Point of Entry

The Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline

By Maryam Adamu and Lauren Hogan   October 2015

Center for American Progress

Point of Entry

The Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline

By Maryam Adamu and Lauren Hogan October 2015

Contents

Introduction and summary

The term "school-to-prison pipeline" has become a powerful metaphor to capture the processes by which children—typically low-income children of color—are pushed out of school and into the criminal justice system. While exact definitions of suspension and expulsion vary across states and school districts, it is clear that what were intended to be last resort and occasional disciplinary tools have become wildly overused and disproportionately applied to children of color, resulting in dramatically negative long-term effects.[1]

Data from the U.S. Department of Education show that African American school-children of all ages are more than three times more likely to be suspended and expelled than their non-Hispanic white peers.[2] American Indian/Alaska Native, or AI/AN, youth are similarly overrepresented in school discipline data: They account for 0.5 percent of total enrollment but 3 percent of total expulsions.[3] While all boys account for two out of three suspensions, girls of color are also overrepresented in the remaining one-third of suspensions. African American girls are suspended at a rate that surpasses boys of nearly every racial group with the exception of African American and AI/AN boys. Likewise, the suspension rate of AI/AN girls outpaces that of non-Hispanic white boys.[4]

At the same time that many states and communities across the country are committing to expanding high-quality early learning opportunities, alarming statistics suggest that early childhood learning environments are a point of entry to the school-to-prison pipeline, particularly for African American children. Preschoolers—children ages 3 to 5—are especially vulnerable to punitive and non-developmentally appropriate disciplinary measures. A national study by Walter S. Gilliam found that preschoolers are expelled at a weighted rate of more than three times that of K-12 students.[5] Furthermore, while African American children make up only 18 percent of preschool enrollment, they account for 42 percent of preschool suspensions.[6] Comparatively, non-Hispanic white preschool-ers make up 43 percent of enrollment but 28 percent of preschool suspensions.

The practice of suspending and expelling children—particularly those younger than age 5—from early childhood settings can have profound consequences. These punitive measures come at a time when children are supposed to be forming the foundation of positive relationships with peers, teachers, and the school institution. Instead, they are experiencing school as a place where they are not welcome or supported, which serves as a troubling indicator of what is to come. Research shows that when young students are suspended or expelled from school, they are several times more likely to experience disciplinary action later in their academic career; drop out or fail out of high school; report feeling disconnected from school; and be incarcerated later in life.[7]

This report highlights the trends around preschool discipline. It first details the interconnected factors that augment these trends, including the rise of zero-tolerance policies and mental health issues in young children while also exploring some of the factors that cause suspensions and expulsions. These factors include the implicit biases of teachers and school administrators and how these biases affect their perceptions of challenging behaviors; the lack of support and resources for teachers; and the effect of teacher-student relationships. Finally, this report will provide recommendations and approaches to increase the protective factors available to ensure that young children stay in school and reap the full benefits of early learning while simultaneously supporting schools and teachers to actively resist the criminalization of African American youth.

The specific recommendations include:

- Prohibiting suspensions and expulsions across early childhood settings

- Improving teacher preparation and education with an eye toward cultural responsiveness and racial equity

- Expanding access to in-school behavioral and emotional support services, including early childhood mental health consultation, or ECMHC

- Increasing funding for the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, or MIECHV

- Supporting a diverse teacher workforce and pipeline

- Promoting meaningful family engagement strategies

High-quality early childhood education has the potential to improve long-term life outcomes for all children—particularly those born into challenging circumstances such as poverty.[8] In order for students to learn, however, they have to actually be in the classroom. As such, it is time to change the nation's approaches and actions related to school discipline.

Background

Although suspensions and expulsions have long been a part of school-based approaches to discipline, the recent rise in students being pushed out of school began in earnest with the proliferation of zero-tolerance policies. This terminology was originally coined to describe a method of exacting severe punishment for major offenses—a method that does not take into account the context of the offense or a student's previous disciplinary record.[9] The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 signaled an unprecedented era of zero-tolerance policies aimed at making schools safer from violence and drugs. Over time, the definition of what constitutes a major offense has grown more nebulous and includes relatively minor violations—typically at the discretion of school administrators. In some cases, schools utilize zero-tolerance policies for infractions such as perceived disrespect of authority figures and—rather counterintuitively—truancy.[10] At the same time, schools have shifted to rely on law enforcement officials to enforce such policies.[11] The result has been a rapid movement toward the criminalization of youth at all levels of their educational careers.
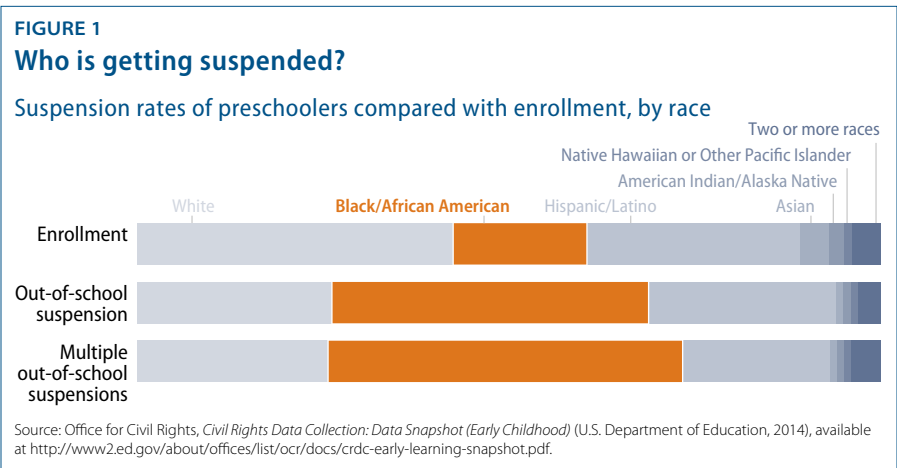
Beginning in the early 2000s, the distinct relationship between zero-tolerance school policies and the life trajectories of too many African American children was identified. Policymakers who discussed the school-to-prison pipeline charged that schools were complicit in the overrepresentation of people of color—who primarily were African American and Hispanic—in the criminal justice system. By 2005, the Children's Defense Fund had written extensively about a "cradle-to-prison" pipeline, both shedding light on the disparities that exist before children even enter a school building and exploring what happens to them when they get there.[12]

