# States' Growing Commitment to Preventing Young Children's Expulsion from Early Care and Education Programs:
## RESULTS OF A 50-STATE POLICY SURVEY

Build
INITIATIVE
**Strong Foundations For
Our Youngest Children**

NCCP
National Center for
Children in Poverty
Bank Street Graduate School of Education

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# Table of Contents

## Acknowledgement

# Introduction

An increasing number of states have established policies that aim to reduce or eliminate expulsion and suspension from early care and education (ECE) settings.[1] This trend reflects growing recognition among policymakers that young children are harmed by exclusionary practices, and that new policies and supports for programs can prevent these practices so all children can benefit from quality early care and education.

Children asked to leave an ECE setting temporarily or permanently due to challenging behavior miss out on opportunities for early learning and social experiences that help them develop key competencies needed for school success. A child's expulsion or suspension may also disrupt the parent's work, creating stress and hardship for families that can also harm children. Previous surveys have found that many children expelled from ECE settings transition to parental care or unregulated ECE settings, which in some cases may be less reliable than regulated settings.[2] Although research on the longer-term consequences of exclusion from ECE programs is lacking, studies

of older children indicate that expulsion and suspension are associated with poor school performance and academic outcomes.[3]

The negative consequences of exclusionary practices in ECE settings are especially concerning in light of evidence that Black children are expelled from preschool at higher rates than other children.[4] Gilliam and colleagues have found evidence of implicit bias that may contribute to racial disparities in expulsion; in experiments, preschool teachers who were prompted to expect that children would engage in challenging behavior paid more attention to the non-challenging behavior of Black children, especially Black boys, than to other children.[5] Because Black children also disproportionately grow up in families that are poor or in deep poverty, disparate exclusionary practices in ECE settings compound the harmful effects of multiple inequities.[6] Young children with disabilities, especially those associated with attention, activity, and behavioral difficulties, also experience expulsion at higher rates than their typically developing peers.[7] Children with challenging behavior that puts them at risk of exclusion from ECE settings have also been found to commonly experience trauma and family adversities, such as involvement with child welfare, severe financial insecurity, housing instability, and domestic violence.[8] Overall, research suggests that children at highest risk of exclusion are those who could most benefit from the developmentally appropriate early learning and social experiences offered in high-quality ECE settings.

Several program features have been found to be associated with expulsion. These include teacher stress, child-staff ratios and larger class size, teachers' years of experience, teachers' use of available resources to promote children's positive behavior, and teachers' negative perceptions of parents.[9] Researchers in Arkansas found that ECE programs requesting assistance from the statewide

BehaviorHelp system when a child was at risk of expulsion, most often needed on-site professional development specialists who could help teachers use developmentally appropriate practices that build children's social-emotional skills and address common behavior problems. Only about one-third of the programs needed an early childhood mental health consultant because the child's behavior suggested a possible mental health condition. This experience in Arkansas adds to the evidence that conditions outside of the child (e.g., teacher stress, supports for teachers, and teaching practices) are often at the root of children's challenging behavior.[10]

Certain supports provided by states for ECE teachers have been found to reduce the likelihood of expulsion and increase teachers' capacity to promote children's well-being and social-emotional growth. One type of support is professional development (PD) that combines group training and on-site practice-based coaching, such as PD in the Conscious Discipline or Pyramid Models.[11] Another is early childhood mental health consultation in which a specialist helps teachers build skills in promoting children's social-emotional competencies and responding effectively when a child has behavior difficulties.[12] Both of these approaches can also provide support aimed at helping parents promote children's social-emotional skills (e.g., resources for parents or guidance to teachers about assisting parents whose child is struggling with behavior difficulties). In recent years, these types of supports have been expanded in many states, although they usually fall short of allowing all ECE programs to obtain them, especially when there is need for a rapid response.[13]

This brief reports on a survey that examined state expulsion and suspension policies for early care and education settings serving children under age six. Survey respondents were lead administrators and program directors in state agencies that oversee early care and education programs (see the methods section for details). The survey asked about the state's most developed expulsion and suspension policy, since some states have multiple policies. Survey questions focused on a wide range of program requirements, expectations, and resources included in the policy as well as supports for programs, such as early childhood mental health consultation, that may be part of or operate separately from the policy. Because the survey focused on states' most developed policies, it does not capture every action states may be taking to reduce and prevent exclusionary practices in all ECE settings. Instead, it identifies trends in critical actions states are taking to help ensure that all children have an opportunity to benefit from early care and education.

The results presented here are based on responses from 43 states and follow-up calls with 12 states to obtain additional information about their expulsion and suspension policies and related program supports. The remainder of this brief is organized by the following sections:

- **Survey Method**
- **Survey Results**
  - Policies' reach across different types of ECE programs
  - Features of states' expulsion and suspension policies
  - Key barriers to developing and implementing expulsion and suspension policy
  - States' provision of supports to ECE programs to help them promote children's social-emotional well-being and address challenging behavior
- **Discussion and Summary of Findings**
- **Recommendations**

# Survey Method

From January to November 2020, the BUILD Initiative and NCCP administered an online survey to early education policy leaders in 50 states and DC. The survey was administered through Qualtrics, a secure web-based platform. Out of 43 states that submitted the survey, four states sent in two surveys. In these cases, the research team chose the submission that provided the most complete information about the state's policies (one state) or the submission that focused on the most developed policy (three states). Additionally, we conducted follow-up interviews with several states to learn more about promising policies and practices aimed at reducing expulsion and suspension rates and strengthening supports for young children's social-emotional well-being. To help ensure up-to-date information, a follow-up request was sent to survey respondents in Spring 2021 asking them to make changes in their survey responses based on any developments in their states' policies related to exclusionary practices in ECE programs.

Changes, mostly minor, were reported by 28 states and the new information was used in reporting survey results. The research team also obtained new survey submissions from two additional states in Summer 2021. The results presented here are based on responses from 43 states.
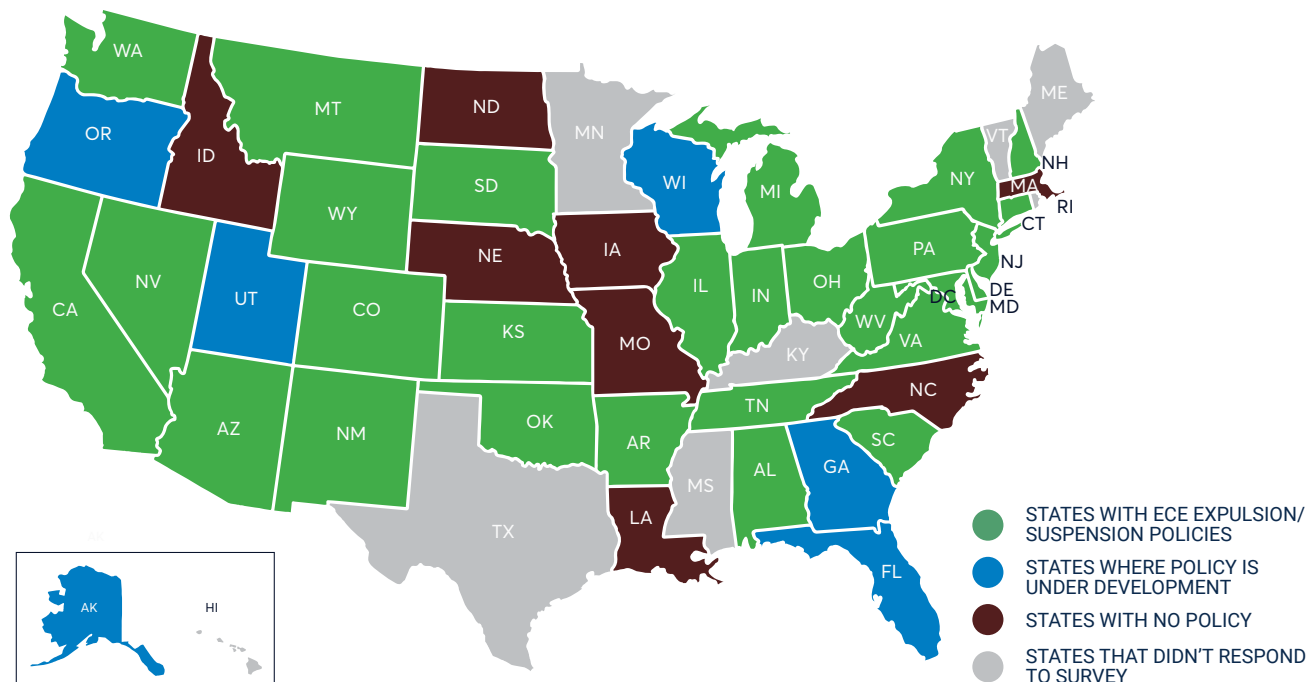
# Survey Results

**Policies' Reach Across Different Types of ECE Programs**

The survey asked whether states have developed policies related to reducing and/or eliminating expulsion and suspension in early care and education settings. "Policy" was broadly defined to include state agency regulation, guidance, and legislation. A state could indicate that a policy had been established or was under development. States also reported on the extent to which an established policy has been implemented.

