



Guidelines for Preventing Preschool Expulsion and Suspension

Created for the Alameda County State Contractors Committee
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BACKGROUND

Purpose of document

This set of preliminary guidelines is meant to serve state contractors, including program administrators and teachers, in reducing suspensions and expulsions in preschool. Members of the Alameda County State Contractors Committee requested development of these guidelines in February 2018, prompted by the passage of AB 752, which prohibits the use of expulsion in state-funded preschool settings.¹ The content of this document was determined by members of the committee at their monthly meeting in June, 2018, and was documented and expanded upon by LaWanda Wesley and Rozy Jhinu, Alameda County Early Care Program, and Caroline Moyer, former MSW intern for First 5 Alameda County, and author of a policy brief on preschool expulsion, Spring 2018.²

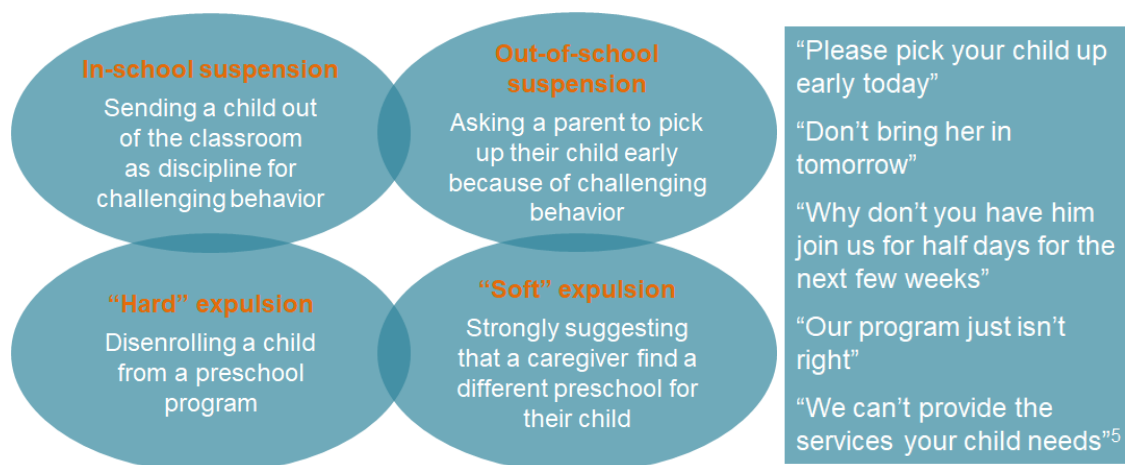
These are **preliminary guidelines meant to serve as recommendations** - rather than mandates, for sites. This document is meant to be **customizable** for each site depending on program needs, practices, and expertise.

¹ (Rubio & McCarty, 2017)

² (Moyer, 2018a)

What is preschool expulsion and suspension?

Expulsions and suspensions, also known as “exclusionary discipline,” are any removal of a child from their learning environment due to behavior that is perceived as challenging by the teacher.³ Suspensions can be in- or out-of-school, and expulsions can be “soft” or “hard.”⁴



While AB 752 only explicitly discusses “hard” expulsions, these guidelines can be used to holistically improve the learning environment so that no form of exclusionary discipline is necessary.

Expulsions and suspensions in preschool deserve special attention because of their implications for racial justice. As in K-12, African American boys are disproportionately impacted by preschool suspensions and expulsions,⁶ which have no proven benefit for behavior⁷ and can place young children on a path of emotional, academic, and legal difficulty in a process known as the preschool-to-prison pipeline.⁸ Studies have also shown that teachers of all races suspend and expel boys of color at higher rates, which may be due to implicit bias or holding young boys of color to higher behavioral standards than their white peers.⁹

VIDEO: Introducing PreventExpulsion.org (<https://preventexpulsion.org/>)

³ (Meek, Ferg-Cadima, et al., 2015; Meek, Smith, et al., 2015; State Capacity Building Center, 2017)

⁴ (Meek, Ferg-Cadima, et al., 2015; Moyer, 2018b; Schachner et al., 2016)

⁵ (McCann, Means, & Shivers, 2018)

⁶ (Gilliam, 2005)

⁷ (State Capacity Building Center, 2017)

⁸ (Barbarin, 2010; Bettencourt, Gross, & Ho, 2016; Chandler, 2017; Gilliam, 2016)

⁹ (Barbarin & Crawford, 2006; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016; McCann & Edge, 2017; Meek & Gilliam, 2016; Todd, Thiem, & Neel, 2016; Yates & Marcelo, 2014)

What is AB 752?