Prevalence and disproportionality of suspensions and expulsions

Zero-tolerance policies typically result in an out-of-school suspension for the first offense, which has led to an explosion in the national suspension rate. In the 2011-12 school year alone, more than 3 million children were suspended—double the 1974 suspension rate.[13] Of these suspended children, more than 250,000 were

referred to law enforcement officers. While all children are vulnerable under such policies, children of color are more often targets of enforcement. The suspension rate of non-Hispanic white students grew from 6 percent to 7.1 percent in the same school year, but for African American and Hispanic students, it more than doubled—rising from 11.8 percent to 24.3 percent and from 6.1 percent to 12 percent, respectively.[14]

Meanwhile, approaches to discipline that center on removal—now commonplace for older school children—are now known to affect children at younger ages. While there are few studies that quantify the problem of suspensions and expulsions for young children, taken together, they provide some indicator of the scope of the issue. A Connecticut study of the 1999-00 kindergarten school year was one of the first to explore the issue.[15] That year, more than 40,000 kindergartners in Connecticut were suspended, most for a period of as many as 10 consecutive school days.[16] Nearly four out of five of these suspended kindergarteners were male, and 87 percent of the suspended schoolchildren were African American or Hispanic. In addition, most of the suspended children came from low-income areas. Prior to this analysis, the overrepresentation of children of color in school discipline data was documented for middle and high school students. Results from this study helped signal for researchers that school discipline policies might be affecting children long before they reached high school.[17] It was not until a 2014 analysis from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights that early local findings were confirmed across the nation. The study found that while African American children make up 18 percent of enrollment in preschool, they account for 42 percent of out-of-school suspensions and 48 percent of those receiving multiple suspensions.[18]

FIGURE 1
Who is getting suspended?

Suspension rates of preschoolers compared with enrollment, by race

Source: Office for Civil Rights, *Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (Early Childhood)* (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), available at http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-early-learning-snapshot.pdf.

The first nationwide study to focus specifically on preschool expulsion found that preschoolers were expelled at more than three times the rate of K-12 students, with 1 percent of all preschool teachers reporting an expulsion in their class over the preceding year.[19] Overall, two-thirds of states with preschool programs either explicitly allowed students to be expelled or gave the provider the discretion to do so.[20] In this case, African American children were more than twice as likely to be expelled than both Hispanic and non-Hispanic white children. In total, the study identified 10 states where more than 10 per every 1,000 preschool students were expelled.[21]

What happens when children are suspended or expelled?

While much more research is needed on the effects of early childhood disciplinary practices, suspension and expulsion during this time period are associated with suspension and expulsion in later grades.[22] Research into the effects of preschool suspension and its links to expulsion in later years points to early childhood suspension as the first of many issues with school—including soured teacher and peer relationships, decreased academic achievement, truancy, and school dropout.

The breakdown of positive relationships between schools and their students can begin in a number of ways. For example, some children are identified early on as difficult. A 2004 study showed that by the time they had entered kindergarten, students had learned to identify certain peers who fell on a spectrum of behaviors from poor sharing skills to externalized aggression.[23] Peer perception of problem behaviors has been shown to be relatively consistent with teacher perception.[24] When a child is identified early on as exhibiting problem behaviors, it becomes clear why their actions are likely to be perceived that way in the future. This labeling and sorting can be counterproductive to creating a safe and supportive educational climate. A growing body of research over the past few decades connects school climate to student self-perception, absenteeism, and suspension.[25]

A data analysis of chronic absenteeism in early learning settings found that—as with suspension and expulsion—low-income African American children are overrepresented. Suspension and expulsion are often components of chronic absenteeism. When a child is truant or consistently absent for reasons that include suspension in the early years of their education, he or she is more likely to experience these problems in later years as well. For low-income children, truancy that begins in kindergarten is correlated with poor academic performance all the way through the fifth grade.[26] By the time a child is in sixth grade, truancy is the

most reliable predictor of whether he or she will graduate from high school.[27] Unsurprisingly, students with the highest truancy rates also have been shown to have the lowest academic achievement rates, as well as greater school disciplinary histories. They are also most at risk of dropping out.[28] In effect, suspensions are the most important initial indicator of longer-term life outcomes that include unemployment, adult earnings potential, and incarceration.

