



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

December 10, 2014

Dear Colleagues,

Today, we are issuing a policy statement and recommendations to assist States and their public and private local early childhood programs in preventing and severely limiting expulsions and suspensions in early learning settings. Recent data indicate that expulsions and suspensions occur with regularity in preschool settings, a problematic issue given the well established research indicating that these practices can influence a number of adverse outcomes across development, health, and education. In addition, stark racial and gender disparities exist in these practices, with young boys of color being suspended and expelled at much higher rates than other children in early learning programs. These trends warrant immediate attention from the early childhood and education fields.

The earliest years of a child's life are critical for building the foundation of learning and wellness needed for future success in school and later in life. During these years, children's brains are developing rapidly, influenced by their experiences, both positive and negative. As a nation, we share the responsibility of ensuring that all of our young children have access to enriching opportunities that will set them up for success and empower them to be our future leaders. By expelling or suspending 3- and 4-year-olds, we do just the opposite—we set their trajectories in a negative direction, before their first day of kindergarten. We not only hinder their social-emotional development during a highly formative period, we also remove them from the early learning programs and corresponding cognitively enriching experiences—that we know contribute to academic success.

The policy statement we are releasing today is one in a series of federal actions that aim to prevent and severely reduce expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings, and more broadly, improve school climates and discipline across the educational spectrum. This statement follows the 2014 release of a [Guidance Package \(http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.html\)](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.html), developed by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, which provides recommendations and resources for improving school climate and discipline in K-12 school settings.

Together, we can make progress in addressing this issue, by partnering with families and communities, investing in the early childhood workforce, and establishing appropriate policies and applying those policies consistently. An important step in closing the "opportunity gap" is ensuring that all of our youngest children are afforded the experiences they need to thrive, from day one. We hope you find these resources helpful in your efforts, as we partner together to provide all children with a high-quality early education. Thank you for the work you do on behalf of children and families across America.

Sincerely,

/s/

Sylvia M. Burwell
Secretary of Health and Human Services

/s/

Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education