



# Supporting All Young Learners to Thrive

**Dismantling the Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline**

**children FIRST**  
THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS

---

**Shante' Brown, EdS**  
Deputy Secretary  
Pennsylvania Office of  
Child Development and  
Early Learning (OCDEL)





**Jennifer Stavrakos, Program Director, Children and Families**  
William Penn Foundation

# Why This Work Matters

- Suspension and expulsion disproportionately affect Black and Brown children.
- Children removed from early learning lose critical developmental support.
- Exclusion undermines family stability and community trust.
- We can prevent this through **policy, training, and investment**.



# The Scope of the Problem

---

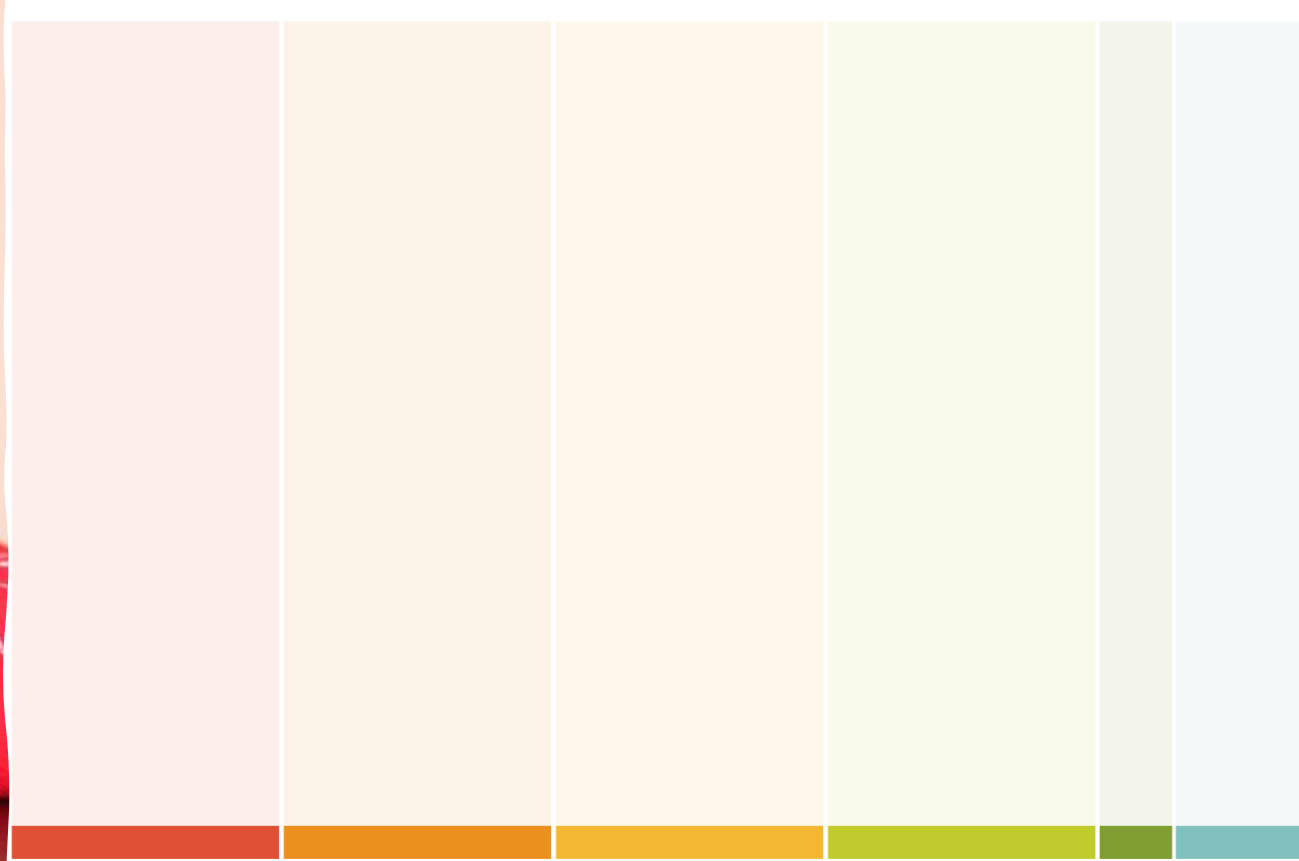


- Thousands of young children are suspended or expelled each year in PA early learning settings.
- Data shows Black children are **3x more likely** to be expelled than peers.
- Many programs report lacking mental health consultation and consistent guidance from the funding sources .

# Purpose of the Project



- To understand how suspension and expulsion occur across early childhood settings;
- To identify what supports educators and families need to prevent them;
- To develop policy recommendations that promote equity, belonging, and thriving for all children.



# Collaborative Partners

- Children First
- PennAEYC
- Trying Together
- PHMC

# Methodology and Approach

---



- Mixed-method design combining:
  - Provider and Parent surveys and focus groups;
  - Classroom Assessment and Professional Development.
- Grounded in trauma-informed, equity-centered, and family partnership frameworks.



