

Recommendations for Next Steps- Reducing Exclusionary Practices in Early Childhood in Alaska



Based on a current assessment of implementation of policies and practices in early childhood learning settings in Alaska using the Administration for Children & Families' Child Care State Capacity Building Center's Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool

June 2019

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Summary

Building on the work summarized in the report *Suspension and Expulsion in Early Learning Programs in Alaska*, which presented findings about perceptions of early childhood teachers across Alaska regarding their stress levels, frequency of encounters with challenging behaviors in their students, and how often they have utilized suspension or expulsion to deal with those behaviors, an interdisciplinary team comprised of representatives from multiple programs and agencies came together to assess the current state of a broad range of policies and practices in the early childhood context affecting exclusionary practices across the state of Alaska. This work represents one piece in a larger effort to provide dependable access to high-quality child care and pre-school for all Alaskan children.

Very young children who are temporarily or permanently removed from their early childcare or education setting experience disruption in their routines and, in cases of expulsion, a change in an important caregiving relationship. Suspension and expulsion can influence a number of adverse outcomes across development, health, and education.

Fitting this goal into a larger context, the stakeholders wish to promote increased positive adult-child interactions, reduce exclusionary practices and increase children's social emotional learning and school readiness.

This phase of work utilizes the toolkit *Building a Comprehensive State Policy Strategy to Prevent Expulsion from Early Learning Settings* (Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool), published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Child Care State Capacity Building Center (June 2018).

Following the recommendations laid out in the Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool, the team was assembled to conduct an initial assessment and recommend next steps.

The top areas of priority are:

- **Implicit bias**, one of 3 identified dimensions of suspension and expulsion
- **Strategy 1:** Clear Goals and Progress Monitoring, specifically Governance and Shared Definitions
- **Strategy 3:** Strong Family Partnerships
- **Sub-strategy 5.2:** Workforce Well-being

Next steps should include

- a formal prioritization and planning process based on the results and recommendations, resulting in a high-level, multi-year roadmap;
- reviewing and updating the membership of the team, to ensure that stakeholder organizations, programs and agencies have a seat at the table; and
- securing funding to continue the work with support for facilitation, planning, implementation, communications, and further research.

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Introduction

Building on the work summarized in the report *Suspension and Expulsion in Early Learning Programs in Alaska*, which presented findings about perceptions of early childhood teachers across Alaska regarding their stress levels, frequency of encounters with challenging behaviors in their students, and how often they have utilized suspension or expulsion to deal with those behaviors, an interdisciplinary team comprised of representatives from multiple programs and agencies came together to assess the current state of a broad range of policies and practices in the early childhood context affecting exclusionary practices across the state of Alaska.

Very young children who are temporarily or permanently removed from their early childcare or education setting experience disruption in their routines and, in cases of expulsion, a change in an important caregiving relationship. Suspension and expulsion can influence a number of adverse outcomes across development, health, and education. Young students who are suspended or expelled are up to *10 times more likely* to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, hold negative attitudes toward school, and face incarceration, compared to students who are not suspended or expelled. (Lamont, et al, 2013). We also know that suspension and expulsion practices disproportionately impact children of color (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam, & Shahar, 2006). As a result of these concerning trends, in 2014 the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services issued a joint statement calling for an end to suspension and expulsion practices in early childcare and education settings. Yet despite calls to end these practices, as well as a growing understanding of the importance early social emotional development and relationships have on a young child's development, training and support on suspension and expulsion practices for early childcare providers remains widely understudied.

This work represents one piece in a larger effort to provide dependable access to high-quality child care and pre-school for all Alaskan children. This next phase of work utilizes the toolkit *Building a Comprehensive State Policy Strategy to Prevent Expulsion from Early Learning Settings* (Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool), published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Child Care State Capacity Building Center (June 2018).

The Team

A team of stakeholder agency representatives was formed to provide recommendations to the Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC) and state Early Childhood strategic plan to reduce exclusionary practices in early childhood programs.

Fitting this goal into a larger context, the stakeholders wish to promote increased positive adult-child interactions, reduce exclusionary practices and increase children's social emotional learning and school readiness.

Following the recommendations laid out in the Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool, the team was assembled to conduct an initial assessment and recommend next steps. The team was comprised of the following individuals:

Meghan Johnson	Learn & Grow Director, Alaska's Quality Recognition & Improvement System at thread
Jimael Johnson	Program Officer, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
Christina Hulquist	Program Coordinator II, State of Alaska Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Resource and Referral
Tamar Ben-Yosef	Executive Director, All Alaska Pediatric Partnership
Veronica Plumb	Program Coordinator and Assistant Professor, Department of Child Development and Family Studies, University of Alaska Fairbanks
Maureen Harwood	Health Program Manager IV, State of Alaska Department of Health and Human Services, Chief of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities/Infant Learning Program/Training
Kristen Spencer	Education Specialist II, State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development
Robert Alsbury	Project Director, Southcentral Foundation
Supanika Ackerman	Education Specialist II, State of Alaska Department of Education & Early Development

Consultants from Raviant LLC were hired to facilitate the team through assessment, prioritization and planning. This document contains initial findings from the assessment.

