

Message Memo on Prekindergartners Left Behind

OVERVIEW

Quality prekindergarten programs well-aligned with early elementary school have a demonstrated ability to improve school readiness and academic achievement. Among the most important benefits of PK are its ability to teach children how to interact with each other and follow the teacher's instructions. This cognitive and behavioral development forms the basis of a child's lifelong ability to learn.

State policymakers recognize these benefits and are investing hundreds of millions of new dollars in publicly supported prekindergarten programs across the nation.

Now, researchers are collecting and analyzing new data from these tens of thousands of pre-K classrooms to assess progress and suggest ways to improve these programs.

MAIN MESSAGE

That this is a first ever, landmark national study focusing on expulsion rates among 3- and 4-year-old prekindergartners. The study examined expulsion rates using data from the 40 states across the nation which fund pre-K.

The study found that pre-K students in these state-funded programs in the 40 states are expelled at a rate more than three times that of children in the K-12 grades.

- Expulsion rates vary from state to state. Only three states have expulsion rates lower than the K-12 expulsion rate.

WHAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- High quality pre-K with classroom-based behavioral assistance and consultation for pre-K teachers appears to offer a promising method for reducing expulsions. The rates of expulsion reported by pre-K teachers who had an ongoing, regular relationship with a behavioral consultant were about half of the expulsion rates reported by teachers that did not have regular access to a psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker.
- Little more than one-fifth of all classrooms studied have regular access to a psychologist or a psychiatrist.
- Head Start programs and public school pre-K programs, which are more likely to have behavioral consultation available to their pre-K teachers, have significantly

lower expulsion rates than prekindergarten classrooms located in faith-affiliated, for-profit, and other community-based settings.

- In addition, we know that children with challenging behaviors often come from families that face many challenges. That so many three- and four-year-olds are being expelled also points up the need to pay attention to children before they reach pre-K.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- Boys were expelled at a rate over 4.5 times that of girls.
- African-American children were twice as likely to be expelled from pre-K than Latino or White children, and over five times as likely to be expelled from pre-K as Asian-American children.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Children should not be expelled from state-funded pre-K classrooms without assuring alternative services.
- States should ensure access to classroom-based behavioral consultations for all state-funded PK classrooms.
- States with publicly supported pre-K programs should develop formal and on-going teacher training in how to better manage behavior in young children.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

- The report draws upon data collected as part of the National Prekindergarten Study (NPS) which examined the nation's 52 state funded pre-K programs in the 40 states that fund prekindergarten.
- A random sample of 4,815 classrooms was surveyed among the 48,000 pre-K classrooms participating in the various programs.
- Data for the report was obtained from about 3,900 pre-K teachers.
- The NPS has an error rate of just +/- 1.97 percent.
- The study drew upon data collected in the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years.

Questions

- What do you mean by expulsion? Does the question you asked teachers specifically mention expulsion?
 - Prekindergarten provides important socialization for children entering school. It teaches them how to play cooperatively with other children and act in the classroom. Children expelled from pre-K may not get these important supports. As a result, they may continue to lag behind their peers through their educational careers.
 - Expulsion is the complete removal of the child from the school due to the child's behavior. We did not consider it expulsion when the child was transferred to another program.
 - Because expulsion is a formal term that has different meaning in different classroom settings and in different jurisdictions, we worded the question like this: [include wording from survey].

- Why are faith-based and child care centers so much worse than public school and Head Start programs?
 - We believe that no state-funded program should expel children from pre-K classrooms.
 - Even public school and Head Start settings have expulsion rates above those in K-12.
 - Public school and Head Start settings may have lower rates of expulsion because they are more likely to have access to behavioral consultation in the classroom. The data shows that regular access to psychologists, psychiatrists, or social workers can reduce expulsion rates in half.
 - States need to require – and provide the resources – for all state-funded pre-K programs to provide regular access to behavioral consultants to help them manage children's behavior.

- Should taxpayer dollars fund faith-based and child care centers to provide pre-K if they have such high rates of expulsion?
 - Pre-K provides an essential beginning for all children's education. This is especially true for at-risk children. These kids are in all types of settings. And parents should have the right to choose the pre-K setting they want.
 - We believe that state policymakers need to wield the stick of “no expulsions” along with the carrot of support for teacher training and regular access to behavioral consultants.

- Don't some behaviors like carrying a knife or making sexual advances or bullying justify expulsion?
 - Pre-K provides an essential beginning for all children's education. This is especially true for at-risk children. If we fail to provide the needed help to these kids at 3 and 4, what can we expect from them as teenagers?
 - Early intervention in quality PK has been shown to reduce the chance that children will get in trouble with the law.
 - Expulsion hurts the children and, eventually, all of us.

- What implications do these findings have for Head Start reauthorization?
 - Nearly one-fifth of children in state-funded pre-K are in Head Start settings, so Head Start is a critical component of the pre-K system.
 - Head Start requires programs to provide services such a behavioral consultation that this research identifies as very important.
 - We'd like to see that Head Start reauthorization not relax federal requirements to provide services such as these.
- What accounts for the high expulsion rate among African-American children?
 - The research does not identify the reason why African-American children are twice as likely to be expelled as white and Hispanic children.
 - We plan two research papers that may help answer that question. The first looks at the PK classroom. The second looks at characteristics of the teachers and children.
- What accounts for the high expulsion rate among older children? Among boys?
 - Ditto above.
- What difference does teacher training make?
 - Ditto above.
 - [I do not recommend getting into the early findings about training not making a difference.]
- Only 5,000 out of 800,000 children were expelled. That doesn't seem like too many.
 - On one hand, you're right. The vast majority of children in pre-K programs are receiving the academic and behavioral benefits pre-K has been shown to provide. They are gaining the cognitive, social and emotional skills they need to succeed in school.
 - ON the other hand, the rate of expulsion in PK nationally is three times the rate in K-12. Three- and four-year-old children are too young to be expelled in such numbers.
- Do the higher rates of expulsion in private programs mean that the public schools are being flooded with behavior problems?
 - Expulsion is defined in this study as the child's removal from the pre-K classroom without any transfer to another program. So by definition, we don't know what is happening to these children.
 - The real issue, however, is for states to prohibit expulsion of children in pre-k from any state-funded program while providing the necessary supports so all state-funded programs can encourage teacher training and provide regular access to behavioral consultants.
- We've heard a lot about pre-K program in NJ, GA, and OK. Yet expulsion rates in those states are all higher than in K-12. Are those programs not as good as we thought?

- The research does not analyze state data on classroom setting, so we cannot answer this question.
- We plan two research papers that may help answer that question. The first looks at the PK classroom. The second looks at characteristics of the teachers and children.
- What behaviors led to expulsion?
 - The National Prekindergarten Survey did not ask teachers about the specific behaviors that led to expulsion. Indeed, it's quite possible that one teacher may have expelled a child for a behavioral that another teacher may have dealt with successfully.
 - That's the reason why we believe that ongoing teach training and access to behavioral consultation are so important.
- Are children being expelled from PK because it is voluntary?
 - The research does not provide insight into this question.
 - The real issue is providing teachers with the supports they need to make PK work for all children.