The long-term consequences of suspension and expulsion are well documented. Students who experience out-of-school suspension and expulsion are 10 times more likely to drop out of school than students who do not experience these punishments.[29] High school dropouts can expect to make $400,000 less over their lifetimes compared to their peers who graduate.[30] They are also eight times more likely to be incarcerated later in life.[31] It is no surprise then that African American boys—the group suspended and expelled at the highest rates—are also most likely to drop out of school, be incarcerated later in life, and experience longer breaks in labor force participation as adults.[32] Similarly, African American girls and women are the fastest-growing population in the juvenile and criminal justice system. In the juvenile justice system, they are more likely to receive harsher sentences than any other group.[33] The roots of this disproportionality can be seen in the high disparity between African American girls' suspension rates and those of their non-Hispanic white female peers, who are almost six times less likely to be suspended.[34]

For parents and caretakers, suspension and expulsion present a different challenge. Public preschool settings in particular often act as affordable, high-quality child care for families. Given that 65 percent of children have all available parents in the workforce, many parents need access to these programs.[35] When students are suspended or expelled, parents are left scrambling to find alternative child care options, often with no assistance from schools.

Why are children suspended and expelled?

In order to change the trends and address the disparities, policymakers must first understand them. Why are children suspended and expelled, and why do these disciplinary actions disproportionately affect African American children?

Implicit bias and addressing challenging behaviors

School discipline is often carried out based on whether a child appears to exhibit so-called challenging behaviors, which can be interpreted to mean anything from defiance to physically harming oneself or peers.[36] These terms and behaviors can take on particular meaning when applied to African American children. Child and family psychologist Richard Weissbourd notes that "popular images and stereotypes have obscured the strong or exemplary moral qualities of many poor children and of immigrant and African-American children across economic classes."[37] In particular, Weissbourd writes that his research "suggests that African-American kids have moral strengths that have been obscured by the stereotypes."[38]

Many non-Hispanic white children describe African American children as more honest, less hypocritical, more independent-minded, more willing to assert their views, and less concerned about popularity than about respect in comparison with their peers.[39] Yet teachers may perceive behavior such as independent-mindedness and a willingness to assert one's views as being disruptive, defiant, or aggressive instead of recognizing these traits as leadership strengths and opportunities.[40] These attributes, when fostered appropriately, are indeed beneficial, and they should be recognized as such in the context of early childhood, where children are forming their educational outlook. In fact, developmental psychology tells us that young children in general appropriately push boundaries and learn how to properly navigate social interactions.[41] Thus, such qualities should be expected.

In many cases, it is not clear whether children actually exhibit behavior that necessitates emotional and developmental support or if they are being unfairly labeled. Indeed, African American students who exhibit disruptive behavior—even if it is the same behavior exhibited by their non-Hispanic white peers—might be perceived as more disruptive because of teachers' biases.[42] A 2014 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* looked into whether identifiers typically associated with children, such as "innocent" and "in need of protection," are extended to African American children in equal measure as non-Hispanic white children, using boys as an index.[43] Overall, African American children were seen as less innocent and more deserving of punishment than their white peers.[44] In addition, participants in the study—the majority of whom were white adults— continually overestimated the age of African American children relative to their white and Latino peers.[45] Essentially, this tells us that African American children are uniquely denied the benefit of being seen as innocent children, which might explain some of the harsher and more inappropriate treatment.

Toward equity in the classroom

While many schools across the country are meeting the legal requirements necessary to ensure a diverse population, only a handful of schools are actively developing substantive, race-conscious policies and practices with students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Recently, however, educational administration researchers Jean Madsen, Mario Torres, and Jessica Yue of Texas A&M University launched an in-depth survey and research project to explore the effect of demographic change on the classroom and the various opportunities for improvement different stakeholders could produce by working together.[46]

Surveying began with a number of Texas school districts, which are important bellwethers for the nation since people of color already drive population growth in Texas.[47] Children of color make up more than two-thirds of the state's population, a demographic shift that is not projected for many other parts of the country until at least 2040.[48]

In one of the survey districts—Austin Independent School District—children of color accounted for nearly 75 percent of total enrollment in the 2012-13 school year.[49] Considering that the majority of teachers are white, this demographic gap between students and their teachers will only become more meaningful as time goes on.[50] The researchers—who focused on identifying and developing administration-level champions of race-conscious school policy—hope that their work will encourage the emergence of workable school engagement models. The urgency of rapidly shifting demographics could be the push that school districts need in order to institute strong social-emotional curricula for students, as well as teacher preparation that involves working through biases to achieve traditional markers of school success. These markers include lower teacher turnover, reduced absenteeism, improved school climate, and higher achievement rates for students overall.

Lack of access to high-quality early learning experiences

Over the past decade, the number of children enrolled in state-funded preschool programs doubled to include 29 percent of 4-year-olds in the 2013-14 school year.[51] At the same time, there has been a widespread push among early childhood advocates to improve the quality of instruction and learning environments.[52] Comprehensive early learning criteria, specialized teacher training, and small class sizes are typically considered indicators of quality. Looking at a nationally representative sample of students, African American preschoolers were the most likely to be enrolled in low-quality preschool and the least likely to be enrolled in high-quality preschool.[53]

One of the most important predictors of high-quality education, meanwhile—and of long-term positive outcomes for children—is the teacher-student relationship.[54] A 2001 study found that the quality of child-teacher interactions in preschool shaped academic and behavioral outcomes through the eighth grade.[55] According

to another study, for children of color in particular, "teacher-reported closeness with students was positively related to growth in children's receptive vocabulary and reading abilities from preschool to second grade."[56]

FIGURE 2
Who has access to quality?