- 29 states reported having an expulsion and suspension policy in early care and education settings.
  - A policy is fully implemented in 18 of these states (AL, AR, CA, CO, CT, DC, IL, IN, KS, NH, NM, NV, PA, SD, TN, WA, WV, WY).
  - The policy's implementation is under way in 11 states (AZ, DE, MD, MI, MT, NJ, NY, OH, OK, SC, VA).
- 6 states reported that a policy is currently under development (AK, FL, GA, OR, UT, WI).
- 8 states reported that there has been little or no discussion about expulsion and suspension policy (IA, ID, LA, MA, MO, NC, ND, NE).

**FIGURE 1.** States with Expulsion and Suspension Policies



States with Expulsion and Suspension Policies map legend:
- STATES WITH ECE EXPULSION/SUSPENSION POLICIES
- STATES WHERE POLICY IS UNDER DEVELOPMENT
- STATES WITH NO POLICY
- STATES THAT DIDN'T RESPOND TO SURVEY

## Features of States' Expulsion and Suspension Policies

The following results describe features of the states' expulsion and suspension policies. For states with more than one expulsion and suspension policy, the survey asked the respondent to focus on the "most fully developed or implemented" one. Therefore, the following results reflect features of the most fully developed or implemented expulsion and suspension policy in each state. Results are presented for the 35 states that have fully established expulsion and suspension policies (29) and those that are under development (6 states). State with policies "under development" were advised to answer questions about features of the policies if these were known.

**Is the expulsion and suspension policy established in legislation, guidance, or rules?**
More than half the states reported that their most fully developed or implemented ECE expulsion and suspension policies are in the form of state agency or departmental guidance or in rules and regulations, while fewer indicated that the policy is in legislation. Among 29 states with established policies, guidance and regulations are more common than legislation. Similarly, among the 6 states that have policies in development, guidance and regulation are more common than legislation. See Table 1.

**Which ECE programs are covered by the policies?**
Most states reported that their policies apply to (or will apply to) all types of ECE providers (e.g., center-based and home-based child care, state-funded prekindergarten) although policies in several states are more narrow in coverage.

- 22 states reported the policy applies to all program types (AK, AR, CO, DE, IL, IN, MD, MI, NH, NM, NV, NY, OK, OR, PA, SC, TN, UT, WA, WI, WV, WY).
- 5 states reported that the policy applies only to state preschool programs (AL, CA, KS, OH, VA); policies in 3 of these states (KS, OH, VA) also apply to preschool special education and early intervention programs.

**TABLE 1.** Is the expulsion and suspension policy established in legislation, guidance, or rules?

| | STATES WITH ESTABLISHED POLICIES | STATES WITH POLICIES IN DEVELOPMENT |
|---|---|---|
| **State Agency Guidance** | **18** (AR, DC, DE, IN, KS, MD, MI, MT, NM, NV, NY, OK, PA, SC, SD, TN, VA, WV) | **3** (FL, GA, UT) |
| **State Agency Rule & Regulation** | **19** (AL, AZ, CA, CO, DC, DE, IL, IN, KS, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, PA, TN, WA, WV, WY) | **1** (GA) |
| **State Legislation** | **8** (CA, CT, DC, KS, MD, NJ, OH, OK) | **1** (OR) |
| **To Be Determined** | **0** | **2** (AK, WI) |

- 2 states reported the policy applies only to center-based and home-based providers who receive child care assistance/subsidy/voucher payments (AZ, SD).
- 1 state reported the policy applies only to providers who receive state child care subsidy and state preschool programs (FL).
- 4 states reported other groups of programs that included subsets of state child care subsidy, preschool, Head Start, preschool special education, and early intervention (CT, DC, MT, NJ) and 1 state was still determining the policy's targeted programs (GA).

**Do the policies provide new funding or resources?**
States reported on whether their expulsion and suspension policies provide new funding and other resources to support implementation. Among the 35 states with established policies or policies under development, less than half reported that the policies provide new funding, while a few redeploy staff or funding to support elements of the policy.

- **Allocates new funding:** 13 states (AL, AR, DC, DE, MD, NH, NV, OH, OR, PA, SC, WA, WV).
- **Redeploys staff:** 7 states (AR, GA, MD, NV, PA, WA, WV).
- **Redeploys funding:** 6 states (AR, GA, IN, MT, NV, WA).
- **Uses existing resources and funding:** 7 states (AZ, CA, DC, KS, NH, TN, UT).

**Do the policies include goals about equity?**
States reported whether the policy uses or will use explicit language about equity, including whether it references research on disparities in expulsion or discipline practices, and whether equity or reducing disparities is a goal of the policy. *(See Illinois − Using data to monitor policy and work toward equity)*

- **Language about racial equity:** 15 states (AZ, CA, CT, DE, FL, IL, IN, MI, NV, OR, PA, SC, TN, VA, WI).
- **Language about children with special needs or disabilities:** 14 states (AZ, CA, CT, DE, FL, IL, IN, MT, NM, NV, OR, PA, SC, WI).
- **Language about gender equity:** 9 states (DE, FL, IL, MI, NV, PA, SC, VA, WI).

Illinois passed legislation in 2017 aimed at preventing expulsion and suspension practices in all licensed early care and education programs. The legislation aims to prohibit expulsions of young children due to child behavior, although planned "transitions" are allowed, and connect providers to available resources and supports. The legislation requires the State Board of Education and the Department of Children and Family Services to develop a system to track expulsions and suspensions in preschool and all licensed child care programs serving children under age six. The required data will allow the state to track trends over time, including the extent of disparities in rates of different exclusionary practices. The information the state agencies are required to report includes:

- The total number children who left the program during the year.
- The number of planned transitions to another program due to the child's behavior and the number of temporary removals.
- The race, gender, disability, home language, class/group size, teacher-child ratio, and length of program day for each child who is removed from the program temporarily or permanently.
- The hours of early childhood mental health consultation provided to program leaders, staff, and families.
- Changes in children's early intervention/early childhood special education service plans.

The legislation also calls for the state agencies to identify and offer training, technical support, and professional development resources to improve the ability of the workforce to promote children's social-emotional development and behavioral health, address challenging behaviors, and to understand trauma and trauma-informed care, cultural competence, effective family engagement, the impact of implicit bias on adult behavior, and the use of reflective practice. The agencies must also promote ECE programs' awareness of early childhood mental health consultation and provide resources that help programs contract with consultants. The State Board of Education is required to report to the state legislature on the progress and results of the policy's implementation every two years. In 2021, led by the Black Caucus, Illinois passed the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations (IECMHC) Act to increase the availability of IECMHC and its coordination with other social-emotional supports. Investments in IECMHC were increased by $4.9M, which expanded the number of consultants and Pyramid Model specialists serving ECE programs.

**What types of action are targeted by states' expulsion and suspension policies?**

Survey participants reported on six potential types of action targeted by their state's most developed or implemented expulsion and suspension policy: 1) program-level actions, 2) program standards, 3) ECE work conditions, 4) supports for programs, 5) child and family services, and 6) policy implementation supports. For each type of action, survey respondents indicated whether particular options are included in their state's policy. See Table 2.

