



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING


RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

BRIAN J. WHISTON
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 29, 2016

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Brian J. Whiston, Chairman 

SUBJECT: Discussion and Approval of the *Statement and Guidance on Developing a Policy for Prevention of Suspension and/or Expulsion of Children Birth through Age 8 in Early Education and Care Programs*

At the September 14, 2016 State Board of Education (SBE) meeting, Michigan Department of Education (MDE) staff presented the *Statement and Guidance on Developing a Policy for Prevention of Suspension and/or Expulsion of Children Birth through Age 8 in Early Education and Care Programs* for SBE approval. The MDE convened stakeholder groups to draft the statement and guidance; additionally, the MDE posted the statement for public comment as a means of receiving broader input on the statement and guidance. This memo summarizes the public comment and provides an initial plan for supporting early education and care providers in developing plans and practice that reduce the suspension and expulsion of young children.

Sixty-three responses were received during the public comment period; the majority of responses support this work and acknowledge the importance of reducing suspensions and expulsions. Although the respondents acknowledge the critical nature of this topic, one-half stressed that Michigan will not achieve success in reducing these practices unless providers receive comprehensive supports. Prevalent themes in the comments include:

- 49 percent of respondents stressed that providers require comprehensive supports to successfully implement the type of quality practices and procedures that curb suspension and expulsion. Specific supports requested include access to mental health consultation and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) training;
- 15 percent of respondents pointed to the importance of family engagement and investment in promoting positive relationships that reduce suspension and expulsions;

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- 11 percent of respondents called for increased funding to support effective programs and strategies.

The stakeholder group revised the statement and guidance in response to the above public comment. The group changed the title to reflect that the goal is encouraging providers to develop policies that reduce suspension and expulsion; this change seeks to clarify the misconception that the guidance is neither law nor mandatory regulation. Secondly, the group adopted clearer definitions of suspension and expulsion to minimize stated confusion in the field. There were language changes in the quality indicators that the burden of this work is solely not on the provider, but requires collaboration with parents, community members and state systems. The stakeholder group engaged in the development of the guidance and statement reviewed the public comment and the efforts of other states in eliminating suspension and expulsion. From this review, the group determined that the MDE must focus its efforts on supporting providers. It is clear from the comment that the public believes that coordinated, multi-tiered supports prove integral to Michigan's success in reducing suspension and expulsion. As such, the MDE will:

1. Convene a stakeholder group to provide recommendations and an implementation plan for reducing suspensions and expulsions in early education and care settings. The efforts of other states demonstrate the need to coordinate a diverse stakeholder group dedicated to developing recommendations for eliminating suspension and expulsion. Beginning in early 2017, the MDE will convene a stakeholder group representing both state and local leaders to determine how to leverage current state funding, projects, and programs. Additionally, the group will determine the need for new state-level supports and how to utilize our various programmatic resources to assist early learning and care programs; and
2. Finalize the Resource Guide. The MDE is moving forward with the Resource Guide discussed at the September board meeting. This guide provides the field with key considerations and background information on the quality indicators. Additionally, the document will contain links to applicable resources. We anticipate completion of the guide by the end of December 2016.

The revised statement and guidance is attached.

It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the *Statement and Guidance for Developing a Policy for Prevention of Suspension and/or Expulsion of Children Birth through Age 8 in Early Education and Care Programs* as attached to the Superintendent's memorandum dated November 29, 2016.

Michigan
State Board of Education
Statement and Guidance on Developing a Policy for Prevention of
Suspension and/or Expulsion of Children Birth through Age 8
in Early Education and Care Programs

The State Board of Education (SBE) has adopted the following as part of its Strategic Goals to help make Michigan a Top 10 education state in 10 years: *Provide every child access to an aligned, high-quality P-20 system from early childhood to post-secondary attainment – through a multi-stakeholder collaboration with business and industry, labor and higher education – to maximize lifetime learning and success.*

The SBE strongly *recommends and encourages* all Michigan early education and care program providers to establish a clear and explicit policy that prevents or significantly limits the expulsion and suspension of young children. The SBE supports policies that facilitate family partnerships and the well being, social emotional health and learning of all children. Therefore, expulsion and suspension measures should be a last resort. In extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety threat that cannot otherwise be reduced or eliminated through reasonable efforts of intervention, the program provider should assist the child and family in accessing alternate services and placement.

The purpose of this guidance is to support providers of early education and care programs as part of the P-20 system by offering recommendations from the SBE for preventing or significantly limiting expulsion, suspension or other exclusionary discipline practices in early learning and care settings for children birth through age 8. It is meant to complement and align with the existing SBE *Policy on Reducing Student Suspensions and Expulsions* adopted in May 2014.

Definitions

Expulsion is the complete and permanent removal of a child from the regular group setting.

Suspension is the temporary prohibition or exclusion from attending an early learning and care program.

Why is this important?

The first years of a child's life prove critical for building the early foundation for learning, health and well being needed for success in school and beyond. Young children's brains develop rapidly, influenced by experiences, both positive and negative, that they share with their families, caregivers, teachers, peers, and communities. Given what we know now from research on early brain development, we must ensure that all children's social-emotional and behavioral health are fostered in appropriate, high-quality early care and education programs. Additionally,

teachers and caregivers working with young children must receive the training and ongoing support needed to engage in responsive, individualized practice that promotes the well being of all the children they serve.

Reducing expulsion and suspension can influence a number of outcomes across development, health (both mental and physical), and education. Longitudinal research indicates that positive, quality, and stable early education environments correspond to higher graduation rates, decreased chronic absenteeism and fewer interactions with the adult criminal justice system. Disruptions in program attendance may diminish these benefits; further research indicates that school expulsion and suspension are associated with negative educational and life outcomes. Moreover, disciplining children early in their education with suspension or expulsion predicts future suspensions and expulsions. Societal consequences of setting children on a negative path via expulsion and/or suspension, including exacerbating racial, gender and economic inequalities in childhood outcomes, also exist. Children who are expelled or suspended, especially in the case of behaviors manifesting from childhood trauma, are not only potentially affected by these negative consequences, but often miss opportunities to receive help to identify the actual cause of the problem and potential strategies to support an early solution.

Quality Indicators for Developing a Quality Comprehensive Policy

Quality indicators for a comprehensive suspension and expulsion policy are included below. Individual providers and programs should consider these quality indicators when forming or evaluating their program policy. A comprehensive policy:

- Focuses on positive collaboration, communication, and partnership among children, families and staff
- Ensures clear communication of the policy to staff, families and community partners
- Promotes and nurtures all children's learning, health and well-being through practices that are:
 - Developmentally appropriate (includes individualization based on child needs);
 - Strengths-based;
 - Culturally competent; and
 - Aligned with the Michigan Core Knowledge and Core Competencies for Early Care and Education
- Promotes early developmental and health screening with appropriate follow-up, including referrals for resources, social services, supports and education
- Focuses on inclusive, supportive high-quality programs and services
- Uses data (from family conversations, observations, screening tools, child assessments, program assessments, etc.) to address children's needs and strengths
- Outlines the process steps (including strategies, documentation, and communication) that are needed for families and staff to work together to address challenging behaviors and strengthen positive behaviors. Identifies steps that will

be taken if intervention plans are not successful and if a child is at risk of causing serious injury to themselves or others

- Supports participation in quality professional development and training opportunities on topics including, but not limited to: use of evidence-based practices, childhood trauma, cultural competence, family engagement, social-emotional well-being, and developmentally-appropriate behaviors
- Adjusts policy to ensure fairness, equity, and continuous quality improvement