



# The Pyramid Equity Project: Promoting Social Emotional Competence and Addressing Disproportionate Discipline in Early Childhood Programs

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Recently released U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights data show that expulsion and suspension are widely used in early childhood programs and that 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.

These data are particularly troubling given that research suggests that expulsion and suspension practices are associated with negative short- and long-term outcomes. Young students who are expelled or suspended experience greater academic failure and grade retention, hold more negative attitudes about school and are less engaged, have higher rates of dropout, and face increased rates of incarceration than those who are not. Discipline practices that remove children from early learning environments and enriching experiences that contribute to healthy development and academic success have the potential to result in pervasive gaps in school success and overall quality of life.

## The Federal Response

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 in 2014 (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. One of the recommendations to address suspension and expulsion was that early learning programs use evidence-based practices and approaches to promote social emotional competence in young children and address challenging behavior, and that staff engage in self-reflective practice that can help prevent and eliminate potential biases in their practice <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>.

Additionally the Department of Education recently released a “dear colleague letter” (DCL) emphasizing that schools must provide behavioral supports to children with disabilities, including preschool children with disabilities, who need such supports and that the repeated use of disciplinary actions may be an indication that children are not receiving appropriate behavioral interventions and supports, <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html>.

To support states and early childhood programs in this effort, The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services have funded the Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) at the University of Oregon in partnership with the University of South Florida and the University of Colorado Denver to implement the Pyramid Equity Project with Preschool Development Grant national activity funds, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/files/fact-sheet-pyramid-equity-project.pdf>.

## The Pyramid Equity Project

The Pyramid Equity Project (PEP) will 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 will develop tools, materials, and procedures to explicitly address implicit bias, implement culturally responsive practices, and use data systems to understand potential discipline equity issues. These practices will be implemented within the *Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social Emotional Competence of Infants and Young Children* (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003) – a multi-tiered framework of evidence based teaching practices that promote social and emotional skills of all children, prevent challenging behavior of children at risk of challenging behavior, and provides individualized interventions for children with persistent challenging behavior. Two randomized trials have been conducted on the Pyramid Model (Hemmeter et al., 2016, April; Hemmeter et al., 2016). These studies have demonstrated that teachers learn to use the Pyramid Model practices with higher levels of fidelity when they receive systematic coaching over time. Teachers’ use of the Pyramid Model practices is associated with improvements in children’s social skills and challenging behavior. [http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/pyramid\\_model.htm](http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/do/pyramid_model.htm), [www.pyramidmodel.org](http://www.pyramidmodel.org).

The Pyramid Equity Project is partnering with two Preschool Development Grant programs: Clifton Early Learning Academy in Clifton New Jersey, and Cambridge Early Learning in Antioch Tennessee, to implement the Pyramid Model and address implicit bias. This partnership will help to develop national models and resources for addressing disproportionate discipline practices in early learning programs within the Pyramid Model framework that will be available to other states and programs.

### Principal staff for the Pyramid Equity Project

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### Websites

- ▲ [www.PBIS.org](http://www.PBIS.org)
- ▲ [www.pyramidmodel.org](http://www.pyramidmodel.org)

### References

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