Proportion of preschoolers who have access to high-quality programs

38%	28%	31%	43%
White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
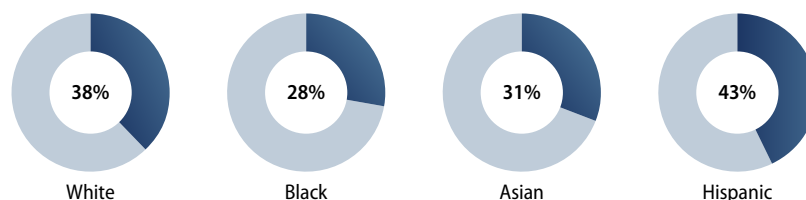
Source: Authors' calculations are based on data from National Center for Education Statistics, *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Birth Cohort* (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Low-income students are less likely to have high-quality interactions than their higher-income peers.[57] Most children of color younger than age 6 belong to low-income families, including 69 percent of African American children, 69 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native children, and 66 percent of Hispanic children.[58] This is consistent with other research that has found that preschools that serve greater proportions of high-poverty children of color are less likely to expose their students to practices that yield social, emotional, and academic growth.[59] These trends suggest that the children for whom early learning could be most transformative run the highest risk of not being able to fully reap its benefits.

Inadequate resources and support for teachers

Teachers often deal with a number of structural factors that make it difficult to provide high-quality instruction and support for each student. Preschool teachers are notoriously underpaid, which can lead to rapid turnover and low job satisfaction. Even though preschool teaching is one of the most rapidly growing professions, these teachers' median salary was $32,040 in 2014.[60] Comparatively, in 2014, kindergarten and elementary school teachers made a median salary of $56,830.[61]

As the number of preschool students increase, it is important to note that when preschool teachers are overwhelmed by larger class sizes, the effectiveness of instruction can be compromised. The National Institute for Early Education

Research, or NIEER, recommends a staff-to-child ratio of 10-to-1 or better.[62] In 2005, almost 13 percent of teachers reported expulsions when the staff-to-child ratio was greater than 12-to-1; the number of teachers reporting expulsions fell by about 5 percent when the staff-to-child ratio was 8-to-1 or smaller.[63] In 70 percent of the states that expel more than 10 preschool students out of every 1,000 students per year, state preschool programs were not meeting the staff-to-child ratio and other benchmarks that NIEER identified.

Finally, children exist in a constellation of family, school, and their broader community—all of which affect their social and emotional development. Children in low-income households, for example, often experience the stress that comes with family economic instability. Repeat exposure to such adversity without positive supports can interrupt healthy cognitive development.[64] The effects of this stress can play out in a child's behavior and academic performance at school.[65] Unfortunately, most preschool programs lack the resources and mechanisms to provide the emotional support that would help children cope with additional family and community stressors. Therefore, when teachers identify behavioral issues in their students, most have a limited number of options for recourse—and students are faced with suspension or expulsion as a result.[66]

Policy recommendations

The nation's early childhood education system must do more to actively resist suspensions and expulsions at the outset of a child's educational experience.

Yet when seeking to eliminate the number of preschoolers pushed out of school, there must be a balance between mitigating factors that contribute to teacher and student stress and equipping teachers with the skills and resources necessary to avoid reinforcing or contributing to the marginalization of students. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services developed a policy statement aimed at reducing the amount of suspensions and expulsions in early childhood programs.[67] With so much evidence on the negative effects of zero-tolerance policies in early childhood settings, it is time to reimagine the concept of school discipline and commit to supporting the healthy development of children and families inside and outside of the classroom. This can be achieved by implementing the following policy recommendations.

Prohibit suspensions and expulsions across early childhood settings

Ensuring the effectiveness of early childhood education means making sure that children are consistently in a supportive classroom environment where they are safe, healthy, happy, and learning. While removing a child from a classroom might seem to provide immediate classroom control benefits, overwhelming evidence points to the fact that suspended or expelled children—who are often already experiencing adversity—are worse off.[68] For young children, there are more developmentally appropriate courses of action.[69] Teachers, principals, and directors should be equipped with more positive and effective tools for intervention when a behavioral problem is identified.

Some states and districts are leading the way in this work. The District of Columbia's City Council Committee on Education, for example, unanimously passed the Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act of 2015, which would ban

the suspension or expulsion of students from all publicly funded pre-K programs in Washington, D.C., and require annual reporting of data on suspensions and expulsions from each local education agency.[70] In 2014, Chicago Public Schools prohibited suspensions from preschool through second grade and eliminated categories that prompted suspensions based on behaviors such as "persistent defiance," a label that has been disproportionately applied to African American children.[71]

In addition, the newly reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant includes a focus on reducing expulsions and allows the use of federal quality improvement dollars to address the issue.[72] While this bill is a step in the right direction—and one that has bipartisan support—it does not include the necessary funding to take the steps that would reduce suspensions and expulsions, including instituting support services for families and teachers.

