

Defining Suspension and Expulsion

Key definitions and national context in early childhood settings

Suspension

In School/Program Suspension: The child is temporarily removed from the classroom and/or class peers, sent to another part of the school/program (e.g., another classroom, director's office) for part of a day or multiple days in response to problem behavior. Includes extended time with an administrator, counselor, behavior therapist, or other adult.

Short-Term Out-of-School/Program Suspension: Child is sent home for part of the school/program day in response to problem behavior.

Out-of-School/Program Suspension: Child is not allowed to return to school/program for one or more days in response to problem behavior.

For Children with Disabilities (IDEA — IEP/IFSP): A temporary removal from the regular school/program to another setting (e.g., home, behavior center) for at least half a day in response to problem behavior. Includes removals of 10 days or less (no IFSP/IEP services required) and removals in which the child continues to receive services under their IFSP or IEP.

Expulsion

Expulsion/Dismissal: Permanent dismissal of the child from the program in response to problem behavior. Does not include transition to another program, service, or classroom (e.g., special education, transitional classroom, therapeutic preschool) deemed more appropriate for the child when done in collaboration with the family and the receiving classroom, program, or service.

By the Numbers

- Preschool children are suspended up to three times more than students in kindergarten through 12th grade.
- The U.S. Department of Education's 2012 Civil Rights Data Collection (released 2014) found approximately 5,000 preschoolers were suspended at least once, and nearly 2,500 of those were suspended a second time.
- African American children make up only 18% of the preschool population but represent nearly half of all preschool suspensions.
- American Indian and Native Alaskan children represent less than 1% of the student population but up to 3% of suspensions and expulsions.

The Policy Response

In 2014, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services issued a Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings, recommending that States and local early childhood programs prevent and severely limit suspensions and expulsions. Recommendations include implementing multi-tiered systems of support (i.e., the Pyramid Model) and training staff in prevention and intervention strategies and effective practices free of bias and discrimination.