AB 752, signed by Governor Jerry Brown in October 2017, states that state-funded preschools may not expel children unless the program has taken careful, documented steps, in collaboration with the child's caregiver(s), to address the child's behavioral needs, and it is determined that the child's safety or the safety of other children cannot be provided, at which time a site must refer the family to other services.¹⁰

Before AB 752, the Community Care Licensing Division could cite preschool programs if they determine that a child's safety is at risk, which often meant sites felt compelled to expel children with challenging behaviors in order to avoid citation. With the passage of AB 752, Licensing can now review paperwork documenting disciplinary processes before determining a citation.¹¹ Program directors should contact their licensing agent to discuss requirements for such documentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Administrators

Building the foundation

Discipline Policy

Administrators should develop clear policies on the site's progressive disciplinary process.¹²

These policies should include:

- Steps in the disciplinary process, including the development of a support plan, and when and how caregivers are involved
- Role of teachers, administrators, and caregivers when a child is hurt or hurts another child
- Possible reasons why a child might be terminated from the program
- How steps will be documented in each individual case

See **resources below** for sample behavior support plans.

Staffing

Have an **adult onsite daily who is not in ratio** to support the classroom and/or specific children (e.g., administrator, ABA worker, consultant with ECE experience, behaviorist, mental

¹⁰ (Rubio & McCarty, 2017)

¹¹ (Rubio & McCarty, 2017)

¹² (Meek, Ash, & Schlund, 2015; State Capacity Building Center, 2017; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014)

health specialist, paraprofessional). This can allow for more one-on-one support when necessary.

Consider **ongoing staff training, professional development, and communities of practice** in:

- Implicit bias¹³
- Trauma-informed teaching¹⁴

Consider **diversity of staff** in hiring processes.¹⁵ This can include diversity of gender, age, temperament, or culture.

Resources

Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings: A Program Leader's Guide to Supporting All Children's Success: <https://preventexpulsion.org/>

Implementing a Program- or School-Wide Multitiered System of Support:
<https://preventexpulsion.org/1h-consider-adopting-a-program-or-school-wide-multi-tiered-system-of-support/>

Designing an Assessment-Based Behavioral Support Plan: <https://preventexpulsion.org/3-1-establish-and-implement-a-process-for-providing-children-with-persistent-challenging-behavior-with-an-assessment-based-behavior-support-plan/>

Complete Guide to Positive Behavior Support:
http://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/PBS_complete-guide.pdf

Routine-Based Support Plan:
http://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/ttyc/TTYC_RoutineBasedSupportGuide.pdf

Behavior Support Plan Template:
<https://www.pbis.org/resource/804/behavior-support-plan-template>

Behavior Plan Template: *See appendix*

Activities for Program Staff to Promote Reflection and Dialogue on Diversity and Equity:
<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activityarch.html>

¹³ (Barbarin & Crawford, 2006; Capatosto, 2015; Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012; Jones et al., 2012)

¹⁴ (Hopkinson, 2017; Wright & Ford, 2016)

¹⁵ (Ahmad & Boser, 2014)

Teachers

Daily classroom practices for preventing and addressing challenges

Understanding Challenging Behavior

Challenging behavior can take many forms, including hitting, having trouble following directions, or struggling to self-regulate emotions. While these behaviors can certainly be challenging for teachers, they also serve a function of **communicating the needs** of that child that are not being met.¹⁶ This need may be relational (e.g., a child is craving positive engagement from their teacher or peers), sensory (e.g., a child is overwhelmed by the noise in the classroom), or due to other contextual factors (e.g., a child is hungry or sleepy). In order to address challenging behavior, it is helpful to figure out the **function of the behavior** so that teachers can help that child to have their needs met.¹⁷

The **Teaching Pyramid** (also known as CSEFEL), as well as other programs that take a deep dive into understanding the form and function of behaviors, provide many resources on understanding and addressing challenging behavior.¹⁸

Preventing Challenging Behavior

A thoughtful and developmentally appropriate **classroom environment** and structure can often help reduce challenging behaviors. Refer to the **Environmental Rating Scale** for ideas on improvements, such as designing a quiet area where children can go when feeling overwhelmed or in need of a break.¹⁹

Outdoor freetime and movement activities have also been shown to improve children's behavior and learning in the classroom.²⁰ Therefore, consider when outdoor freetime is held during the day, and try adjusting the schedule to see how behavior is impacted.