Improve teacher preparation and education with an eye toward equity

Studies of diversity requirements in undergraduate early childhood teacher education programs across the country have shown that the majority of programs require limited coursework on diversity issues, and only 7 percent require students to be taught in settings with ethnic, racial, or language diversity.[73] In addition, a literature review of existing state early childhood educator competencies found a general weakness in the areas of competencies in cultural diversity and dual- or second-language learning.[74]

At the same time, there is growing evidence to support the belief that children's development and learning benefit from culturally competent teaching, which reduces misunderstandings between students and teachers; provides a bridge between what students know and what they are expected to learn in school; and may contribute to the development of trust—which is crucial to the social-emotional learning climate.[75] To build toward a fully culturally competent staff, schools and preparation programs need to prioritize professional development opportunities and conversations that support difficult discussions about race and culture. This will help teachers learn the roles that institutional forms of racism and bias play in children's school experience. Schools and teachers must do more to understand this process as central—rather than tangential—to the academic outcomes

for which they strive. Teachers, with the support of administrators, must be able to create a school climate where it is comfortable to talk about and address these issues as a core component of the learning process.[76]

It is important to understand that the learning process cannot and should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Much of Howard University psychology professor A. Wade Boykin's research has focused on cultural factors that help shape African American students and how schools might develop to assist them. One of his studies found that 70 percent of African American children reported preferring school contexts that support communal learning, music and movement, and high-energy pedagogical and learning strategies.[77] As schools attempt to reduce and eliminate suspensions and expulsions, it is more important than ever that early childhood educators are able to identify and engage comfortably in a range of classroom management and relationship-building strategies that support the learning of African American students—and, indeed, the diverse range of all students and their families.

Expand access to in-school behavioral and emotional support services

It would be ill advised to prohibit suspensions and expulsions without also increasing the support services available to teachers and schools. The University of California, Los Angeles' Center for Mental Health in Schools estimates that anywhere from 4 percent to 10 percent of young children exhibit emotional and behavioral disabilities.[78] While some states and schools have started to invest in effective behavioral consultation programs in order to deal with this heightened need, more than two-thirds of preschool teachers do not have consistent access to these resources.[79] This is highly significant: 2005 research by Walter S. Gilliam found the lowest expulsion rates in cases where preschool teachers had sustained access to classroom-based behavioral consultants.[80]

Early childhood mental health consultation is an evidence-based alternative to suspension and expulsion. When ECMHC programs offer high-quality consultants and services, the outcomes are clear: They decrease expulsion rates, reduce externalized behavior, increase pro-social behavior, and improve child-teacher interactions.[81] Preschool programs in every state should have access to consulting and, where possible, on-site support services.

Increase funding for the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program

In addition to providing support for children in schools, more should be done to support children's development before they enter a classroom—and in some cases, before they are even born. Since 2010, the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program has done just that by focusing on improving the life outcomes of new mothers and families with young children through voluntary home-based services.[82] By connecting at-risk families with social workers, nurses, and other professionals—as well as services such as health care and counseling—MIECHV gives parents the tools they need to support their children's healthy development.

MIECHV funds a total of 17 evidence-based models for service delivery.[83] Some of these include the Early Intervention Program for Adolescent Mothers, which helps pregnant teenagers develop positive maternal habits, as well as Nurse Family Partnership, a nurse-led program that helps first-time mothers have a healthy pregnancy and improve their children's health and development.[84] These programs have been shown to improve maternal and newborn health; school readiness and education outcomes for children; and family economic security.[85]

MIECHV-funded programs have been instituted in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 25 tribal communities.[86] States use social and demographic information in order to target resources at the most at-risk populations. In many states, this includes young African American parents in poverty. Funding for the program was set to expire in 2014 but was extended for two years at an annual level of $400 million.[87] Despite its proven effectiveness, the program is still relatively small, and the Center for American Progress encourages its expansion along with the creation of an evaluation pipeline that incentivizes innovation at the community level and helps new programs earn the right to become evidence-based.

Support a diverse teacher workforce and pipeline

In 2014, for the first time ever, a majority of public school students were students of color.[88] In states such as California and Texas, children of color already comprise more than 60 percent of all children.[89] Conversely, 80 percent of public school teachers are non-Hispanic whites.[90] While anywhere from one-third to half of all preschool teachers are people of color, school directors and lead teachers—

or teachers with teaching assistants and paraeducators working under their direction—are more likely to be white English speakers. This gap can be considered even larger when one includes the fact that, since 2011, the majority of children born have been children of color.[91] While there is not much to suggest that simply shifting teacher demographics is a silver bullet, there is evidence that teacher diversity is beneficial to students of color. According to findings from a 2001 National Bureau of Economic Research evaluation of reading and math scores, when students were matched to a teacher of their own race, scores improved by 4 percentage points and 3 percentage points, respectively.[92] Similar findings point to the importance of children seeing themselves reflected in examples of career success and authority.[93]

Promote meaningful family engagement strategies

Psychologist Walter S. Gilliam, one of the initial researchers to identify the problem of suspensions and expulsions in early childhood, notes that programs should work to pull parents and families in rather than push students away.[94] Family engagement is not only a highly effective strategy for improving schools and increasing achievement but also a critical component of decreasing the use of suspensions and expulsions in early childhood and beyond.

As the nation collectively looks to implement policies that embody the oft-quoted maxim that parents are their children's first and most important teachers, it must operationalize a definition of family engagement as a "systemic and sustained commitment that occurs across time, spans many settings, and requires shared responsibility from all parties."[95] In addition to home visiting, policies also should explicitly support the provision of and funding for two-generation strategies and comprehensive wraparound services and supports for families.