Preliminary Team Vision

As part of its work the steering team developed the following preliminary vision statement:

This work is about creating a comprehensive system of supports for the early childhood workforce [to prevent and eliminate exclusionary practices in early learning settings in Alaska]. It's important to do because it directly impacts access and quality of care for children and families.

Success will look like:

1. A well-funded, aligned, and sustainable early childhood system where:
 - a. Private and government funding is invested upstream
 - b. There is shared state level early childhood policy and regulation across agencies and programs
2. Increased child retention and fewer transitions
3. A trained workforce, where:
 - a. Early childhood professionals understand childhood development and have appropriate expectations
 - b. Teachers are confident and competent with regards to social emotional development
4. Partnership and active relationships with families
5. Active collaboration and coordination between stakeholder and service provider agencies and programs

Suspension and Expulsion Defined

The team adopted the following working definitions of suspension and expulsion, taken from *Preventing Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Childhood Settings: An Administrator's Guide to Supporting All Children's Success (2016)*:

In-school suspensions: Practices that involve removing or excluding the child from the classroom.

Out-of-school suspensions: Practices that involve temporarily removing the child from the program.

Expulsions: Permanent removal or dismissal from the program.

Soft-expulsions: Practices that make it so that the program is not a viable or welcoming care arrangement for the family and leaves the family with little choice but to withdraw their child.

The Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool

The Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool lays out a rubric for a range of policy options to promote young children's social-emotional development and reduce the likelihood of expulsion and suspension in early learning settings. The tool is closely aligned with the 2014 Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) reauthorization and can be used to identify strengths and set priorities for action. Its goals are to support the development of state-level strategies to build quality, equity, and capacity in early learning settings and to provide an approach to preventing suspension and expulsion that acknowledges the role of many critical programs, such as child care assistance; quality rating and improvement systems; workforce and professional development; licensing; behavioral and mental health. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Child Care State Capacity Building Center, 2018)

The Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool is designed to address the complexity of preventing exclusionary practices and promotes a collaborative and comprehensive interagency approach. It is used to identify areas of strengths and priorities for action, rating the extent of implementation of policies across six strategies and it provides policy options to promote young children's social-emotional development and reduce the likelihood of expulsion and suspension in early learning.

Strategy 1: Clear Goals and Progress Monitoring

Strategy 2: Fair and Appropriate Policies

Strategy 3: Strong Family Partnerships

Strategy 4: Universal Developmental and Behavioral Screening

Strategy 5: Highly Skilled Workforce

Strategy 6: Access to Specialized Consultation

The Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool acknowledges that reducing these types of exclusionary practices is complex due to the intersection of a variety of factors, including:

1. Child behavior
 - a. Teacher understanding of behavior
 - b. Variability in tolerance for challenging behavior
2. Teacher-student interactions*
 - a. Levels of stress, depression, and strict beliefs about discipline
3. Organizational considerations*
 - a. Teacher-student ratio per setting
 - b. Classroom environment
 - c. Consultation and support for leadership and staff
4. Variety of exclusionary practices
5. Individual early learning environments
6. Implicit bias
7. Workforce needs (training/education, support)

8. Family needs

*Associated with likelihood of expulsion

The Rating System

Each strategy in The Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool contains a number of policies; the team rated the degree of implementation for each policy option as one of the following:

Area of strength: The state has fully implemented the policy successfully over many years.

In process: The state is either in the process of implementing the policy, with roll-out across the state underway, or the policy has been implemented but the state is still determining its impact and whether changes or improvements in implementation are needed.

In planning: The state is considering the policy. It is of interest and initial research is underway, or the state is still determining the design and implementation process.

Not started: The state does not have the policy and is not currently doing any exploration.

Results

Before, during and after conducting the assessment together, members of the team were asked for identified “must-have” elements or priority areas to be addressed and included in a roadmap to reduce exclusionary practices.

Goals and Roadmap (Strategy 1)

- Shared definitions

- Governance and a coordinated approach, aligning systems and policies

- Communications and alignment, including to and with families (in addition to programs and agencies)

- A white paper to communicate to the public about this work and its importance

- Shared vision for early childhood systems (related to suspension and expulsion)

Family partnerships (Strategy 3)

- Improving family engagement practices

Workforce (Strategy 5)

- Knowledge of child development, knowledge of social and emotional development, and culturally responsive approaches

- Improving workforce well-being

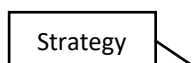
Mental health consultation (Strategy 6)

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is not a strategy but one of the three dimensions of expulsion described in the Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool. This topic may need to be addressed both through targeted interventions as well as through a rigorous process of questioning (when changing or developing policies, procedures or systems) whether a given structure might result in a systemic bias and how to avoid it.

These themes remain consistent in the following review of the Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool. Results are shown below at the Strategy – Sub-strategy and Topic levels of the tool. For the full tool and policy level ratings, see Appendix 1.