# By the Numbers – Part 1

|                      | Surveys | Focus Group Participants | Classroom Assessments (Pre- & Post-Observations) | Professional Development Pilot Program |
|----------------------|---------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Child Care Providers | 328     | 100                      | 21                                               | 9                                      |
| Parents/ Caregivers  | 129     | 65                       | ---                                              | ---                                    |

# By the Numbers – Part 2

|                            | Regional Response    | Quality Rating                                               | Program Type              | Funding Source                                                                 |
|----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Providers</b>           | 67% from urban areas | 63% High Quality (STAR 3 or 4)                               | 84% center-based programs | 85% Accept CCW<br>60% provide Head Start/ Pre-K Counts/ PHL PreK (Philly only) |
| <b>Parents/ Caregivers</b> | 70% from urban areas | Nearly 50% report that they are unsure of the quality rating | 80% center-based programs | -----                                                                          |

# The Human Impact

- *“We don’t want to suspend — but we feel alone when behaviors escalate.”*
- *“We need access to mental health consultants, not just trainings.”*
- *“Retention is hard when staff feel unsupported and overwhelmed.”*
- *“I didn’t know my child was suspended from preschool.”*
- *“No one told me where to get help when challenges started.”*



**Provider focus group data painted a different picture from the providers' surveys.**

---

Providers have mixed response to a need for centralized, comprehensive data collection.

|                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Challenges Reported</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Staffing</b></li><li>• <b>Delays in EI evaluations and services</b></li><li>• <b>Limited Agency Collaboration</b></li><li>• <b>COVID-19 Impacts</b></li></ul> |
| <b>Inconsistencies with Survey Data</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Communication with families</b></li><li>• <b>Inadequate training</b></li><li>• <b>Inconsistencies in guidance from regulating agencies</b></li></ul>          |

**Parent focus group  
data showed that  
parents want more  
for their children  
AND for providers.**

---

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Challenges<br/>Reported</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of documentation</li><li>• Delays in EI evaluations and services (particularly in Preschool settings)</li><li>• Healthcare access</li><li>• Stigma</li><li>• Lack of knowledge of rights</li><li>• Economic and occupational burdens</li><li>• Inconsistent quality standards in ECE</li><li>• Staffing</li><li>• Cultural misunderstandings &amp; biases</li></ul> |
| <b>Suggestions</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased, high-quality, training for providers</li><li>• Improved compensation and retention efforts for providers</li><li>• Increased inclusive/ therapeutic options</li><li>• Parental empowerment &amp; advocacy programs</li></ul>                                                                                                                                  |

# Training and Assessment Insights

- Training grounded in **Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)** and **Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Environment Indicators**
- Focus on emotional support, individualized instruction, and inclusion.
- Providers reported stronger confidence and improved child engagement.
- Programs that participated showed measurable growth in inclusive practices.



# Philadelphia-Based Classroom Assessments

Assessments conducted by **PHMC** in **22 early childhood programs** in **Philadelphia**



```
graph TD; A[Assessments conducted by PHMC in 22 early childhood programs in Philadelphia] --> B[Tools used:]; B --> C[Assessment Timeline:];
```

## Tools used:

- **Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)** – classroom-level focus
- **Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) Environment Indicators** – program-level/systems focus

## Assessment Timeline:

- **Pre-assessments:** Fall 2023 – Spring 2024
- **Post-assessments:** Winter – Spring 2025
- **Final sample:** 21 classrooms (1 site closed and was excluded)

# Short-Term Policy Recommendations (1–3 Years)

- ☐ Expand Rapid Response and ECE Family Navigator statewide;
- ☐ Provide add-on payments for children with IEPs/IFSPs;
- ☐ Incentivize professional development focused on trauma-informed care and family engagement;
- ☐ Require parent intake meetings to review center policies and rights;

- ☐ Develop and distribute ‘Know Your Rights’ resources for parents;
- ☐ Increase funds for teacher recruitment and retention;
- ☐ Create state guidance on preventing suspensions in ECE;
- ☐ Fund pilot programs demonstrating best practices in inclusion.



# Long-Term Policy Recommendations (3–5 Years)

---

- ☐ Mandate statewide data tracking of suspensions and expulsions across CCW, HS, and PKC;
- ☐ Require trauma-informed and equity-focused training for all ECE staff;
- ☐ Integrate these competencies into higher education and CDA pathways;



- ☐ Establish a centralized entity to coordinate EI and mental health services;
- ☐ Ensure workforce investments for pay parity with K–12;
- ☐ Build statewide consistency through cross-agency collaboration.



# Provider & Parent Impact Panel

---



**Facilitator:** Valarie K. Oulds, JD

## **Panelists:**

- ☐ Providers – Monica Valente,  
Tiffany Chavous
- ☐ Parents – Mellisa Wilson, Dr.  
Benita Tilman



# Supporting All Young Learners to Thrive

**Dismantling the Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline**

**children FIRST**  
THE ADVOCATE FOR KIDS

# Call to Action and Next Steps



- ☐ Administrators – Implement consistent and equitable discipline policies;
- ☐ Teachers/Providers – Access professional development, coaching, and consultation;
- ☐ Parents/Families – Participate in advocacy and partnership;
- ☐ Funders – Prioritize equity and workforce stability;
- ☐ Policymakers – Adopt frameworks that prevent exclusion.

# Closing Reflection



Reducing suspensions and expulsions is not only a policy issue — it's a moral commitment to equity, belonging, and justice.

Every child deserves the chance to learn, grow, and thrive.

Together, we can make that possible!