Depending on the site, teachers may also have access to a variety of supports such as **early childhood behavioral consultants and coaches**.²¹ Teachers can utilize these resources to improve their classroom and troubleshoot behavioral challenges.

¹⁶ (*Understanding Challenging Behavior in Young Children*, 2015)

¹⁷ (Fox & Smith, 2007; Smith & Fox, 2003)

¹⁸ (Perry & Kaufmann, 2009)

¹⁹ (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, n.d.)

²⁰ (Dotson-Renta, 2016; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993; Strauss, 2014)

²¹ (Adamu & Hogan, 2015; Alameda County Early Childhood Mental Health Systems Group, n.d.; Gilliam, 2005a, 2008; Gilliam et al., 2016)

Coping with Challenging Behavior

When challenging behavior does occur, it can be helpful to remember **not to blame the child for the behavior**. Instead, react with **patience, understanding, positive support, and trauma-informed strategies**. Behavior always has a message behind it. Therefore, it can be helpful to determine **what the child might be trying to communicate**, and how the teacher can help them to express their needs and have them met.

Challenging behavior is just that - *challenging*. **Take a moment to reflect** on what behaviors seem to be most challenging for you, and how you can be mindful of your own reactions and adjust your **style and approach** in navigating those teachable moments with students.

When challenging behavior does occur, **utilize supports** such as early childhood behavioral consultants and coaches to help brainstorm and monitor different potential solutions.

As outlined in the program's disciplinary policies, **work with parents** to discuss the challenging behavior, brainstorm possible messages behind the behavior, and develop a **behavioral support plan** that teachers can use in the classroom and parents can use in the home, as appropriate.

Parents may have their own concerns around this conversation, so it is important to **be mindful of language and approach**, remembering that **parents are first teachers and experts** in their children, and **inviting parents to share in a trauma-informed, whole-child approach**.

Finally, it can be helpful to remember that **behavioral changes take time** - it might take a few days, weeks, or even months before a new strategy really impacts behaviors. Understanding the context of the behavior, and **utilizing self-care and reflection strategies**, can help teachers to provide consistent and unconditional support for students.

As in preventing challenging behavior, the **Teaching Pyramid Model**, as well as other programs that take a deep dive into understanding the form and function of behaviors, have many supports for addressing challenging behavior as it arises.

Resources

Recommended Policies and Practices for Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions:

<https://preventexpulsion.org/recommended-policies-practices/>

Routine-Based Support Plan:

http://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/ttyc/TTYC_RoutineBasedSupportGuide.pdf

Understanding Challenging Behavior in Young Children (VIDEO):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acAJsiEKxzq>

Behavior Support Plan Template:

<https://www.pbis.org/resource/804/behavior-support-plan-template>

Behavior Plan Template: See *appendix, page 16*

Parents

Engagement and involvement

“It’s extremely rare for a child to be expelled from preschool when the teacher and parent know and like each other.”²²

Parent engagement is an essential component to any anti-expulsion effort. Clearly establishing how parents can be involved in their child’s learning can help build parent engagement into the foundation of your preschool program.

At Intake

Clearly explain and share the **program discipline policy** with all prospective and new parents to the preschool program. Discuss what a **support plan** might look like if needed (see Appendix and Resources at end of document for sample plans).

In addition to the academic curriculum, outline for new parents the program’s **social-emotional curriculum**. Include in this discussion how staff uses this curriculum in the classroom, what training the staff has, how parents can understand the message in their child’s behavior, and how parents can help their child advance their social-emotional learning.

There are many teacher-parent engagement child developmental screening tools that help teachers and parents develop a reciprocal relationship and increase parent knowledge of developmental milestones, such as the **ASQ and the ASQ-SE**. Share your developmental screening tool with parents and explain its purpose and instructions. Follow up with parents if they have any questions about completing the tool with their child.

Finally, share a list of resources with new parents, including **program resources** (e.g., home visiting, early childhood behavioral consultants) and **community resources** (e.g., playgroups, library activities, concrete supports). Also ensure that parents know about **Help Me Grow** (<https://www.alamedakids.org/>) and the resources it can provide, including assistance with developmental screening tools (<https://alamedakids.org/developmental-screening-program-child-development>).