Strategy



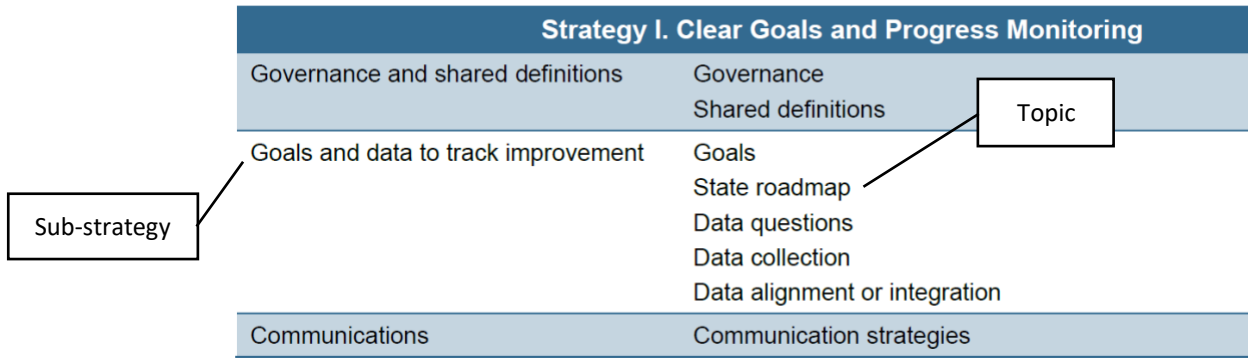


Figure 1. The structural organization of the Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool
 Areas of Relative Strength and Opportunity

This section identifies and briefly discusses areas of relative strength (higher rating) and opportunity (lower rating).

Strategy Level

The following strategies are relative strengths:

Strategy 2: Fair and Appropriate Policies

Strategy 4: Universal Developmental and Behavioral Screening

Strategy 5: Highly Skilled Workforce

The following strategies are relative opportunities:

Strategy 1: Clear Goals and Progress Monitoring

Strategy 3: Strong Family Partnerships

Strategy 1 addresses many foundational components to any large change effort and therefore requires particular emphasis in the next steps.

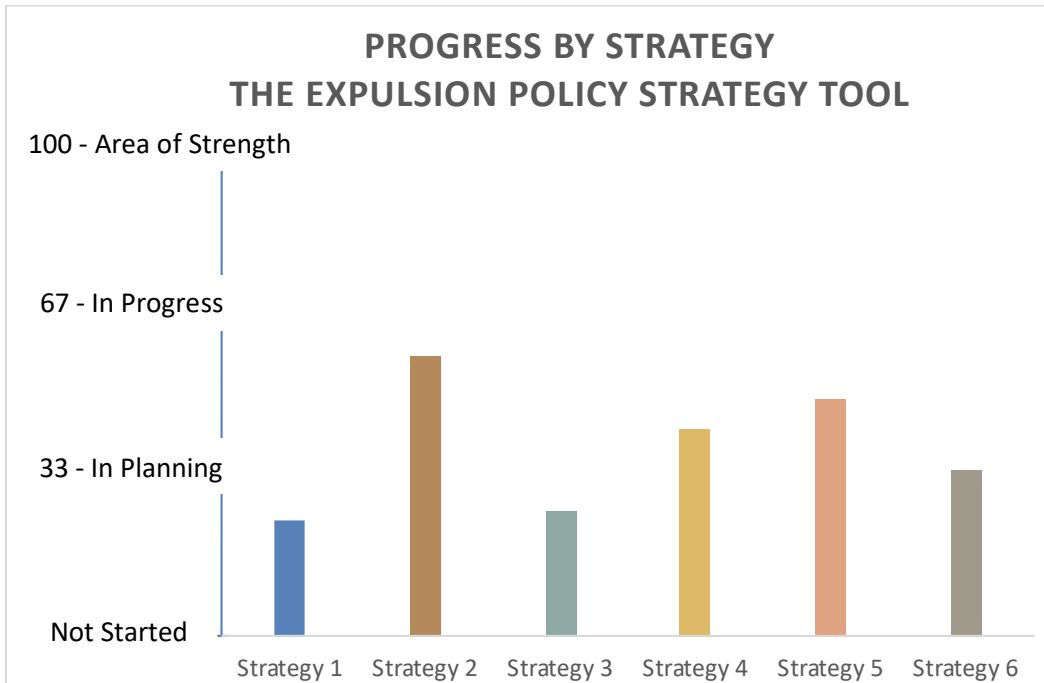


Figure 2. Progress by Strategy, where rating steps are treated as evenly distributed (into thirds) on a linear scale of full implementation [facilitator’s choice in presenting the data].

Strategy	Progress
Strategy 1 – Clear Goals and Progress Monitoring	23
Strategy 2 – Fair and Appropriate Policies	57
Strategy 3 – Strong Family Partnerships	25
Strategy 4 – Universal Developmental and Behavioral Screening	42
Strategy 5 – Highly Skilled Workforce	41
Strategy 6 – Access to Specialized Consultation	33

Sub-Strategy Level

The following table shows sub-strategies ranked from relative strengths to opportunities

Sub-Strategy	Progress
2.1 – Programmatic policies of early learning programs	67
1.3 – Communications	58



Areas of relative strength

2.2 – Continuity of care	56
3.1 – Shared vision for strong partnerships with families	50
5.1 – Highly skilled workforce	48
4.1 – Universal screening and referrals	44
5.3 – Infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) workforce	44
2.3 – Access to high-quality care	42
4.2 – Capacity for further assessment and services	33
6.1 – Access to specialized consultation	33
1.2 – Goals and data to track improvement	21
5.2 – Early learning work conditions and workforce well-being	19
3.2 – Early learning programs’ strong partnerships with families	13
1.1 – Governance and shared definitions	12

There is an increasing recognition of the importance of workforce wellness, both 1) in terms of the impact of working with children who experience trauma or other adverse experiences on teachers, as well as the effect on teachers of being chronically stressed and at risk of burnout, and 2) the effect teachers working under these conditions in turn also have on their students.