Evaluation strategies and state quality-rating systems set the standard by which programs can be held accountable for offering multiple opportunities for engagement; addressing structural and cultural barriers to that engagement; and promoting culturally relevant and responsive activities and programs in order to ensure that family engagement is defined by significant investment, meaningful relationships, and an ongoing series of aligned and comprehensive supports. These supports should help families and children build on strengths and create a deep foundation of connection with teachers and schools in the early years of education.

Conclusion

Evidence clearly shows that the overuse of suspension and expulsion, particularly for early childhood students, results in negative consequences for the student receiving the punishment, as well as for their community as a whole. Studies have shown that these practices stunt children's development, lower their likelihood of academic success, and increase their likelihood of becoming entangled in the criminal justice system. Additionally, evidence shows that African American students are disproportionately affected by the disciplinary use of suspension and expulsion.

It is important that policymakers understand the harmful consequences of suspensions and expulsions so that they can implement the proper policy solutions to ensure that the nation's youth are in a position to succeed—both in education and later in life.

About the authors

Maryam Adamu is a Research Associate for the Early Childhood Policy team at the Center for American Progress. Previously, she was an Emerson National Hunger Fellow with the Poverty to Prosperity Program and Progress 2050 team, where her work focused on economic and racial justice in light of the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. Prior to joining the Center, Maryam worked to expand the federal Summer Food Service Program in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area and co-directed the Global Engagement Summit, a student-organized conference aimed at building the capacity of the next generation of social change leaders. She holds a bachelor's degree from Northwestern University.

Lauren Hogan is the former vice president for programs and policy at the National Black Child Development Institute, or NBCDI, providing leadership for the organization's initiatives across early childhood education, family engagement, and literacy while working with the organization's members and affiliate network on a robust local, state, national, and federal policy agenda. Lauren began her career working in an after-school program at the Louisville Urban League in Louisville, Kentucky, and later led an early literacy and family support program in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She also served as a Rappaport public policy fellow in the Department of Social Services in Boston, Massachusetts. Lauren earned a bachelor's degree from Yale University and a master's degree in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School.

Endnotes

1 In this paper, suspension refers to a temporary removal of a child from the classroom for a period of fewer than 10 days; expulsion refers to any longer-term disruption of schooling, including for as much as a full year.

2 Office for Civil Rights, *Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: School Discipline* (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), available at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Walter S. Gilliam, "Prekindergarteners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Programs" (New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development, 2005), available at http://challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/explore/policy_docs/prek_expulsion.pdf.

6 Office for Civil Rights, *Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot*.

7 J.H. Lamont and others, "Out-of-school suspension and expulsion," *Pediatrics* 131 (3) (2013): 1000-1007; L. Raffaele Mendez, "Predictors of suspension and negative school outcomes: A longitudinal investigation," *New Directions for Youth Development* 99 (2003): 17-33.

8 Hakim M. Rashid, "From Brilliant Baby to Child Placed at Risk: The Perilous Path of African-American Boys in Early Childhood Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 78 (3) (2009): 347-355.

9 Russell Skiba, "Zero Tolerance and Alternative Discipline Strategies," (Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists), available at http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/Zero_Tolerance_35-1_S4-35.pdf.

10 Jacob Kang-Brown and others, "A Generation Later: What We've Learned about Zero Tolerance in Schools," (Washington: Vera Institute of Justice, 2013), available at http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/zero-tolerance-in-schools-policy-brief.pdf.

11 Susan Ferriss, "Virginia tops nation in sending students to cops, courts: Where does your state rank?", Center for Public Integrity, April 10, 2015, available at http://www.publicintegrity.org/2015/04/10/17089/virginia-tops-nation-sending-students-cops-courts-where-does-your-state-rank.

12 Children's Defense Fund, "America's Cradle to Prison Pipeline" (2007), available at https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_iDZIlaSGBfMWEyYzljOWQtOGNmMS00MzYx-LWFkMzAtOGViZTViN2I3MDlk/edit.

13 Dignity in Schools, "Fact Sheet on School Discipline and the Pushout Problem," available at http://www.dignityinschools.org/files/Pushout_Fact_Sheet.pdf (last accessed October 2015); All analyses based on the 2011-12 unsuppressed data from the Civil Rights Data Collection, or CRDC, released by the U.S. Department of Education in March 2014. More details about the data collection can be found online at Civil Rights Data Collection, "Civil Rights Data Collection," available at http://ocrdata.ed.gov (last accessed September 2015). Per Institute of Education Sciences, or IES, requirements, to protect the identity of individual students, numbers of suspension and enrollment in this spreadsheet and the related report are rounded to the nearest five. All analyses completed by Daniel Losen and others, "Are we closing the school discipline gap?" (Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project of the University of California,

Los Angeles, 2015), available at http://tinyurl.com/CCRRNationalReports.

14 Daniel J. Losen and Tia Elena Martinez, "Out of School & Off Track: The Overuse of Suspensions in American Middle and High Schools," (Los Angeles, CA: The Center for Civil Rights Remedies, 2013), available at http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/out-of-school-and-off-track-the-overuse-of-suspensions-in-american-middle-and-high-schools/OutofSchool-OffTrack_UCLA_4-8.pdf.

15 Walter S. Gilliam and Golan Shahar, "Preschool and Child Care Expulsion and Suspension," *Infants & Young Children* 19 (3) (2006): 228-245.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, *Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings* (2014), available at http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf.