### PROGRAM-LEVEL ACTIONS

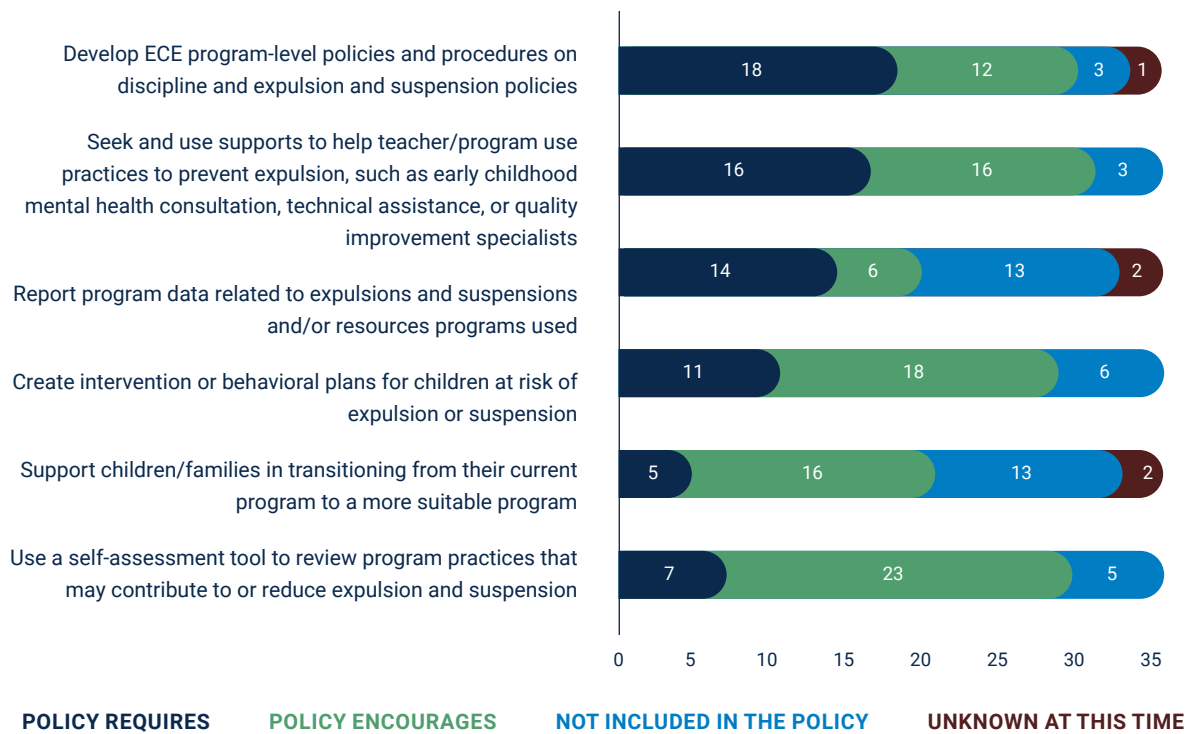**What actions do policies expect of ECE programs?**
State expulsion policies vary in what they require or encourage ECE programs to do. The two most frequently reported requirements were for programs "to seek and use supports…such as early childhood mental health consultation, technical assistance, or quality improvement specialists," and for programs to "develop program-level policies and procedures on exclusionary practices." See Figure 2.

- Nearly all of the states (32) report that policies require or encourage ECE programs to seek and use supports that help programs prevent expulsion, such as early childhood mental health consultation, technical assistance, or quality improvement specialists.
  - 16 states **require** action (AK, AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, DE, IL, IN, NV, OH, OR, PA, SD, WI, WV).
  - 16 states **encourage** action (DC, FL, GA, MD, MI, MT, NH, NJ, NM, NY, OK, SC, TN, UT, VA, WY).
- 30 states require or encourage providers to develop ECE program-level policies and procedures on exclusionary practices.
  - 18 states **require** action (AK, AL, AZ, CA, DE, FL, IL, IN, MT, NH, NJ, NM, OH, PA, TN, WA, WV, WY).
  - 12 states **encourage** action (CO, CT, DC, MD, MI, NV, NY, OK, SC, UT, VA, WI).

**TABLE 2.** Targets of State Expulsion/Suspension Policies

| POLICY TARGETS | SPECIFIC OPTIONS |
|---|---|
| **ECE Program-Level Actions** | • Seek and use available supports by the state.<br>• Develop program-level policies on discipline and exclusionary practices.<br>• Create behavioral plans for children who are at risk of suspension or expulsion.<br>• Support children and families who are transitioning to a new program.<br>• Report program data related to exclusionary practices and/or use of supports to prevent these events.<br>• Use a self-assessment tool to review program practices. |
| **ECE Program Standards** | • Decrease adult-to-child ratios.<br>• Decrease group sizes of center-based care.<br>• Increase knowledge and skills in child development and developmentally appropriate practices.<br>• Increase knowledge and skills related to family engagement.<br>• Increase knowledge and skills in culturally and linguistically responsive early care and education.<br>• Use evidence-based social-emotional curriculum. |
| **ECE Work Conditions** | • Increase capacity to provide reflective supervision.<br>• Improve staffing patterns to allow reasonable hours and breaks.<br>• Add or increase paid planning time.<br>• Develop local substitute pools to allow staff to participate in supportive activities during the workday. |
| **Program Supports** | • Expand professional development.<br>• Expand technical assistance and/or coaching.<br>• Expand early childhood mental health consultation.<br>• Implement a centralized structure to connect ECE providers to supports.<br>• Increase use of strategies to address racial and gender disparities. |
| **Services for Children & Families** | • Increase access to early childhood mental health services.<br>• Increase access to Early Intervention (Part C of IDEA) and Early Childhood Special Education (Part B of IDEA).<br>• Increase delivery of social-emotional screening with a tool and referrals. |
| **Infrastructure and Implementation** | • Establish a cross-system leadership team, work group, or committee.<br>• Set statewide goals for preventing and reducing expulsion and suspension.<br>• Collect data to learn if changes in policy and supports are decreasing rates of expulsion and suspension.<br>• Develop statewide definitions for expulsion and suspension.<br>• Communicate with parents and ECE programs about the policy. |

FIGURE 2. **What State Policy Requires or Will Require Providers to Do**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Develop ECE program-level policies and procedures on discipline and expulsion and suspension policies | 18 | 12 | 3 | 1 |
| Seek and use supports to help teacher/program use practices to prevent expulsion, such as early childhood mental health consultation, technical assistance, or quality improvement specialists | 16 | 16 | 3 | |
| Report program data related to expulsions and suspensions and/or resources programs used | 14 | 6 | 13 | 2 |
| Create intervention or behavioral plans for children at risk of expulsion or suspension | 11 | 18 | 6 | |
| Support children/families in transitioning from their current program to a more suitable program | 5 | 16 | 13 | 2 |
| Use a self-assessment tool to review program practices that may contribute to or reduce expulsion and suspension | 7 | 23 | 5 | |

0   5   10   15   20   25   30   35

**POLICY REQUIRES**   **POLICY ENCOURAGES**   **NOT INCLUDED IN THE POLICY**   **UNKNOWN AT THIS TIME**

- 29 states require or encourage providers to create intervention or behavioral plans for children who are at risk of expulsion and suspension.
  - 11 states **require** action (AK, AL, CA, CO, DE, IL, IN, SD, WA, WI, WV).
  - 18 states **encourage** action (AZ, DC, FL, GA, MD, MI, MT, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, SC, UT, VA, WY).
- 21 states require or encourage providers to support children and families who are transitioning to a new program.
  - 5 states **require** action (AL, CA, IL, NY, TN).
  - 16 states **encourage** action (AZ, DC, DE, FL, GA, IN, MD, MI, MT, NM, NV, SC, SD, UT, VA, WV).
- 20 states require or encourage providers to report program data related to exclusionary practices and/or supports used to prevent these events.

  - 14 states **require** action (AK, AL, AZ, CT, DC, IL, KS, OH, OR, PA, TN, VA, WA, WI).
  - 6 states **encourage** action (CO, FL, GA, NY, SD, WV).
- 7 states encourage providers to use a self-assessment tool to review program practices that may contribute to or reduce expulsion and suspension (AL, AZ, FL, MD, NM, NY, SC).