Topic Level

The following 10 topics had the highest and lowest progress ratings.

Top 10		Bottom 10	
2.2.A – Continuity of care – Family and child eligibility	100	1.2.A – Goals and data to track improvement – Goals	0
2.1.D – Programmatic policies of state early learning programs – Guidance practices	83	1.2.B – Goals and data to track improvement – State roadmap	0
2.1.C – Programmatic policies of state early learning programs – Curriculum	67	1.1.A – Governance and shared definitions – Governance	7
2.2.E – Continuity of care – Family income policies	67	3.2.A – Early learning programs’ strong partnerships with parents – Program capacity to build strong partnerships	8
2.3.A – Access to high-quality care – Enrollment reimbursement for programs	67	5.2.A – Early learning work conditions and workforce well-being – Work environment and well-being	13

5.1.A – Highly skilled early learning workforce – Workforce knowledge and skills	67	3.2.B – Early learning programs’ strong partnerships with parents – Program approaches to preventing expulsion	17
5.3.C – IECMH workforce – IECMH professional endorsement or credential	67	5.1.D – Highly skilled early learning workforce – Program leadership	19
1.3.A – Communications – Communication strategies	58	1.1.B - Governance and shared definitions – Shared definitions	22
2.1.E – Programmatic policies of state early learning programs – State expulsion policies and guidance	56	1.2.D – Goals and data to track improvement – Data collection	24
4.1.B – Universal screening and referrals – Early detection	56	2.3.B – Access to high-quality care – Payment practices and timeliness of payments to programs	25

Areas identified as strengths by participants were:

1. Practices related to Learn & Grow QRIS.
2. The area of Universal screening and referrals has a lot of potential for impact. Overall, the group rated it as ‘in planning’ in many areas, but representatives from Part C and A2P2 rated this an ‘area of strength’. This represents an opportunity of statewide impact, by learning from and building based on their systems and practices in this area.

Other items of potential note:

1. While knowledge and skills in the early learning workforce and education in the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) workforce both ranked in the top 10, program leadership ranked in the bottom 10.
2. Half of the bottom 10 topics are related to laying the foundations for this coordinated work.

3. The only two topics rated “Not Started: across the board are related to goals and a plan for these efforts to reduce exclusionary practices.
4. Program capacity to build strong partnerships rated third from the bottom, but the adjacent topic (also in sub-strategy 3.2) of Shared understanding of strong family partnerships ranked in the upper half (with a rating of 50).

Policy Level

For the full tool and policy level ratings, see Appendix 1.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the team's assessment of the current state of implementation in Alaska of policies and practices contained in the Expulsion Policy Strategy Tool. These recommendations are underpinned by a foundation of implementation science and systems change frameworks due to the critical importance of ensuring that evidence-based practices are not only identified and taught, but fully implemented and used in systems (e.g. Metz, Bartley, Ball, Wilson, Naoom, & Redmond, 2015). Since we know that less than 50% of interventions ever make it to scale (Balas & Boren, 2000), integrating components critical to the spread and long-term use of the recommended interventions and practices should be considered.

The top areas of priority are:

- **Implicit bias**, one of 3 identified dimensions of suspension and expulsion
- **Strategy 1:** Clear Goals and Progress Monitoring, specifically Governance and Shared Definitions
- **Strategy 3:** Strong Family Partnerships
- **Sub-strategy 5.2:** Workforce Well-being

Implicit bias

Key to improved outcomes in suspension and expulsion is the need to address implicit bias. The team recommends that consideration be given to implicit bias and equity issues in each of the following recommendations. Conducting continuing education on implicit bias alone is not enough; bias must be considered and addressed throughout all practices and systems in order to begin improving outcomes and creating more equitable opportunities (Mayfield, Garrison-Wade, 2015).

Recommended steps:

1. Take initial steps to identify funding sources and effective approaches to address implicit bias, possibly including but not limited to training-based interventions.
2. Find or develop work processes to identify (and eliminate) implicit bias in existing structures that are reviewed, changed, or developed as part of this work.
3. Find or develop work processes to avoid or prevent implicit bias and promote equity in new structures that are developed as part of this work.

Strategy 1 Clear Goals and Progress Monitoring

A strong foundation is crucial to any change effort. Strategy 1 – Governance and Shared Definitions, tests for the presence of a committed leadership team and shared definitions and aims, as well as measures of success and a roadmap to achieving the intended aims.

Aligns with change management and implementation science – addresses key concepts from CM and IS – meets the conditions for successful change recommended by CM and IS .. some such

The team agreed there is a need for improved data tracking and definitions related to suspension and expulsion practices. There has recently been some exemplary movement forward in this area with the passage of a statewide policy focused on tracking exclusionary practices, which creates the potential to measure impact in this area.