19 Ibid.

20 Gilliam, "Prekindergarteners Left Behind."

21 Ibid.

22 L. Raffaele Mendez, "Predictors of suspension and negative school outcomes: A longitudinal investigation."

23 Susan Philips Keane and Susan D. Calkins, "Predicting Kindergarten Peer Social Status from Toddler and Preschool Problem Behavior," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 32 (2004): 409-423.

24 Ibid.

25 Center for Social and Emotional Education and Education Commission of the States, "The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the Gap Between School Climate Research and School Climate Policy, Practice Guidelines and teacher Education Policy" (2007), available at http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/school-climate-challenge.pdf.

26 Hedy N. Chang and Mariajosé Romero, "Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades" (New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, 2008), available at http://nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_837.pdf.

27 Baltimore Education Research Consortium, "Destination Graduation: Sixth Grade Warning Indicators of Baltimore City Schools, Their Prevalence and Impact" (2011) available at http://www.baltimore-berc.org/pdfs/SixthGradeEWIFullReport.pdf.

28 Myriam L. Baker, Jane Nady Sigmon, and M. Elaine Nugent, "Truancy Reduction: Keeping Students in School" (Washington: U.S. Department of Justice, 2001) available at https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/188947.pdf.

29 American Academy of Pediatrics, "Out-of-School Suspension and Expulsion" (2015), available at http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/131/3/e1000.full.pdf.

30 Ibid.

31 Dignity in Schools, "Fact Sheet on School Discipline and the Pushout Problem."

32 Erica R. Meiners, *Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

33 Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Priscilla Ocen, and Jyoti Nanda, "Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected" (New York, NY: Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies and African American Policy Forum, 2014), available at http://alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/dchs/childrenfamily/BlackGirlsMatter.pdf.

34 Ibid.

35 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Available Parents in the Labor Force," available at http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/1/any/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473 (last accessed September 2015).

36 Peter Later, Ja'Nina Walker, and Eric Landers, "Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Challenging Behavior and the Impact of Teacher Demographics," *Education & Treatment of Children* 36 (4) (2013): 51-69.

37 Richard Weissbourd, "A Conversation with Richard Weissbourd," available at http://richardweissbourd.com/conversation_richard_weissbourd.html (last accessed September 2015).

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Amanda R. Tarullo, Jelena Obradovic, and Megan R. Gunnar, "Self-Control and the Developing Brain," (Washington: Zero to Three, 2009), available at http://web.stanford.edu/group/sparklab/pdf/Tarullo,%20Obradovic,%20Gunnar%20(2009,%200-3)%20Self-Control%20and%20the%20Developing%20Brain.pdf.

42 John Raible and Jason G. Irizarry, "Redirecting the teacher's gaze: Teacher education, youth surveillance and the school-to-prison pipeline," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26 (2010): 1196–1203.

43 Phillip Atiba Goff and others, "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106 (4) (2014): 526-545.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Texas A&M University Education & Human Development, "Keeping Schools Accountable In the Name of Diversity," February, 11, 2015, available at http://transform.tamu.edu/news/keeping-schools-accountable-name-diversity.

47 Julie Ajinkya, "Toward 2050 in Texas: A Roundtable Report on Houston's Experience as One of the Most Diverse Metros in the Nation" (Washington: Center for American Progress and PolicyLink, 2013), available at http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/toward-2050-houston.pdf.

48 Becca Aaronson, "One the Records: Texas 1 of 5 'Minority-Majority' States," *The Texas Tribune*, May 17, 2012, available at http://www.texastribune.org/2012/05/17/on-the-records-majority-texas-minority-races/; U.S.

Bureau of the Census, "U.S. Census Bureau Projections Show a Slower Growing, Older, More Diverse Nation a Half Century from Now," Press release, December 12, 2012, available at http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html.

49 National Council on Teacher Quality, "Austin Independent School District, Texas," available at http://www.nctq.org/districtPolicy/contractDatabase/district.do?id=31 (last accessed September 2015).

50 National Educational Association, "Time for a Change, Diversity in Teaching Revisited" (2014), available at http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Time_for_a_Change_Diversity_in_Teaching_Revisited_(web).pdf.

51 W. Steven Barnett and others, "The State of Preschool 2014" (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Graduate School of Education National Institute for Early Childhood Education Research, 2014), available at http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Yearbook2014_full2_0.pdf.

52 W. Steven Barnett, "Expanding Access to Quality Pre-K is Sound Public Policy," (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Graduate School of Education National Institute for Early Childhood Education Research, 2013), available at http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/Why%20expanding%20quality%20PreK%20is%20a%20sound%20public%20policy.pdf

53 Based on calculations from National Center for Education Statistics, "Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Birth Cohort" (2009).

54 The National Center on Quality Teacher and Learning, *Improving Teacher-Child Interactions: Using the CLASS in Head Start Preschool Programs* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013), available at https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/using-the-class.pdf.

55 Bridget K. Hamre and Robert C. Pianta, "Early Teacher-Child Relationships and the Trajectory of Children's School Outcomes through Eighth Grade," *Child Development* 72 (2) (2001): 625-638.

56 Barbara Bowman and Evelyn K. Moore, "School Readiness and Social-Emotional Development: Perspectives on Cultural Diversity" (Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2006), available at https://www.naeyc.org/store/node/360.

57 Ibid.

58 Yang Jiang, Mercedes Ekono, and Curtis Skinner, "Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 6 years, 2013" (New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, 2015), available at http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_1097.html.

