context of the three-month timeframe, as opposed to a calendar year.⁵² In addition, although mentoring and coaching are interventions that are distinct from consultation, and the evidence for each of these approaches—and for various models of each approach—differ, the NSECE survey data requires that we assess these together, as questions about these practices were not asked separately. This may explain the inconsistencies between our findings that indicate that practice-based supports for ECE staff alone are not related to reductions in expulsion, and previous studies that have found that a specific type of practice-based support, early childhood mental health consultation, is related to reductions in expulsion. Although previous data has revealed large racial, ethnic and gender disparities in the experience of expulsion, the NSECE center based survey data does not allow assessment of disparities because it provides estimates of rates of expulsion for a whole center,

⁴⁸ ELC TA Program, US Department of Education in partnership with the US Department of Health and Human Services. (2015). Race to the Top -- Early Learning Challenge: 2015 Progress report update. Washington, DC: US Department of Education. Retrieved <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2015apr/2015progressfinal.pdf>

⁴⁹ Mathematica Policy Research (MPR). (2011). The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Evaluation Toolkit. (No. OPRE Report 2011-31). Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), US Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/qrisc_toolkit.pdf

⁵⁰ Zaslow & Tout (2014).

⁵¹ Johnson-Staub & Schmit (2014).

⁵² The study team at NORC indicated that the 3-month window was determined through cognitive interviewing prior to surveying, which suggested that a 3-month window would yield more accurate data about expulsion than asking about the academic year as has been previously surveyed. Participants in cognitive interviews suggested that this shorter window follows natural breaks in the school year, such as holiday and spring breaks and more accurately captures when an expulsion occurs (ie: a child being asked not to come back to a center after a holiday break). (National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team, personal communication, May 6, 2016). For more details about the methodology and findings from cognitive interviews for the NSECE, please see: Bowman, M., Datta, A. R., & Yan, T. (2010). Design phase of the National Study of Child Care Supply and Demand (NSCCSD): Cognitive interview findings report for center-based provider questionnaire. *Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center (NORC)*. Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/final_center.pdf

and does not provide information about the characteristics of the children who were denied services. Similarly, we do not know the exact age of the children who have been expelled, and the NSECE includes centers that serve preschool and school-age children. Expulsion rates in the NSECE are lower for centers that only serve preschool children (5.5 percent) than they are in centers that include school-age children (13.6 percent). The structure of the NSECE means that we only know that centers provide various staff supports (such as funding for coursework and access to mentors, coaches and consultants), but we cannot say whether the same staff members receive all the supports.

Finally, this descriptive analysis should not be interpreted as demonstrating the *effect* of helping families access comprehensive services or providing supports for ECE staff on expulsion rates, or implying causality. Instead, these findings describe the relationships between program characteristics and rates of expulsion. For example, it could be that helping families access comprehensive services may address the challenging behavior that would otherwise lead to expulsion, or it could be that those who work in centers that help families access comprehensive services or provide support for staff have the expertise needed to support children's development regardless of challenging behaviors that are presented. There may also be some other underlying quality or unobserved variable that is related to both expulsion rates and the program characteristics we assessed. In either case, the relationships demonstrated through this analysis warrant further exploration.

Conclusion

Early learning settings are intended to be a safe and supportive space for all children to learn, play and advance their development across domains. The benefits associated with early learning programs can be greatly diminished when the most vulnerable children are excluded from high-quality early learning settings because of challenging behavior. This brief sheds light on the characteristics of ECE centers that are less likely to engage in this exclusionary practice. Centers that help families access an important array of services and supports that can be offered to young children and the adults who care for them are also less likely to expel young students. Consistent with previous research, our findings also demonstrate that for-profit child care centers were much more likely to report recently expelling a young child for behavior than either non-profit or government centers. Continued research is needed to better understand which practices and policies contribute to these outcomes in order to frame appropriate policy responses that will guide centers in helping to avoid the long-term negative impacts of denying services at this early age.