Recommended steps:

1. Formalize a governing body or steering team to own this work
 - a. Develop a charter with specific outcomes, scope and responsibilities
 - b. Identify or develop linkages to existing formal structures
2. Establish goals and a plan
 - a. Establish clear definitions and success measures
 - b. Establish preliminary/sustainable data collection structures and routines
 - c. Develop multi-year, high-level roadmap with detail on the first 6-12 months
3. Develop a plan for communicating to various stakeholders and coordinating the work
 - a. Official aims/vision statement
 - b. Communications plan
 - i. Stakeholder engagement and relationship management
 - ii. Workforce awareness
 - iii. Public awareness

Strategy 3 Strong Family Partnerships

Various industries are increasingly recognizing the importance of including the end customer in process redesign and organizational change work, especially when changing structures and workflows that customers come into direct contact with. Given the human-centered nature of challenging behaviors, and potential impact of suspension and expulsion decisions on families, partnership with parents and families is critical when designing new policies, structures, and routines.

There were large discrepancies noted across early childhood systems regarding family engagement practices. Specifically, in some systems team members rated practices in this area

as either “Not Started” or “In Planning”. In other systems, such as Part C early intervention, this is a strength area across practice and policy. This presents the opportunity for collaboration and learning across systems to build upon and align with already strong practices. As the work to improve family engagement in childhood education moves forward, it is also recommended that these efforts are linked to and align with other current initiatives such as the Strengthening Families initiative.

Recommended steps:

1. Set an expectation for family participation in this work and draft a working model, for example, adding family representatives to the team or establishing a family advisory council.
2. Find or develop a method for selecting family representatives.

Sub-Strategy 5.2 Workforce well-being

While there are indications that the current workforce is an area of relative strength (see Sub-Strategy Table), the same does not appear to be the case when it comes to supports for the well-being of the workforce. Repeatedly, team members pointed to teacher stress and workforce well-being as areas of need and high priority.

Recommended steps:

1. Secure funding for a wellness pilot program.
2. Select intervention approach, e.g. large-scale workforce training or small-scale testing and scale up.

Choose a change model

While not listed above, the team also recommends formal adoption of an implementation framework or change model alternative to follow for this work. As mentioned above, less than half of interventions ever make it to scale, so in order to improve the probability that this work succeeds, the team should consider following a formal approach that clearly outlines steps or components critical to successful adoption and long-term use of interventions and practices.

Recommended step:

1. Identify and review implementation frameworks or change model alternatives and select one.

Next steps

Prioritize and Plan

The recommendations in this report are preliminary, based on the ratings by the team and informed by implementation science. However, the full team has not yet reviewed and analyzed the ratings, which is the clear next step. In the next month or two, the team should be given the opportunity to reconvene, discuss the results and recommendations, scope and prioritize the work ahead, and develop a high-level, multi-year roadmap with some detail for the work of the next 12 months.

Review and Update Membership

Two members of the original team have discontinued their involvement. Replacements should be identified to ensure that those stakeholder organizations, programs or agencies continue to have a seat at the table. Additional membership may be deemed appropriate as well and should be considered.

Secure Funding to Continue the Work

Funding sources must be identified to continue to support this work with facilitation, planning, implementation, communications, and further research.

This report was compiled by Raviant LLC, Eugene Oregon.



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Appendix – Full tool results at policy level

STRATEGY 1 - CLEAR GOALS AND PROGRESS MONITORING				
1. Governance and Shared Definitions				
1A. Governance	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
A1 policy: Identify or develop a collaborative body of stakeholders across the early childhood system to design, implement, and monitor the state’s multifaceted strategy for reducing expulsion and suspension in early learning programs. This body could do the following:				
i. Establish a cross-system public and private leadership team		1/2 ✓	1/2 ✓	
ii. Identify a director who can make a significant time commitment to driving implementation and monitoring progress				✓
iii. Ensure that goals and data are integrated in all agencies’ agendas				✓
iv. Perform an annual assessment of progress to inform ongoing policy, investments, and supports				✓
v. Implement short- and long-term strategies simultaneously				✓
vi. Determine how to increase access to the continuum of supports				✓
vii. Ensure that racial, gender, and age disparities are reduced				✓
Other (please specify)				
1B. Shared Definitions	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
B1 policy: Establish a statewide definition of expulsion.			✓	
B2 policy: Establish a statewide definition of suspension.			✓	
B3 policy: Establish a statewide definition of adult-child interactions.				✓
2. Goals and Data to Track Improvement				
2A. Goals	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
A1 policy: Establish goals for state-level improvements in reducing and preventing expulsion.				✓