### PROGRAM STANDARDS
**What changes in ECE program standards are included in policies?**

The survey asked states to identify any changes in ECE program standards that the policy requires or encourages. In most instances, many more states reported that policies encourage rather than require changes in program standards that might help reduce expulsion and suspension. An exception is that two states require and one state encourages a reduction in adult-child ratios.

- 27 states require or encourage efforts to increase staff knowledge in child development and developmentally appropriate practices.
  - 4 states **require** this change (AL, NM, OR, SD).
  - 23 states **encourage** this change (AZ, CO, DC, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, MD, MI, MT, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, SC, TN, UT, VA, WI, WV, WY).
- 24 states require or encourage efforts to increase staff knowledge and skills related to family engagement.
  - 2 states **require** this change (AL, OR).
  - 22 states **encourage** this change (AZ, DC, FL, GA, IL, IN, MD, MI, MT, NV, OH, OK, PA, SC, SD, TN, UT, VA, WA, WI, WV, WY).
- 19 states require or encourage efforts to increase staff knowledge and skills concerning culturally and linguistically responsive care and education.
  - 3 states **require** this change (AL, DC, OR).
  - 16 states **encourage** this change (AZ, DE, FL, IL, IN, MD, MI, NM, NV, NY, OH, PA, SC, UT, VA, WI).
- 18 states require or encourage the use of an evidence-based social-emotional curriculum.
  - 1 state **requires** this change (AL).
  - 17 states **encourage** this change (FL, GA, IL, IN, MD, MI, MT, NM, NV, NY, SC, SD, UT, VA, WI, WV, WY).
- 3 states require or encourage the reduction of adult-child ratios.
  - 2 states **require** this change (AL and NM).
  - 1 state **encourages** this change (SC).
- 3 states also require or encourage the reduction in group sizes of center-based care.
  - 1 state **requires** this change (NM).
  - 2 states **encourage** this change (AL and SC).

### ECE WORK CONDITIONS
**How do policies aim to enhance ECE work conditions?**
States reported on ECE work conditions that their expulsion and suspension policies seek to change in order to decrease the likelihood of expulsion and suspension. Overall, relatively few states' policies required changes in work conditions that aim to enhance staff well-being and the ability of staff to participate in professional development.

- 5 states require or encourage programs to increase their capacity to provide reflective supervision to staff.
  - 1 state **requires** this change (AL).
  - 4 states **encourage** this change (FL, IL, NM, and SC).
- 5 states encourage programs to improve staffing patterns to allow reasonable hours and breaks (AL, DE, NM, SC, UT).
- 2 states encourage programs to increase paid planning time for staff (AL, NM).
- 1 state **encourages** the development of local substitute pools to allow staff to participate in professional development, reflective groups, and other supportive activities during the workday (AL) and 1 state **requires** that grants be given to programs participating in the state's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS), allowing time for staff to be out of the classroom for trainings (NM).

### SUPPORTS FOR PROGRAMS
**What supports for ECE programs are included in the policies?**
States reported on whether policies require or encourage state agencies to provide different types of supports for ECE programs that could help reduce and prevent exclusionary practices. The largest number of states reported that policies call for an expansion of professional development, technical assistance, and/or coaching, although more states encouraged rather than required an increase in these supports. An expansion of early childhood mental health consultation was also widely encouraged and required in about a quarter of states. Another support encouraged by about half of the states'

policies, and required by fewer, was a centralized hotline or resource to connect providers to program supports such as professional development.

- 29 states require or encourage the expansion of professional development opportunities for program directors, providers, or teaching staff.
  - 9 states **require** this support (AL, AR, AZ, DC, DE, OH, PA, SD, WV).
  - 20 states **encourage** this support (CA, FL, GA, IL, IN, MD, MI, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OK, OR, SC, TN, UT, VA, WI, WY).
- 27 states require or encourage the expansion of on-site technical assistance and/or coaching.
  - 10 states **require** this support (AL, AR, AZ, DC, DE, OH, OR, PA, SD, WV).
  - 17 states **encourage** this support (FL, GA, IL, IN, MI, MT, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, SC, TN, UT, VA, WI, WY).
- 23 states require or encourage the expansion of early childhood mental health consultation.
  - 6 states **require** this support (AL, AR, AZ, OR, PA, SC).
  - 18 states **encourage** this support (CA, DC, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, MI, MT, NH, NM, NV, OK, SD, TN, UT, VA, WV).
- 19 states require or encourage establishing a hotline or centralized resource to connect ECE providers to supports.
  - 7 states **require** this support (AL, AR, AZ, IN, OR, PA, SC).
  - 12 states **encourage** this support (CO, DC, FL, GA, MI, NH, NM, NV, NY, OK, WI, WY).
- 17 states require or encourage the use of strategies to address racial and gender disparities, including professional development and/or coaching on implicit bias, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.
  - 5 states **require** this support (AR, DC, OR, PA, SC).
  - 12 states **encourage** this support (AL, AZ, DE, FL, IL, IN, MD, MI, NM, NV, NY, VA).

## CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

**How do policies promote access to child- and family-related services?**

Recognizing that some children and families can benefit from developmental and social-emotional services, some state expulsion and suspension policies promote increased access to these services. Most policies aim to increase access to early childhood mental health services, early intervention, and preschool special education, as well as social-emotional screening and referral. However, many more states report expulsion and suspension policies that encourage rather than require expanded access to these services.

- 22 states require or encourage increasing access to early childhood mental health services.
  - 5 states **require** this change (AL, AR, AZ, PA, SD).
  - 17 states **encourage** this change (CA, DC, DE, FL, IL, IN, MD, MI, MT, NM, NV, SC, TN, UT, WI, WV, WY).
- 19 states require or encourage expanding access to Early Intervention (Part C of IDEA) and Preschool Special Education (Part B of IDEA) services, and/or increasing the capacity of these programs to address children's social-emotional needs.
  - 5 states **require** this change (AL, AR, CA, PA, WV).
  - 14 states **encourage** this change (AZ, DC, FL, IN, MD, MT, NM, NV, SC, SD, TN, UT, VA, WY).
- 18 states require or encourage increasing access to Social-Emotional (SE) Screening and Referral support.
  - 4 states **require** this change (AL, AR, AZ, SD).
  - 14 states **encourage** this change (CA, DC, DE, FL, IN, MD, MI, NM, NV, SC, TN, UT, VA, WY).

## POLICY IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS

**What state-level activities are included in policies to support effective implementation?**

The survey asked about whether policies require or encourage certain state-level activities aimed at promoting awareness of the policy and effective implementation. Policies in most states have provisions concerning increased communication about expulsion and suspension policy to parents and providers, the development of formal definitions of expulsion and prevention, and the collection of data to allow the monitoring of policies' effects on rates of expulsion and suspension.

- 25 states require or encourage stronger communication with parents about policies and suspension.
  - 14 states **require** this activity (AL, AR, AZ, CA, DC, DE, FL, IL, IN, NH, NV, WA, WI, WY).
  - 11 states **encourage** this activity (MD, MI, MT, NM, OH, OK, SC, SD, TN, UT, WV).
- 24 states require or encourage stronger communication with ECE providers about policies and expectations regarding expulsion and suspension.
  - 11 states **require** this activity (AL, AR, AZ, CA, DE, IL, IN, NV, WI, WV, WY).
  - 13 states **encourage** this activity (DC, FL, MD, MT, NH, NM, NY, OK, SC, SD, TN, UT, WA).
- 24 states require or encourage the development of statewide definitions for expulsion and suspension.
  - 13 states **require** this activity (AR, AZ, CT, DC, DE, IL, KS, NJ, NV, OR, PA, SD, WI).
  - 11 states **encourage** this activity (AL, FL, MD, MI, NH, NM, NY, SC, UT, VA, WY).
- 20 states require or encourage the collection of data to learn if changes in policy and supports are decreasing rates of expulsion and suspension.
  - 12 states **require** this activity (AR, AZ, CT, DC, IL, KS, NV, OH, OR, TN, WA, WI).
  - 8 states **encourage** this activity (AL, DE, FL, MI, NY, SC, UT, WV).
- 17 states require or encourage state agencies to set goals for preventing and reducing expulsion and suspension.
  - 8 states **require** this activity (AR, CT, NJ, OH, OR, PA, SD, WI).
  - 9 states **encourage** this activity (AL, AZ, FL, MD, MI, NM, NY, SC, UT).