Regular Engagement

Day-to-day relationships with parents can go a long way in building a foundation of trust in case challenging behavior ever does arise. This can mean intentionally greeting and saying

²² (Neufeld, 2015)

goodbye to parents at the start and end of each day or sending semi-regular messages about a success their child had in the classroom.

Programs can also send parents regular **articles or videos** on topics relevant to their child's learning, such as understanding the messages behind behavior, having a trauma-informed approach, or the importance of movement and play.

Programs can also offer a **Back-to-School Night** and regular **parent workshops**, which provide a way to build community and advocacy among parents and share in parenting education.

Finally, programs can provide ways for parents to **volunteer**, whether spending some time in the classroom, helping prepare supplies, or helping to host events for other parents.

Each of these community building activities provides a foundation for administrators, teachers, and parents to build trust, which will always positively impact the learning of their children.

Resources

Implementing Processes for Developing Family-Program/School Partnerships:

<https://preventexpulsion.org/1b-implement-processes-for-developing-family-program-school-partnerships/>

School-Family Partnership Strategies to Enhance Children's Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/school-familypartnershipstrategies>

19 Proven Tips for Getting Parents Involved at School: <https://www.slideshare.net/edutopia/19-proven-tips-for-getting-parents-involved-at-school-49006623>

Activities for Program Staff to Promote Reflection and Dialogue on Diversity and Equity:

<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activityarch.html>

PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships: <https://www.pta.org/home/run-your-pta/National-Standards-for-Family-School-Partnerships>

SUMMARY OF RESOURCES

Below is a complete list of resources listed above, plus others that may be of interest.

Overview Resources:

Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings: A Program Leader's Guide to Supporting All Children's Success (VIDEO): <https://preventexpulsion.org/>

Recommended Policies and Practices for Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions:

<https://preventexpulsion.org/recommended-policies-practices/>

Program Policies:

Implementing a Program- or School-Wide Multitiered System of Support:

<https://preventexpulsion.org/1h-consider-adopting-a-program-or-school-wide-multi-tiered-system-of-support/>

Behavior Support:

Pyramid Model Overview: <http://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/Pyramid/overview/index.html>

Understanding Challenging Behavior in Young Children (VIDEO):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acAJsiEKxzq>

Complete Guide to Positive Behavior Support:

http://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/PBS_complete-guide.pdf

Designing an Assessment-Based Behavioral Support Plan: <https://preventexpulsion.org/3-1-establish-and-implement-a-process-for-providing-children-with-persistent-challenging-behavior-with-an-assessment-based-behavior-support-plan/>

Behavior Support Plan Template:

<https://www.pbis.org/resource/804/behavior-support-plan-template>

Behavior Plan Template: *See appendix*

Routine-Based Support Plan:

http://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/ttyc/TTYC_RoutineBasedSupportGuide.pdf

Equity and Family Engagement:

Implementing Processes for Developing Family-Program/School Partnerships:

<https://preventexpulsion.org/1b-implement-processes-for-developing-family-program-school-partnerships/>

School-Family Partnership Strategies to Enhance Children's Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/school-familypartnershipstrategies>

19 Proven Tips for Getting Parents Involved at School: <https://www.slideshare.net/edutopia/19-proven-tips-for-getting-parents-involved-at-school-49006623>

Activities for Program Staff to Promote Reflection and Dialogue on Diversity and Equity:

<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activityarch.html>

PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships: <https://www.pta.org/home/run-your-pta/National-Standards-for-Family-School-Partnerships>

Help Me Grow and the ASQ/ASQ-SE:

Help Me Grow Homepage: <https://alamedakids.org/>

Developmental Screening Program: <https://alamedakids.org/developmental-screening-program-child-development>

Ages and Stages Questionnaire: <http://agesandstages.com/>

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APPENDIX

Individual Behavior Support Plan

YMCA-CBA
 Early Childhood Services
 2009 Tenth Street, Berkeley, CA, 94710
 510.848.9092, fax 510.848.0103, www.baymca.org

Date of Behavioral Planning Meeting:

Site:

Child's Name/ DOB:

Parent's/Guardian's Name:

Teacher(s):

Center Director:

Mental Health Consultant:

Family Advocate:

Inclusion Specialist:

Description of child's behaviors:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Classroom strategies to prevent challenging behaviors:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Guidelines for parents to try at home:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Follow up recommended:

Next meeting to be held on:

Signatures Parent &/or Guardian: _____

Consultant/Staff Members: _____