2B. State Roadmap	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
B1 policy: Develop a state roadmap or logic model to connect goals with strategies and data-driven monitoring of progress.				✓
2C. Data Questions	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
C1 policy: Establish key questions that the data collected will assist in answering and monitoring progress.			✓	
2D. Data Collection	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
D1 policy: Identify what data are already being collected as part of existing efforts through administrative sources or workforce surveys.		✓		
D2 policy: Identify barriers to collecting data about expulsion and suspension and how that may affect data collection methods chosen. For example, a no-expulsion policy may mean that programs will not report their practices if their identities are connected to the data.				✓
D3 policy: Identify data to collect that represent all children across all settings and all the reasons children leave programs.				✓
D4 policy: Identify data that will enable you to hear from families that have been affected by expulsion, and require data to be disaggregated by race, gender, age, child's first language, and the like.				✓
D5 policy: Modify workforce data system to enable an assessment of the reach of education, training, and coaching opportunities for all early educators, across settings and disaggregated by race, language, and the like, as it pertains to reducing expulsion and suspension.			✓	
D6 policy: Identify measures that can inform the supports used to reduce expulsion and suspension in early learning programs.				✓
D7 policy: Collect data on the availability and impact of intervention services for children and families who need additional supports, such as special education and early intervention, health, and mental health.		✓		
2E. Data Alignment or Integration	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started

E1 policy: Coordinate efforts to collect data from the data systems that serve across all early childhood programs to enhance tracking progress, reduce duplication, and so forth.

✓

3. Communications

3A. Communication Strategies

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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A1 policy: Collect and disseminate the following to parents, providers, and the general public in multiple languages and modes:

i. Research and best practices in child and social-emotional development

✓

ii. State-level policies regarding social-emotional and early childhood mental health of young children, which may include positive behavior supports

✓

iii. Policies on expulsion and suspension in early childhood programs receiving child care assistance

✓

A2 policy: Develop a parent education strategy that takes into account multiple languages and cultures and covers health and public benefit programs and ways parents can promote child well-being, care for their own mental health, recognize signs of maternal depression, and identify community resources

✓

STRATEGY 2 - FAIR AND APPROPRIATE POLICIES

1. Programmatic Policies of State Early Learning Programs

1A. Teacher:Child Ratios

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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A1 policy: Review licensing policies and identify current ratios across all early learning settings; consider whether there is an opportunity to modify policies to address possible root causes of suspension and expulsion.

✓

1B. Group Size

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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B1 policy: Review licensing policies and identify current group sizes across all early learning settings; consider whether there is an opportunity to modify policies to address possible root causes of suspension and expulsion.

✓

1C. Curriculum

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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C1 policy: Require the use of a research-based curriculum.	✓
C2 policy: Assess whether guidance is provided on when to use social- emotional curricula.	✓

1D. Guidance Practices	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
D1 policy: Set requirements for programs on appropriate positive guidance policies to promote a social climate conducive to learning for all children.	✓			
D2 policy: Provide guidance to early learning programs on the following:				
i. Having developmentally appropriate expectations	✓			
ii. Developing guidance on what to do when staff experience a challenging behavior		✓		
iii. Ensuring that programs' guidance practices are not punishment		✓		
iv. Fostering programs' teaching practices that support children's social- emotional development		✓		
v. Ensuring that guidance policies comply with federal civil rights laws	✓			

1E. State Expulsion Policies and Guidance	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
E1 policy: Provide statewide policy and guidance to programs that establish clear due process protocols and requirements regarding the following:				
i. Responding to challenging behaviors	✓			
ii. Accessing supports before expulsion is allowed			✓	
iii. Supporting transitions to another early learning program			✓	

2. Continuity of Care

2A. Family and Child Eligibility	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
A1 policy: Set the income eligibility threshold no lower than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.	✓			
A2 policy: Indefinite eligibility for families who have a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) plan.	✓			
2B. Family and Child Eligibility Redetermination	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started

B1 policy: Set 12-month child care eligibility determination.		✓		
B2 policy: Set exit income eligibility threshold higher than the entry.				✓
B3 policy: Align redetermination with Head Start, Early Head Start, and preschool year.				✓
B4 policy: Average family earnings and work hours over a period of time.	✓			
B5 policy: Eliminate the reporting of fluctuation in earnings		✓		

2C. Job Search	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
C1 policy: Job search eligibility should be at least 90 days.	✓			
C2 policy: Eligible new families who are seeking employment are allowed job search for 60 days so child is already transitioned into child care when parent lands a job.				✓

2D. Parent Work Hours	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
D1 policy: Delink parent work hours from child's attendance hours to consider the development needs of the child and not only the parents' schedule.			✓	

2E. Family Income Policies	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
E1 policy: Allow for other means to verify employment if employer refuses.	✓			
E2 policy: Eliminate child support cooperation provisions.	✓			
E3 policy: Mandate that only the income of the parent or guardian be considered in determining income eligibility, especially for teen parents.				✓

2F. Family Contribution or Copayment	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
F1 policy: Waive copayments for the following:				

i. Families living in poverty				✓
ii. Families who receive TANF	✓			
iii. Families who are homeless				✓
iv. Teen parents Teen parents				✓
v. Children in protective services	✓			
F2 policy: Develop copayment sliding fee scales for families with lower incomes and those with more than one child.	✓			

3. Access to High-Quality Care

3A. Enrollment Reimbursement for Programs

	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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A1 policy: Reimburse on the basis of enrollment rather than attendance.		✓		
A2 policy: Modify reimbursement to eliminate disincentives for serving infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities (who have more absences).		✓		

3B. Payment Practices and Timeliness of Payments to Programs

	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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B1 policy: Provide a mix of vouchers and contracts to providers.				✓
B2 policy: Offer contracts to providers who meet higher quality standards, such as a certain level on the quality rating and improvement system, or those blending preschool and/or Early/Head Start with child care assistance.				✓
B3 policy: Offer contracts to providers who serve subsidized children in key populations, such as dual-language learners, children with disabilities, homeless children, and infants and toddlers.				✓
B4 policy: Ensure that providers are paid within a reasonable timeframe.	✓			

3C. Base Rates and Tiered Reimbursement for Programs

	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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C1 policy: Determine actual costs for special populations of children and provide tiered rates or rate add-ons; for example, children with special needs and infants and toddlers.	✓			
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C2 policy: Determine actual costs for programs meeting higher quality standards; for example, higher QRIS ratings.