- 8 states require or encourage the creation of a cross-system leadership team, work group, or committee that implements, monitors, and/or refines the strategies for reducing expulsion and suspension.
  - 4 states **require** this activity (AR, IL, NV, WI).
  - 4 states **encourage** this activity (AZ, MI, NM, SC).

## Key Barriers to Developing and Implementing Expulsion and Suspension Policy

In response to an open-ended question in the survey and follow-up interviews, states described several barriers to developing and implementing policies to prevent expulsion and suspension. The following are among the most frequently reported barriers.

- **ECE governance across more than one department:** Developing common definitions of expulsion and suspension and designing specific policies, across all types of ECE programs, is challenging. States report that it is difficult to convene leaders across departments and reach consensus on a policy that would be applicable across program types.
- **Lack of resources for supports:** A lack of funding for professional development and early childhood mental health consultation makes it difficult for ECE programs to comply with policies that discourage or prohibit exclusionary practices. Simply banning expulsion does not help programs increase their capacity to respond to children's challenging behaviors with new practices. If timely, effective program supports are not provided, expulsion and suspension policies can have unintended consequences, such as increasing "soft expulsion" (e.g., a parent who is repeatedly asked to pick up the child decides to take the child out of the program).

- **Communication and provider buy-in:** When a policy is established, it is challenging to make the policy known to all ECE providers and to secure their buy-in, especially if it does not include timely, effective supports. Many states shared that constant communication with ECE programs about the policy and available supports is needed over several years.
- **Guidance instead of regulation:** Policy that is established in the form of guidance, or legislation that encourages rather that requires actions, is difficult to enforce because it does not establish accountability for required activities or supports that would help ECE programs avoid expulsion.
- **Collecting data on prohibited practices:** It is challenging to develop and use methods for collecting data on expulsion and suspension because providers must self-report on actions that reflect non-compliance with the state policy. Because data are limited or not available, it is difficult to monitor policy implementation, program needs, changes in rates of expulsion and suspension, and disparities in the use of exclusionary practices.

## States' Provision of Supports to ECE Programs to Help Them Promote Children's Social-Emotional Well-Being and Address Challenging Behavior

All 43 states that responded to the survey were asked about states' provision of supports for ECE programs that help them promote children's social-emotional well-being and effectively address challenging behavior. These supports are not necessarily a part of the expulsion and suspension policy, although policies in some states call for their expansion, as discussed earlier. Some states without expulsion and suspension policies also provide these supports.

Professional development focused on promoting children's social-emotional growth and addressing challenging behavior is reported to be widely available in more than half of the states while other supports, including Pyramid Model training or early childhood mental health consultation, are widely available in about a third of the states. It is important to note that in follow-up discussions, many states indicated that a support may be "available" to all ECE providers, but not necessarily delivered to all ECE providers or provided in a timely way. These restrictions on the actual provision of supports are due to the limited number of professional development or other specialists available to work with programs, and to the delivery of professional development and early childhood mental health consultation to providers who request assistance. Some states also noted that supports are not coordinated and include many professional development opportunities that do not go beyond

an introductory level. The following results show the number of states in which different types of supports are reported to be available to all ECE settings. **See Figure 3** for complete results.

- 28 states: professional development focused on practices that promote children's social-emotional growth and effectively addressing challenging behavior (AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, DC, DE, FL, IN, KS, MA, MD, MI, MO, MT, NC, NE, NH, NV, OH, PA, SC, SD, TN, UT, VA, WI, WV).
- 25 states: professional development focused on promoting family engagement (AL, AR, CA, DC, DE, FL, GA, IN, KS, MA, MD, MI, MT, NE, NH, NM, NV, OH, PA, SC, TN, UT, VA, WI, WV).
- 23 states: on-site technical assistance or coaching focused on program practices that promote social-emotional well-being and development (AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, DE, FL, GA, IN, KS, MA, MI, NH, NM, NV, PA, SC, SD, TN, VA, WI, WV, WY).

## ALASKA  Embedding expulsion and suspension reduction strategies in a state QRIS
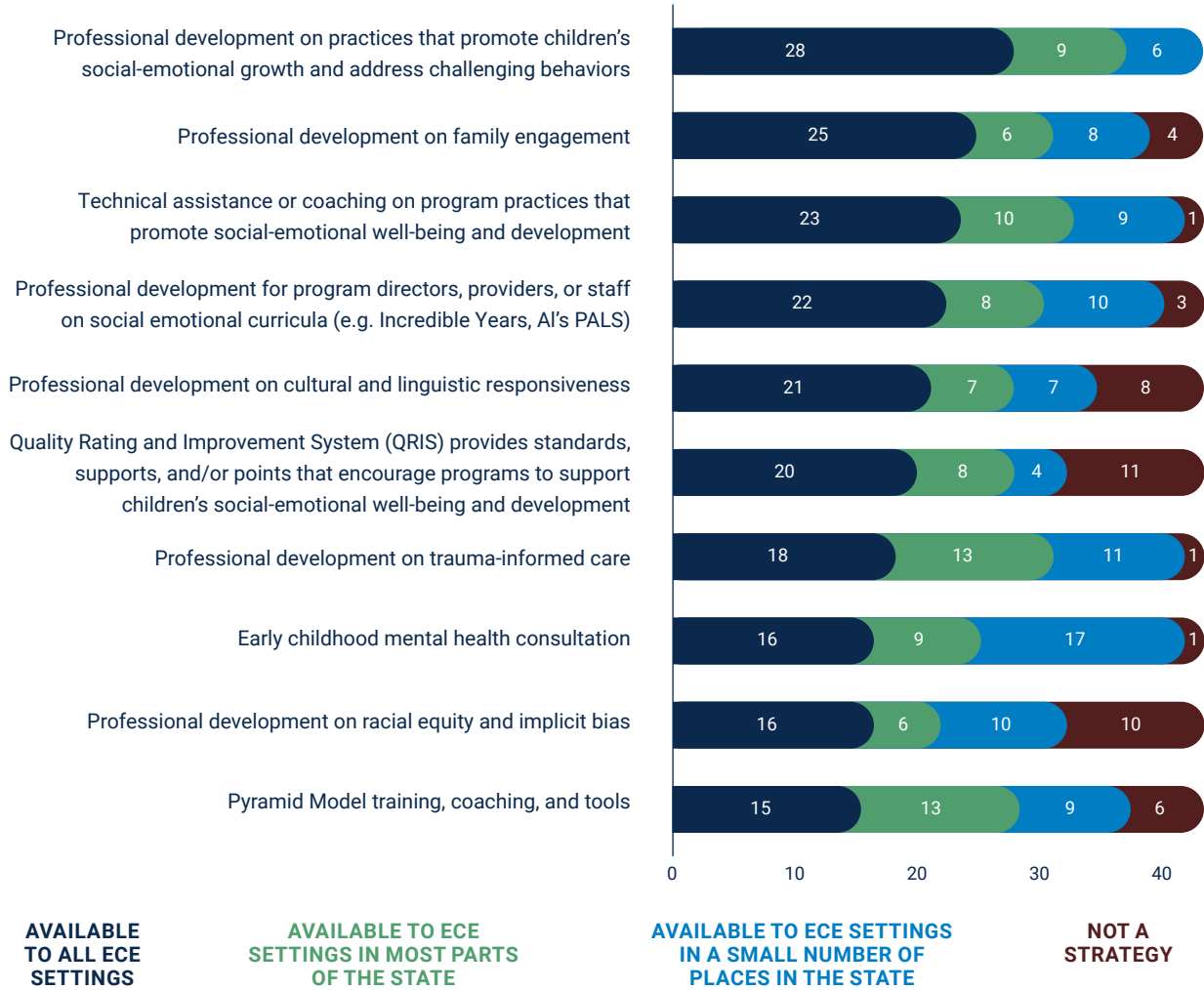
Alaska has embedded key strategies to reduce expulsion and suspension into the state's Quality Recognition and Improvement System, Learn & Grow. Learn & Grow provides a roadmap to help early care and education programs develop high-quality early learning environments using five levels of quality standards beyond licensing.