59 Jennifer LoCasale-Crouch and others, "Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 23 (1) (2008): 124-139.

60 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "May 2014 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates United States," available at http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#00-0000 (last accessed September 2015).

61 Ibid.

62 Barnett and others, "The State of Preschool 2014."

63 Gilliam, "Prekindergarteners Left Behind."

64 Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, "Key Concepts: Toxic Stress," available at http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/key_concepts/toxic_stress_response/ (last accessed September 2015).

65 Casey A. Holtz and Robert A. Fox, "Behavior problems in young children from low-income families: The development of a new screening tool," *Infant Mental Health Journal* 33 (1) (2012): 82-94.

66 Ibid.

67 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, *Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings*.

68 American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, "Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools?: An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations," *American Psychologist* 63 (9) (2008): 852-862, available at http://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/zero-tolerance.pdf.

69 Ibid.

70 David Grosso, "Pre-K Student Discipline Amendment Act of 2015," available at http://www.davidgrosso.org/grosso-analysis/2015/1/6/pre-k-student-discipline-amendment-act-of-2015 (last accessed September 2015).

71 Becky Vevea, "CPS softens strict discipline policies," WBEZ, June 24, 2015, available at http://www.wbez.org/news/cps-softens-strict-discipline-policies-110396.

72 *Child Care and Development Block Grant of 2014*, Public Law 113-186, 113th Cong., 2d sess. (November 14, 2014), available at https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ186/PLAW-113publ186.pdf.

73 Aisha Ray, Barbara Bowman, and Jean Robbins, "Preparing Early Childhood Teachers to Successfully Educate All Children: The Contribution of Four Year Undergraduate Teacher Preparation Programs" (Chicago, IL: Erickson Institute, 2006), available at https://www.erikson.edu/wp-content/uploads/Teachered.pdf.

74 Stephanie Schmit and Emily Firgens, "Expanding Teacher Competencies to Support Young Dual Language Learners," (Washington: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2012), available at http://www.clasp.org/issues/child-care-and-early-education/in-focus/expanding-teacher-competencies-to-support-young-dual-language-learners#sthash.ekVr0SOD.dpuf.

75 Peter Murrell and Michele Foster, "Teacher Beliefs, Performance, and Proficiency in Diversity-Oriented Teacher Preparation." In James Rath and Amy C. McAninch, eds., *Teacher Beliefs and Classroom Performance: The Impact of Teacher Education*, vol. 6 (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2003); Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Multicultural Education Series, No. 8. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000).

76 Louise Derman Sparks and Carol Brunson Phillips, *Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).

77 A. Wade Boykin, Eric A. Hurley, and Brenda A. Allen, "Communal Versus Individual Learning of a Math-Estimation Task: African American Children and the Culture of Learning Contexts," *The Journal of Psychology* 139 (6): 513–527.

78 Kathy S. Hepburn and others, "Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: An Evaluation Toolkit" (Washington: Georgetown University, National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health, 2007), available at http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/products/ECMHCToolkit.pdf.

79 Ibid.

80 Gilliam, "Prekindergarteners Left Behind."

81 Hepburn and others, "Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: An Evaluation Toolkit."

82 Heath Resources and Services Administration, "Maternal Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting," available at http://mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/homevisiting/ (last accessed September 2015).

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "HHS awards $386 million to support families through the home visiting program," Press release, February 18, 2015, available at http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2015pres/02/20150219a.html.

88 National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 203.50: Enrollment and percentage distribution of enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by race/ethnicity and region: Selected years, fall 1995 through fall 2023," available at http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_203.50.asp (last accessed September 2015).

89 Steve Suitts and others, "A New Diverse Majority: Students of Color in the South's Public Schools" (Atlanta, GA: Southern Education Foundation, 2010), available at http://www.southerneducation.org/getattachment/884678f3-ca14-474f-a5e4-be2fa687136c/2010-A-New-Diverse-Majority-Students-of-Color-in-t.aspx.

90 Ulrich Boser, "Teacher Diversity Revisited: A New State-by-State Analysis," (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TeacherDiversity.pdf.

91 U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Most Children Younger Than Age 1 are Minorities, Census Bureau Reports," Press release, May 17, 2012, available at http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-90.html.

92 Thomas S. Dee, "Teachers, Race and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment." Working Paper 8432 (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2001), available at http://www.nber.org/papers/w8432.

93 Farah Z. Ahmad and Ulrich Boser, "America's Leaky Pipeline for Teachers of Color" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2014), available at https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TeachersOfColor-report.pdf.

94 *Education Week*, "Behavior and Discipline of Preschool Children," July 27, 2005, available at http://www.edweek.org/chat/2005/07/27/transcript_07_27_2005.html.

95 Heather B. Weiss and others, "The Federal Role in Out-of-School Learning: After-School, Summer Learning, and Family Involvement as Critical Learning Supports" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, 2009), available at http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/the-federal-role-in-out-of-school-learning-after-school-summer-learning-and-family-involvement-as-critical-learning-supports.

Our Mission

The Center for American Progress is an independent, nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans, through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.

Our Values

As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

Our Approach

We develop new policy ideas, challenge the media to cover the issues that truly matter, and shape the national debate. With policy teams in major issue areas, American Progress can think creatively at the cross-section of traditional boundaries to develop ideas for policymakers that lead to real change. By employing an extensive communications and outreach effort that we adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape, we move our ideas aggressively in the national policy debate.

Center for American Progress