STRATEGY 3 - STRONG FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

1. Shared Vision for Strong Partnership with Families

1A. Shared Understanding of Strong Family Partnerships

A1 policy: Develop or confirm shared state-level definitions for strong family partnerships and family engagement across early childhood settings.

A2 policy: Develop or refine a state-level framework for strong family partnerships and family engagement for all early learning settings.

A3 policy: Include family partnership indicators across QRIS tiers using measurable indicators to supplement items from Strengthening Families and PFCE or similar self-assessment tools to capture a more complete range of quality elements in family and teacher relationships.

A4 policy: Compare family and provider/teacher relationship quality measures with professional development competencies and QRIS family partnership/engagement standards and indicators in order to fill gaps and link indicators to competencies.

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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2. Early Learning Programs' Strong Partnerships with Families

2A. Program Capacity to Build Strong Partnerships

A1 policy: Identify how state policies and supports can increase or prioritize the time programs spend developing family partnerships and planning and implementing family engagement practices.

A2 policy: Fund early learning programs to hire family services staff.

A3 policy: Offer tools that help programs understand and measure their progress in building strong partnerships with families.

A4 policy: Communicate directly with families—in their home languages and with cultural sensitivity—on state expulsion policies and expectations for programs to use required due process protocols and positive guidance practices.

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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2B. Program Approaches to Preventing Expulsion	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
B1 policy: Require programs to consult parents and staff when developing expulsion policies.				✓
B2 policy: Require programs to communicate with families on expulsion policies and guidance practices in their home languages.				✓
B3 policy: Increase programs' access to early childhood mental health consultation and other supports that involve families in joint problem-solving if challenging behavior arise.			✓	
B4 policy: Increase programs' capacity to support families through appropriate referrals or transitions to high-quality settings as determined by teams that include a mental health consultant and parent.			✓	

STRATEGY 4 - UNIVERSAL DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCREENING

1. Universal Screening and Referrals

1A. Screenings in Early Learning Programs	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
A1 policy: Require early learning programs to educate families about the value of developmental screening.			✓	
A2 policy: Establish requirements to increase the workforce's capacity to do the following:				
i. Discuss healthy development with all families in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways on a regular basis			✓	
ii. Share knowledge with families regarding resources on developmental screening and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act			✓	
iii. Complete developmental and social-emotional screenings			✓	
iv. Discuss screening results with families and celebrate developmental milestones			✓	
v. Encourage families to talk to their primary health care provider about their child's development at every well-child visit			✓	
A3 policy: Align screening across early learning and other systems; for example, health and home visiting.		✓		

1B. Early Detection	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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B1 policy: Provide consumer education regarding screening to families, the general public, and providers in multiple languages.	✓			
B2 policy: Provide information on resources and services to support developmental screening and referrals, including Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) under Medicaid, and IDEA Part B (Special Education), section 619, and Part C (Early Intervention).	✓			
B3 policy: Provide a description of how families or providers may use resources for children who may be at risk for developmental delays.			✓	

1C. Referrals to Further Assessment and Services

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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C1 policy: Promote linkages between prevention and intervention services:

i. Coordinate care through medical homes	✓			
ii. Build relationships between Early Intervention and health and early learning programs	✓			
iii. Provide health and early childhood mental health consultation to early learning programs			✓	
iv. Share data to support screening referrals, service coordination, and cross-system information exchange			✓	
v. Disaggregate screening data by race, gender, age, and first language			✓	

2. Capacity for Further Assessment and Services

2A. Capacity of Assessment and Intervention and Treatment Services

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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A1 policy: Map infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) services to leverage funding and build cross-agency initiatives.			✓	
A2 policy: Require the use of an age-appropriate diagnostic classification system for mental health diagnosis in children birth to age five; for example, the DC:0–5™ Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood.			✓	
A3 policy: Permit Medicaid payment for IECMH treatment in diverse settings, e.g. pediatric primary care, home visiting, and early education.			✓	

A4 policy: Permit Medicaid payment for mental health services provided to families and children to prevent or treat IECMH disorders (e.g. dyadic treatment) under the child's Medicaid number.	✓
A5 policy: Require services to use evidence-based IECMH treatments.	✓

STRATEGY 5 - HIGHLY SKILLED WORKFORCE

1. Highly Skilled Early Learning Workforce

1A. Workforce Knowledge and Skills

	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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A1 policy: Examine social-emotional content in all early childhood education and training to ensure that it includes the following areas:

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|--|--|---|---|--|
| i. Promoting children's social and emotional development | | ✓ | | |
| ii. Providing culturally and linguistically competent early education | | | ✓ | |
| iii. Understanding how implicit bias influences teaching | | | ✓ | |
| iv. Implementing positive behavior management and productively responding to challenging behaviors | | ✓ | | |
| v. Incorporating trauma-informed care | | | ✓ | |

A2 policy: Ensure that social-emotional content is used in all forms of adult education:

- | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| i. Professional development and continuing education series | ✓ | | | |
| ii. Higher education coursework | ✓ | | | |
| iii. QRIS standards, ratings, and technical assistance | ✓ | | | |

A3 policy: Ensure that professional development supports on social- emotional content are accessible to all providers, including those serving American Indian and Alaska Native Grantees and those with limited English proficiency.

