

Prekindergarten Expulsion Linked to High Student-Teacher Ratios, Extended-Day Programs, and Teacher Job Stress

Parents Need to Check on Classroom Size and Advocate for Teacher Support.

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January 10, 2008 (New Haven, Conn.) – Children are much more likely to be expelled from prekindergarten in programs with high student-teacher ratios and in extended day programs, according to new research from Yale University’s Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy based on data from the National Prekindergarten Survey.

The report, *Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion*, also found that teacher job stress, which may be connected to high student-teacher ratios and extended day programs, is related to high rates of expulsion in prekindergarten.

“This research can help parents choose prekindergarten programs that provide the support their children need,” explained Walter Gilliam, director of the Zigler Center and author of the study. “Classrooms with fewer than eight students per teacher are much less likely to expel children. In programs that are open for eight or more hours per day, parents should ask whether teachers have sufficient time to recuperate from the stress of the classroom.”

Data from the National Prekindergarten Study finds that higher student-teacher ratios predict the likelihood of expulsion in state-funded prekindergarten programs. Only 7.7 percent of prekindergarten teachers reported an expulsion in the past year when there were fewer than eight children per adult in the class. In comparison, the rate of expulsion reported by teachers with 12 or more children per adult was 12.7 percent.

Program duration was also found to predict expulsion in state-funded prekindergarten programs. Only 7.1 percent of half-day prekindergarten classes experienced an expulsion over a 12-month period, compared to 9 percent for school-day classes, and 13.2 percent for extended-day classes of eight or more hours per day.

The research also found that prekindergarten teachers reporting a high level of job stress were much more likely to expel children. Of prekindergarten teachers who reported an elevated level of job stress, 14.3 percent reported an expulsion in the past year, compared to only 4.9 percent who reported low levels of job stress.

The report identifies three ways policymakers can reduce prekindergarten expulsion:

- Require classrooms to have no more than 10 children per teacher.

- Require adequate time for teachers to relax during the school day, especially for teachers in extended-day programs.
- Provide teachers access to early childhood mental health consultants to help them manage the behavior of challenging children

Early childhood mental health consultation (ECMHC) may be an effective means for decreasing the likelihood that children with challenging classroom behaviors will be expelled. In a recent statewide random-controlled study, prekindergarten classes that received ECMHC demonstrated significant decreases in teacher-rated acting-out behavior problems in the classroom. Effects were greatest in the areas of oppositional behaviors and hyperactivity. ECMHC was assessed an effective means for reducing disruptive classroom behaviors that are likely causes of prekindergarten expulsion.

“Prekindergarten teachers should have access to early childhood mental health consultants,” concluded Gilliam. “Teachers who have ongoing relationships with classroom-based mental health consultants are about half as likely to report expelling preschoolers as teachers with no such support.”

The National Prekindergarten Study (NPS) is a comprehensive data collection effort across each of the 40 states that fund prekindergarten. A random sample of 4,815 classrooms, or about 12 percent of the total number of state-funded prekindergarten classrooms, was selected.

Two years ago, the Zigler Center published the heavily-reported first research ever on the rate of expulsion in prekindergarten programs for three- and four-year-olds. That study found that pre-K students are expelled at a rate more than three times that of children in the K-12 grades. The original report can be obtained at http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=464280.

Press note: A toll-free audio conference to unveil the report will be held on Thursday, January 10 at 1 p.m. EST. To reserve a line, please call Nancy Bennett at 800-834-1110.

The complete new report and policy brief will be available online on an embargoed basis on Wednesday, January 9 at 4 p.m. (EST) at http://www.fcd-us.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=636702.

The opening statement by audio press conference speaker Libby Doggett, executive director of Pre-K Now, is also available at: <http://www.preknow.org/media/pressreleases/expulsionstmt2008.cfm>

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