Strategies for promoting children's social-emotional growth and reducing expulsion and suspension are included in each level of the QRIS. For example: **Level 2** requires training in Strengthening Families and the Pyramid Model to help ensure that families and teachers can promote nurturing relationships with children and social-emotional competence. **Level 3** requires the use of an inclusion readiness checklist as well as training in developmental and social-emotional screening, culturally responsive practices, implicit bias and equity practices, and other strategies that can reduce exclusionary practices. Programs are also required to document behavior incidents to inform coaching focused on classroom quality improvement, and report expulsion or suspension to the regulatory body. **Level 4** requires programs to demonstrate that they have policies and procedures for supporting the inclusion of children with special needs, including a detailed plan of how the program works to prevent expulsion and suspension. At this level, programs must participate in training

on effective ways to support children and families experiencing adverse circumstances, including trauma. **Level 5** requires programs to have the fiscal resources and program readiness to use an early childhood mental health consultant and an internal coach, if needed. Learn & Grow has also incorporated the Pyramid Model's inventory of social-emotional practices into the annual teacher needs assessment to identify teachers' needs for coaching in this domain. The needs assessment process will also help Learn & Grow examine changes over time in teachers' use of practices that promote children's social-emotional competence. Programs receive assistance from coaches to move up levels of the QRIS with a cohort of peers receiving similar support.

In addition to the QRIS effort, the Alaska leadership team used Building a Comprehensive State Policy Strategy to Prevent Expulsion from Early Learning Settings to develop a plan to reduce exclusionary practices in ECE settings. The plan includes strategies to support the well-being of the ECE workforce, the provision of early childhood mental health consultation, and the development of a data collection system to document the use of exclusionary practices and support continuous improvement efforts. For more information about the team's initiative, see Reducing Early Childhood Exclusionary Practices (RECEP).

## FIGURE 3. Supports for ECE Programs



Bar chart data (values read left to right as: Available to all ECE settings | Available to ECE settings in most parts of the state | Available to ECE settings in a small number of places in the state | Not a strategy):

| Support | Available to all ECE settings | Available to ECE settings in most parts of the state | Available to ECE settings in a small number of places in the state | Not a strategy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Professional development on practices that promote children's social-emotional growth and address challenging behaviors | 28 | 9 | 6 | |
| Professional development on family engagement | 25 | 6 | 8 | 4 |
| Technical assistance or coaching on program practices that promote social-emotional well-being and development | 23 | 10 | 9 | 1 |
| Professional development for program directors, providers, or staff on social emotional curricula (e.g. Incredible Years, Al's PALS) | 22 | 8 | 10 | 3 |
| Professional development on cultural and linguistic responsiveness | 21 | 7 | 7 | 8 |
| Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) provides standards, supports, and/or points that encourage programs to support children's social-emotional well-being and development | 20 | 8 | 4 | 11 |
| Professional development on trauma-informed care | 18 | 13 | 11 | 1 |
| Early childhood mental health consultation | 16 | 9 | 17 | 1 |
| Professional development on racial equity and implicit bias | 16 | 6 | 10 | 10 |
| Pyramid Model training, coaching, and tools | 15 | 13 | 9 | 6 |

**AVAILABLE TO ALL ECE SETTINGS** — **AVAILABLE TO ECE SETTINGS IN MOST PARTS OF THE STATE** — **AVAILABLE TO ECE SETTINGS IN A SMALL NUMBER OF PLACES IN THE STATE** — **NOT A STRATEGY**

- 22 states: professional development for program directors, providers, or staff on social emotional curricula, such as Incredible Years or Al's PALS (AL, AR, CA, DC, DE, FL, GA, IN, MA, MD, MT, NC, NH, NV, OH, PA, SC, SD, TN, UT, VA, WV).
- 21 states: professional development on cultural and linguistic responsiveness (AL, AR, CA, DC, DE, FL, GA, IN, KS, MA, MI, NE, NM, NV, OH, PA, SC, TN, UT, VA, WV).
- 20 states: a Quality Rating and Improvement System with standards, supports, and/or points that encourage programs to support children's social-emotional development (AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, DC, DE, IL, IN, MA, MD, MI, MT, NM, NV, OH, PA, TN, VA, WI).

- 18 states: professional development on trauma-informed care (AR, CA, DC, DE, FL, KS, MA, MD, MI, NE, NH, OH, PA, SC, TN, UT, VA, WV).
- 16 states: early childhood mental health consultation (AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, MA, MD, NH, NV, OH, PA, SC, TN, VA).
- 16 states: professional development on racial equity and implicit bias (AL, AR, CA, DC, DE, FL, IN, KS, MA, MI, NE, OH, PA, SC, TN, WV).
- 15 states: Pyramid Model training, coaching, and tools (AL, AR, CA, FL, GA, IN, MA, MD, MT, NM, NV, SD, TN, VA, WI).

# Discussion and Summary of Findings

The results of survey responses from 43 states and follow-up interviews with state leaders suggest widespread efforts to develop and implement policies intended to prevent expulsion and suspension in early care and education settings. Many states are also providing supports to ECE programs, such as professional development and coaching focused on practices that promote children's social-emotional growth and early childhood mental health consultation, although these are not always formally tied to expulsion and suspension policy. Given the harmful consequences of exclusionary practices for children and families, and the contribution of children's social-emotional competence to school success, the survey findings provide reason for optimism. At the same time, the results suggest that the design of policies and reported barriers to effective policy implementation may limit the positive impacts of the policies. States are especially challenged by a lack of funding for professional development and coaching focused on practices that promote children's social-emotional competencies and early childhood mental health consultation, supports that are critical to inclusive practices that help all children benefit from high-quality ECE programs. State leaders reported that even when these supports are available statewide, professional development specialists and early childhood mental health consultants may still be in short supply, making it difficult to offer timely assistance to programs. Most policies do not include provisions for improving workplace conditions and structural features of programs, such as staff-to-child ratios, that likely contribute to teacher stress, children's challenging behavior, and the use of exclusionary practices. In addition, many states face challenges in their efforts to monitor policy implementation and outcomes, leaving states without the information they need to strengthen expulsion and suspension policies and related program supports. Recommendations concerning the design of expulsion and suspension policies and their implementation are offered in the final section.

The key findings from the survey are summarized below. As a reminder, survey respondents focused on their most fully developed or implemented policy when reporting on particular features of their state's expulsion and suspension policy.

## Policy type and ECE settings covered

■ **States with policies:** 29 of the 43 participating states reported having an expulsion and suspension policy for ECE programs and another 6 states indicated they have a policy currently under development. Among the 35 states with established or developing policies, state agency or departmental guidance or rules and regulations were most often used to create the expulsion and suspension policy, while under a quarter of states used legislation.

■ **ECE settings covered by policy:** ECE expulsion and suspension policies apply to all ECE programs in 22 states. In the other states, the policies apply to one or more subsets of programs (e.g., only state preschool, only child care programs receiving CCDF funding).

■ **Includes equity goals:** Over one-third of states with established or developing policies include language about racial equity and equity for children with disabilities.

## Policy resources and expectations of programs

- **Funding:** Under half of the 35 states reported that policies allocate new funding although several policies call for redeploying staff or existing funds.
- **Expectations of programs:** Nearly all the states with established or developing policies call for programs to seek and use supports, such as professional development and early childhood mental health consultation, to prevent expulsions and suspensions; over three-quarters require or encourage programs to develop program-level policies and procedures concerning expulsion and suspension. Over half the states' policies also require or encourage data collection and reporting of data on expulsions and suspensions.

## Policy inclusion of supports for programs and provisions regarding program standards and work conditions

- **Policy includes supports for programs:** Several states reported that their expulsion and suspension policies require an expansion of professional development (9), on-site technical assistance or coaching (10), or early childhood mental health consultation (6). Many more state policies encourage expansion of these supports. For example, 17 states encourage the expansion of technical assistance or coaching and 18 states encourage an expansion of early childhood mental health consultation. A centralized hotline or resource to connect providers to program supports, such as coaching and early childhood mental health consultation, was another support encouraged by about one-third of state policies, and required by a smaller number.