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1B. Facilitate Practice Change

	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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B1 policy: Attach coaches to training to assist teachers in translating training into their own goals, action plans, and teaching practices in order to implement the social-emotional content covered in the training.

		✓		
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B2 policy: Provide early childhood mental health consultation to programs to enhance teacher-child interactions, improve the quality of classroom

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climate, increase children’s social skills, and prevent expulsion.

1C. QRIS Social-Emotional Content	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
C1 policy: Include a progression to increase teacher competency in social-emotional knowledge and skills across QRIS rating tiers.			✓	
C2 policy: Review and set standards to use continuous quality improvement processes to improve program-level strategies to promote adult-child interactions, prevent suspension and expulsion, build partnerships with families, and so forth.			✓	
C3 policy: Revise ratings to encourage programs to meet key social- emotional content criteria; for example, using social-emotional early learning standards, building relationships with families, and accessing expulsion prevention supports.			✓	
C4 policy: Use tools that measure the quality of teacher-child relationships.	✓			

1D. Program Leadership	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
D1 policy: Support program leaders to develop skills in the following:				
i. Setting program goals and data tracking on expulsion and suspension practices				✓
ii. Increasing access to professional development, technical assistance, and early childhood mental health consultation				✓
iii. Building teachers’ time to plan, assess, and change practice			✓	
iv. Providing reflective supervision aimed at reducing implicit bias in teaching practices, guidance, expulsion and suspension, and so forth				✓
v. Building strong partnerships with families			✓	
vi. Promoting teacher and staff wellness				✓
vii. Creating program-level guidance practices for all staff, and ensuring that guidance policies comply with federal civil rights laws		✓		

1E. Statewide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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E1 policy: Implement a PBIS approach statewide as a strategy to sustain a professional development system focused on children’s social- emotional and behavioral needs and the supports programs need.



2. Early Learning Work Conditions and Workforce Well-Being

2A. Work Environment and Well-Being

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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A1 policy: Support early learning programs’ ability to create organizational climates that alleviate conditions that cause stress, and instead promote teacher well-being and their professional practice.



A2 policy: Support programs’ ability to provide reflective supervision to staff in building and maintaining relationships with others, and in gaining deeper understanding of their own beliefs and how their beliefs impact their work with children and families.



A3 policy: Revise program guidelines, QRIS ratings, and state early learning funding requirements to phase in paid planning time for teachers.



A4 policy: Develop community or regional substitute pools to allow staff to attend training and participate in reflective groups and other supportive development activities during the workday.



A5 policy: Provide guidance and support structuring staffing patterns with reasonable hours and breaks.



2B. Compensation

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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B1 policy: Identify guidelines for determining initial and ongoing compensation levels, including benefits, for teaching positions ranging from entry level to leadership level (taking into account education, training, and experience), in order to achieve parity with the K–12 education system.



B2 policy: Identify ongoing funding to ensure sustainable raises in base pay in order to improve the economic circumstances of early educators and ensure the ability to attract and retain a skilled workforce.



3. Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Workforce

3A. IECMH Consultation Workforce

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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A1 policy: Increase the mental health workforce that has knowledge and skills in early childhood social-emotional development, mental health, early learning, and consultation in order to provide effective IECMH consultation to early learning programs and families.

✓

3B. IECMH Assessment and Treatment Services

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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B1 policy: Increase the professional mental health workforce that has knowledge and skills in infant and early childhood clinical mental health in order to provide effective assessment and treatment services for young children and their families.

✓

3C. IECMH Professional Endorsement or Credential

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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C1 policy: Implement a credential that recognizes competencies in IECMH and identifies mental health professionals equipped to work with young children and the adults who care for them.

✓

STRATEGY 6 - ACCESS TO SPECIALIZED CONSULTATION

1. Access to Specialized Consultation

1A. Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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A1 policy: Ensure that all early learning leaders and teachers have regular access to early childhood mental health consultants. In general, regular access means most programs receive visits once or twice a week for 3 to 6 months with follow-up sessions being common and recommended.

✓

1B. Alignment Across Technical Assistance Providers

Area of Strength	In Progress	In Planning	Not Started
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B1 policy: Establish the shared knowledge and skills that all technical assistance providers should have in social-emotional content (for example, QRIS specialists, infant-toddler specialists, health consultants, and practice-based coaches).

✓

B2 policy: Align and coordinate joint professional development of all early childhood technical assistance providers.

✓

B3 policy: Establish relationships between technical assistance providers, especially those covering similar regions or communities.

