



January, 2017

Implementing the Pyramid Model to Address Inequities in Early Childhood Discipline

Data from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights show that expulsion and suspension are widely used in early childhood programs and there are gender and racial disparities (United States Department of Education, 2016). These data include:

- ▲ 6,700 children attending public preschool were suspended at least once in 2013-2014.
- ▲ Black preschool children are 3.6 times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions as white preschool children.
- ▲ While boys represent 54% of preschool enrollment, they represent 78% of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions.
- ▲ Black boys represent 19% of the male preschool enrollment, but represent 45% of male preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions.
- ▲ Black girls represent 20% of female preschool enrollment, but 54% of female preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions.

In recognition of the severity of the issue, the US Departments of Education and Health and Human Services issued a *Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, 2014) that provides recommendations to States and local early childhood programs to prevent and severely limit expulsions and suspensions in early learning settings (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ee-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>).

The Pyramid Equity Project

The Pyramid Equity Project (PEP) was funded to develop, demonstrate and disseminate an effective approach for the promotion of social competence in young children and the prevention of suspension, expulsion, and discipline disparities in early learning programs. The Pyramid Equity Project is developing tools, materials, and procedures to explicitly address implicit bias,

implement culturally responsive practices, and use data systems to understand potential discipline equity issues through the implementation of the Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social Emotional Competence of Infants and Young Children (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003). PEP is working in partnership with two Preschool Development Grant programs: Clifton Early Learner Academy in Clifton, New Jersey and Cambridge Early Learning in Antioch, Tennessee. The project will implement the Pyramid Model and demonstrate the program-wide use of effective practices and procedures for promoting the social and emotional skills of all children, preventing challenging behavior of children at risk of challenging behavior, and providing individualized interventions for children with persistent challenging behavior. Our goal is, in fact, to demonstrate how programs, children and families all thrive in an environment where no suspensions and expulsions occur.

Implementation Features for Early Childhood Programs

The following are PEP implementation features that align with the recommendations of the federal policy statement on expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings:

Program-Wide Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Support

The program must have the capacity to meet the diverse social and emotional needs of young children. In PEP, the Pyramid Model is used to provide a framework of universal, secondary, and tertiary strategies and system supports that improve the social emotional competence of young children and reduce behavioral challenges. Program-wide implementation refers to the systemic implementation of the framework by a program leadership team who ensure that Pyramid Model practices are implemented with fidelity by all program personnel. The program leadership team provides ongoing implementation support by addressing staff buy-in, program-wide expectations, family engagement, practice implementation fidelity, the identification and appropriate response to individual children's social and emotional support needs, professional development and staff support, and the use of data for decision-making.

Professional Development of Program Personnel

Program personnel should be trained in effective practices and supported to implement practices with fidelity. In PEP, all program personnel are trained in social emotional promotion, prevention, and intervention practices and receive individualized practice-based coaching (Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015) for practice implementation fidelity. Personnel are also trained in understanding issues of implicit bias and the use of culturally responsive practices in the support of diverse children and families. Classroom coaches are trained to support teachers in practice implementation fidelity, problem solving challenges in the support of individual children, and guiding personnel in response to issues of bias or cultural responsiveness.

Partnerships with Families

Programs should develop strong partnerships with families that include working together to promote child skill development and providing activities and supports that are responsive to and inclusive of all families. In PEP, families are essential partners in program-wide implementation and the use of culturally responsive practices. Families provide their expertise to program staff in the support of their children, work in partnership with classroom personnel in the implementation of social emotional teaching strategies and individualized interventions, and participate in the work of the program leadership team in promoting family and community engagement.

Use of Data Decision Making

Data should be used to monitor the implementation of practices and the program's progress in achieving goals towards reducing suspension and expulsion. In PEP, the program leadership team use data tools to examine implementation and outcomes and makes decisions related to program implementation strategies, teacher professional development, and child interventions. Data tools include a system for collecting data on child behavior incidents and responses to incidents that provides a data summary to examine factors related to incidents, identifying children and teachers in need of support, examining incidents over time, and provides an analysis related to disproportionality in incidents and discipline actions (i.e., suspensions and expulsions).

Developing Clear Policies and Procedures

Programs should establish clear policies and procedures related to how children's social and emotional support needs will be addressed and what intervention and discipline practices will be used (and not used) by the program. PEP leadership teams work with program personnel and families to establish program-wide expectations that are explicitly taught to children, develop

a child guidance/discipline policy that endorses the use of social emotional prevention and promotion practices in partnerships with families, and develop a program plan for how they will respond to behavior that compromises the safety of the child or other children. In addition, the leadership team designs the steps that are used to ensure that children with intensive behavior support needs receive effective intervention.

Internal Capacity to Address Child Challenging Behavior

It is critical that early childhood programs have the capacity to address the intensive behavior support needs that might occur with a small number of children. PEP programs identify a person within the program who is trained to provide behavior consultation support to classroom teachers and facilitate a team-based process of functional behavioral assessment and behavior support plan development that includes partnerships with families for plan implementation and progress monitoring.

For More Information:

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Websites:

- ▲ www.PBIS.org
- ▲ www.pyramidmodel.org

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