- **Provisions related to program standards:** Several states reported that expulsion and suspension policies call for changes in ECE program standards. However, policies most often included provisions about program standards that "encourage" rather than "require" changes in program features and teaching. For example, one state requires and 17 states encourage an increase in the use of a social-emotional curriculum; three states require and 16 states encourage an increase in staff knowledge and skills concerning culturally and linguistically responsive education. An exception is that two states require while one state encourages lower staff-to-child ratios.
- **Improving work conditions:** Policies in relatively few states call for better work conditions, and most encourage rather than require changes, such as improving staffing patterns to allow reasonable hours and breaks for teachers or increasing planning time and opportunities for professional development for teachers.

## Policy inclusion of child and family services

- **Increased access to child and family services:** Most state policies also aim to increase children's access to mental health and developmental supports. However, similar to policy language about program supports, more states encourage rather than require this access. Five states require and 17 states encourage children's increased access to early childhood mental health services. Five states require and 14 states encourage increased access to early intervention and preschool special education services and/or increasing these programs' capacity to address young children's mental health needs. Four states require and 14 encourage increased access to social-emotional screening and support for referrals to needed services.

## Provisions to support policy implementation

- **Communications and data:** To support effective implementation, policies in most states call for promoting communication about expulsion and suspension policy to parents and ECE programs, the development of formal definitions of expulsion and prevention, and the collection of data that will help show how well the policy is working to reduce expulsion and suspension, and reduce or eliminate disparities in exclusion.

- **Challenges concerning data collection:** The collection of monitoring data appears to be one of the most challenging policy components to implement. Twelve states require and 8 states encourage data collection to monitor the policy's impacts on expulsion and suspension reduction and disparities in expulsion and suspension. However, follow-up discussions with survey participants indicated that states have made limited progress in developing effective methods for collecting this data, although several states

continue to work on developing data reporting procedures. Arkansas is one state that does collect extensive data. It obtains information about program needs and whether expulsions are prevented in programs that receive assistance through a centralized warm-line; currently however, data are collected from programs that request assistance, not from all ECE programs in the state. *(See Arkansas – Interdisciplinary team delivering support when needed)*

- **Program supports separate from policy design:** All of the 43 states participating in the survey reported on the availability of program supports that help teachers promote children's social-emotional well-being and address challenging behavior. These supports may have been developed and may operate separately from states' expulsion and suspension policies, but they are important to highlight since they can help states meet the goal of these policies. On-site technical assistance and coaching that includes a focus on practices that promote children's social-emotional well-being and

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### ARKANSAS — Interdisciplinary team delivering support when needed

Arkansas' state policy requires the state's publicly funded early care and education programs to seek assistance when a child is at risk of expulsion. BehaviorHelp is Arkansas' system for providing support to early care and education programs serving children birth to five when they are struggling with young children's behavior. This system provides a centralized website through which programs or families can request assistance. Department of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) specialists conduct an interview with those requesting assistance to assess the situation and program's needs. An interdisciplinary team of ECMH consultants and ECE Technical Assistance (TA) providers consider each request and, based on the needs of the program, child, and family, one of three types of support is offered:

(1) DCCECE specialists share information and resources with the ECE provider and/or parent; (2) developmental and social-emotional coaches offer short-term technical assistance to build teacher skills, create a more supportive learning environment, and identify training

needs; or (3) early childhood mental health consultants provide the program and families with supports and strategies to address specific concerns related to a child's behavior. ECMH consultation is most often used when there are more serious concerns about the child's social-emotional development, the child has experienced trauma, or when multiple systems are involved with the child and family. In this way, Arkansas draws on a full continuum of resources and tailors assistance to each situation. The TA providers and ECMH consultants meet regularly to review progress in the programs and to ensure they are receiving the most appropriate supports. BehaviorHelp also collects data on the needs being addressed by the specialists and consultants, the nature of the supports delivered, the outcomes of the assistance, and the quality improvement needs of the programs. Positive outcomes achieved by this system include high teacher satisfaction, prevention of expulsion, increased skills of teachers, families, and children, and improvements in teacher-reported symptoms of children's social-emotional problems. For more information on Arkansas' evaluation, see its study.

growth is available to all ECE programs in 23 states. Pyramid Model training, an evidence-based model of professional development that includes on-site coaching, and early childhood mental health consultation are widely available in a little more than one-third of the states. Many states also reported offering professional development to all ECE programs that focused on family engagement (25), cultural and linguistic responsiveness (21), and racial equity and implicit bias (16). During interviews, most states explained that while their responses indicating that these types of supports are "available to all ECE programs" were accurate, programs' timely access to effective supports is more complicated. Waitlists are common, most of these supports are not aligned or coordinated, and many professional development opportunities do not go beyond an introductory level.

## Barriers to designing and implementing expulsion and suspension policies

- **Multiple barriers:** States cited significant barriers to designing and implementing expulsion and suspension policies. These included the challenge of working with leaders across agencies or departments to develop common definitions of expulsion and suspension applicable to different types of ECE programs and a lack of funding for program supports such as early childhood mental health consultation and professional development that could help ECE programs meet policy expectations to reduce expulsion and suspension. Even in states with well-developed early childhood mental health consultation programs and professional development that targets social-emotional practices, the limited number of specialists often makes it difficult for programs to receive assistance quickly enough to prevent expulsion and suspension. Perhaps in part due to this lack of timely program support to help teachers address children's challenging behavior, another reported barrier is ECE programs' lack of buy-in to expulsion and suspension and policies. States also reported that data needed to monitor policy impact are difficult to collect and that the lack of data poses an obstacle to strengthening policy implementation and ensuring desired impacts.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations reflect the need to design expulsion and suspension policies with features that can help ensure strong implementation, desired social-emotional outcomes for children, and a marked reduction or elimination of expulsion and suspension and racial disparities in these practices. It is likely that multiple actions by states will be needed to achieve these outcomes (e.g., well-designed policies and sufficient investment in program supports and the ECE workforce).

**ECE expulsion and suspension policy should promote ECE programs' timely access to and use of effective program supports, including evidence-based professional development and coaching focused on social-emotional teaching practices and early childhood mental health consultation.** To ensure programs' access to critical supports, expulsion and suspension policies should include new funding or target existing funding to pay for needed expansions of these program supports. Policies can also require that programs request these supports when a child is at risk of expulsion. If policies only convey a "ban" on exclusionary practices in the absence of adequate supports, programs will face difficulties with compliance, and may resort to exclusionary practices that are not called "expulsion" (e.g., suggesting the parent should take the child out of the program because it is a poor fit), but have similar negative impacts on children and families.

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**COLORADO** | **Creating a multiprong approach built on licensing**

Colorado has taken a multipronged approach to reducing ECE expulsion and suspension. While several states' expulsion and suspension policies require ECE programs to develop program-level policies and procedures related to exclusionary practices, Colorado built this requirement into a licensing standard and specifies the components that should be included. The licensing standard, established in 2016, requires licensed child care and state funded pre-K programs to have policies and procedures that accomplish the following:

1. Cultivate positive child, staff, and family relationships.
2. Create and maintain a socially and emotionally respectful early learning and care environment.
3. Implement teaching strategies to support positive behavior, pro-social peer interaction, and overall social-emotional competence in young children.
4. Provide individualized social-emotional intervention supports for children who need them, including methods for understanding child behavior, and implementing a team-based positive behavior support plan to reduce challenging behavior and prevent expulsion and suspension.
5. Demonstrate access to early childhood mental health consultants or other specialists as needed.

Colorado Department of Human Services offers professional development to help ECE providers gain the knowledge and skills required by the licensing standard. The 2016 Licensing Rule is currently under public review. As part of its proposed revisions, licensed care directors would be required to complete a one-hour eLearning course, "Working with an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant," and be required to identify their local ECMH consultant. All updates to the Licensing Rule are expected to be finalized by January 2022.

In addition to these efforts related to helping programs comply with the licensing standard, Colorado has invested approximately $3 million annually from state and federal funds to support the statewide ECMH consultation program. Additional program supports are available through Colorado Shines, the state's QRIS. Through its Preschool Development Grant, Colorado recently established the ECMH State Support Line. Callers who use the Support Line have immediate access to information, resources, and referrals furnished by experienced ECMH consultants. The long-term goal of this new resource is to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and connect adults to timely resources that have the potential to reduce the use of expulsion and suspension practices. In 2019, legislation was passed that restricts expulsions and suspensions in state-funded preschool through grade-two classrooms. Data on the impact of this legislation should become available at the end of 2022.

**Policies and related program supports should be applicable to all types of early care and education programs serving children under age six, including state-funded prekindergarten programs, center- and home-based child care programs, Head Start programs, and programs serving children with special needs.** Regardless of the ECE program type, all children deserve the opportunity to experience the benefits of high-quality early care and education and protection from exclusionary practices. Another benefit of policies that offer consistent expectations and program supports across different types of ECE programs is that state agencies will be better positioned to convey a strong and unified message about strategies for preventing expulsion and suspension to ECE providers and parents. Despite the challenges involved in developing policy and delivering supports across all ECE programs, the many states that have achieved this goal suggest that it can be accomplished.

**Stakeholders and policymakers should consider expulsion and suspension policies that establish a centralized resource (e.g., a warm-line) that ECE programs can use to request assistance and quickly access appropriate forms of support when children are at risk of being expelled or suspended.** A centralized resource, which could be offered in multiple regions of the state or as a single access point, would help program staff know how to easily seek help and provide the opportunity for staff to talk with a specialist who can assess the situation and arrange for programs to receive professional development, coaching, early childhood mental health consultation, or other appropriate types of support. A centralized resource also offers the chance to tailor assistance to a program's needs and maximize use of all the state's resources (e.g., different types of professional development and early childhood mental health consultation).

**ECE expulsion and suspension policies should include provisions aimed at improving teacher well-being or should be developed in concert with other policies that support this goal; supports for teacher well-being include higher compensation and benefits, and staffing that allows teachers to participate in professional development that can reduce children's challenging behavior.** Teachers who experience less stress as a result of financial security and positive workplace conditions are more likely to have positive relationships with children which, in turn, are associated with more positive child behavior and less frequent use of harsh teaching practices.[14]

**ECE expulsion and suspension policies should set child-staff ratios and group size regulations that meet recommended standards.** Many states' ECE regulations specify ratios and group size that are outside recommended limits.[15] Larger ratios and group sizes in ECE settings are associated with more stress among teachers and a higher incidence of expulsion.[16] States should review recommended ratios (e.g., in NAEYC, Head Start Performance Standards), assess whether their state meets these standards, and include changes in rules concerning ratios and group size that bring them into alignment with recommended standards.

**Stakeholders should consider designing expulsion and suspension policies that communicate clear requirements for ECE programs, as well as the availability of supports.** A policy that requires an ECE program to request available assistance when a child is at risk of expulsion, or requires a certain level of participation in evidence-based social-emotional professional development sets clearer expectations than a policy that only encourages these actions. Such requirements could be used in conjunction with incentives, such as points in a QRIS system.

**Expulsion and suspension policies should include resources to help ECE programs connect families to supports that address adversities and strengthen families' capacity to promote children's social-emotional well-being.** Parents and families play a critical role in promoting children's mental health and social-emotional competence, and often experience adversities that may contribute to children's behavior difficulties. Ensuring programs' access to early childhood mental health consultants is one way to support families whose children may be at risk of expulsion, since early childhood mental health consultation usually includes some level of assistance to families such as guidance and referrals to needed services.[17] Another resource

that could be included in expulsion and suspension policies is Help Me Grow, a system established in a growing number of states that can be used by ECE programs, families, and other providers to monitor children's development and help connect families to community supports and services, including parenting programs and assistance to help families meet basic needs.[18]

**Expulsion and suspension policies should provide resources for data collection to examine policy implementation and outcomes over time.** While there is a need to identify the most effective strategies for collecting data that can inform ongoing efforts to strengthen expulsion and suspension policies

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## ARIZONA     *Updated policy giving stronger voice to parents*

In fall 2021, the Arizona Department of Economic Security will be implementing an updated expulsion and suspension policy in partnership with its contracted provider, Southwest Human Development, and through the Arizona Statewide Training and Technical Assistance for Expulsion Prevention (AZ STEPS) program. The policy and program enhancements expand training and technical assistance and improve the data collection and analysis system. The policy requires providers to use all available supports to prevent expulsion and suspension of children from child care settings. AZ STEPS is developing a new expulsion prevention series that includes three tiers - foundational training, core components to build skills, and leadership support. This series provides information about how understanding child development, attachment, trauma reaction, and support of children's developing self-regulation skills can help reduce and prevent expulsion of children from ages birth to 12 years. Moving Forward with Expulsion Prevention (Foundations 1) is a two-hour course, with accompanying technical assistance for participants who request additional support. This foundational training will be required of all child care providers within 90 days of hire. The training will include information about how early childhood mental health consultants work with programs and how to access consultants and other supports.

One component of the policy and program enhancement is a system for responding to requests for support and collecting data. Providers, parents, and others will be able to complete an online form through the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) if there is a concern about a child who is at risk of expulsion or suspension. A Resource Consultant who works for Southwest

Human Development's Smart Support program, in conjunction with AZ STEPS, will respond within two business days and collect information from the program director, teacher, and parent to develop an action plan and consider three levels of support: professional development, technical assistance, or early childhood mental health consultation through the Southwest Human Development Smart Support. The Resource Consultant will maintain communication with all involved with the goal of keeping the child in the program. If needed, the Resource Consultant will help the family to find a suitable new setting and provide appropriate support to the program and family so that the child's needs are addressed during and after this transition. Parents can also use AZ STEPS and the CCR&R to report an expulsion from a program has already happened. In these cases, the Resource Consultant will reach out to the program to connect it to technical assistance to prevent future expulsions.

The improvements to Arizona's expulsion prevention data system will enable it to track age, gender, race, and other demographics of children at risk of expulsion or suspension, as well as those who transition to another program, the types and duration of supports provided, and how many expulsions were prevented. The system will also allow parents to provide information about their experiences and potentially permit the identification of soft expulsion practices in the future. Additionally, it will allow analysis of how well the policy is working for children receiving foster care, and the need to provide support to these children, their families, and ECE providers.

and their implementation, the provision of resources for data collection can support the improvement of these strategies over time. Such resources might include funding for technical assistance to develop data collection methods or to administer parent or provider surveys. The use of different data collection methods, such as regular program reporting on exclusionary practices in conjunction with periodic anonymous surveys of ECE staff and parents could contribute to an understanding of how the policy is working, and how reliable data can be obtained. These methods can be used to examine how well the policy succeeded in preventing exclusionary practices and eliminating disparities related to children's race and disability; whether the policy contributed to unintended consequences such as an increase in programs' use of "soft" expulsion (e.g., a program makes it uncomfortable for a parent to keep a child in a program); whether programs increased their use of effective supports to prevent expulsion and suspension; changes over time in staff knowledge about and use of practices that help prevent expulsion and suspension; and attitudes about the policy.

**States Should Review Funding under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Consider Using ARPA Funding for Key Elements of Expulsion and Suspension Policy.** Guidance from the US Department of Health and Human Services and other resources make it clear that ARPA funds can be used to expand mental health supports to providers and children, including professional development and early childhood mental health consultation. Because the funds are time-limited, states could consider approaches that train specialists who can provide long-term support to the ECE system's workforce, including early childhood mental health consultants and coaches (e.g., trained Pyramid Model coaches). These specialists, in turn, can promote ECE programs' capacity to comply with existing and developing expulsion and suspension

policy, including provisions to use practices and resources that promote children's social-emotional growth and prevent expulsion and suspension. ARPA funds can also be used to update and improve data systems so that they can support efforts to monitor and strengthen policy implementation and outcomes. For example, funds could increase data systems' capacity to collect data on quality improvement supports provided to ECE programs, disparities in children's access to and removal from ECE programs, and programs' staffing and professional development needs.

While there is much work to be done to expand and strengthen expulsion and suspension policies, the results reported here suggest a widening commitment across the states to develop policies and supports for programs that can help ensure opportunities for all children to benefit from high-quality early care and education programs. States' policies are also beginning to explicitly include equity goals. With policies that establish clear expectations for ECE programs, increased funding for adequate program and workforce supports, and strengthened data collection to monitor policies, these goals can be met.

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