

Evaluating the implementation of the Illinois expulsion law 2017-2020

Findings & recommendations three years later



SETL

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University of Illinois at Chicago



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Contributing Authors**Katherine M. Zinsser, Ph.D.****H. Callie Silver, Ph.D.****Elyse Shenberger, M.A.***University of Illinois Chicago*

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Allison Lowe-Fotos*Start Early***Maria Estlund***Illinois Action for Children***Lori Orr***IL Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development***Funding was provided by:****Questions about this report can be directed to:**

Dr. Kate Zinsser (kzinsser@uic.edu) Department of Psychology, University of Illinois Chicago

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BACKGROUND

Nationwide, 17,000 3- and 4-year-old children are expelled or suspended from preschool each year (Zeng et al., 2019) and miss out on the early learning opportunities that benefit them socially, emotionally, and academically. Further, as in K-12 settings, the children suspended or expelled from early childhood settings are disproportionately boys and children of color. Black children, specifically Black boys, account for over 40% of preschoolers expelled even though nationally, they represent 18% of all children enrolled (Meek & Catherine, 2020). Because exclusionary discipline is not an effective behavior intervention (Council on School Health, 2013), children who are expelled are more likely to experience subsequent expulsions over time, placing them at greater risk for school dropout and involvement in the criminal justice system (Gregory et al., 2010).

With evidence of the high rates and negative impacts of early childhood exclusion mounting, the U.S. Departments of Education and the Health and Human Services (2014) issued a joint policy statement recommending policy action, social-emotional programming, and unified data systems to support research and accountability. That same year, the CCDBG Act (2014), a federal flow-through funding source for state early childhood systems, strongly encouraged grantees to address the issue of suspension and expulsion through its guidance on effective state-wide practices. Approaches to limit the expulsion of young children from early learning programs varied (Grossman- Kahn et al., 2018), with some states issuing administrative guides and others enacting systemic reforms. At least ten states have successfully passed legislation on the issue (Padilla et al., 2020), though many adopted policies that apply to only certain age-bands, funding, or program types (e.g., only children enrolled in school-based pre-K).

Illinois' Early Childhood Expulsion Law (IL PA 100–0105) is one of the most expansive pieces of early childhood expulsion legislation passed across the nation (Meek et al., 2020; Padilla et al., 2020). This law seeks to limit, if not end, the use of exclusionary discipline in any publicly funded or state-licensed early childhood program serving children between the ages of birth to five. Ultimately, the law stipulates that (a) programs are prohibited from expelling children from their program because of a child's behavior; (b) programs must exhaust all possible resources and supports to retain a child; (c) programs must document all steps they have taken to address the child's behavioral needs and to retain the child in care; (d) If the program ultimately cannot meet the behavioral needs of a child, providers must work with the family to identify and transition the child into an alternative, and appropriate, care setting, such that there is no loss of services to the child; and (e) programs must collect and report data on children transitioning out of their program.

This ongoing study was launched in the summer of 2018 and sought to collect retrospective administrator reports of their program's exclusionary discipline practices in the 2017-2018 school year. Additionally, through surveys and interviews, administrators reported on their understanding of and confusion about the new law, access to resources stipulated in the law, and anticipated changes. Findings in the first report (Zinsser et al., 2019) broadly point towards systematic variance in programs' level of knowledge of the law, comfort, and confidence complying with its stipulations and perceived benefits. Administrators generally felt uninformed about the law upon its passage and were unsure what would be required of them regarding reporting. Those who were more informed tended to be at programs that had recently excluded a child. Notably, the 2019 report offered the only known estimates of suspension and expulsion in private and community-based childcare in Illinois at the time of the enactment of PA 100-0105. Those data indicated that 12.61 children were expelled out of every 1,000 children enrolled in ECE in Illinois. This was nearly five times the expulsion rate reported previously from the Illinois Early Childhood Block Grant Prekindergarten Program almost fifteen years previously (Gilliam, 2005).

This report builds on those prior findings and provides results from surveys covering the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school year. Over time, the focus and methods have evolved to meet emerging needs and questions from advocates, policymakers, and practitioners. Nevertheless, this report addresses four key questions:

1. How have exclusionary discipline rates changed since the expulsion law had gone into effect in 2018?
2. Who is being excluded, from where, why, and how?
3. What interventions and resources are programs using to retain children?
4. What, if anything, do we know about what happens to excluded children?

METHOD

Methods for the 2017-2018 data collection wave are reported in the 2019 report. For the subsequent years, we used similar survey methods. Invitations to participate were sent out over listservs and in newsletters targeting Illinois area early childhood professionals in September of 2019 and 2020. Links were also sent directly to any participant from prior years who had agreed to be contacted. Either directors or assistant directors were eligible to participate, and they were incentivized by being entered into a gift card raffle each year they completed the survey. Each survey inquired about the programs' experiences with and responses to children's challenging behaviors in the preceding 12-month period (i.e., September 1, 2018 - August 31, 2019).

Participants

Table 1 describes the participating programs for each year of the study to date. Across all three study years, 391 valid surveys were submitted, with 24 administrators or programs participating in all three time points. Generally, the samples were comparable across years. Programs were primarily center-based and accepting some or only private tuitions. A few school-district prekindergarten programs were represented, and between a quarter and nearly half of responding programs were fully publicly funded (receiving no private tuition). The majority of programs did not participate in the Illinois ExceleRate quality rating improvement system program (QRIS), but those that did were often at the Gold or Silver levels of quality. Table 2 describes the children enrolled in participating programs in 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. Across surveys, programs served on average fewer than 70 children (although ranges varied by year). Across samples, half of the children served were White, and nearly two-thirds were of preschool-age (three or four years old).

Table 1: Responding Programs by Year

	2017-2018 (N=154)	2018-2019 (N=97)	2019-2020 (N=140)
Type			
Home-based	17.5	28.9	27.9
Center-based	65	64.9	67.1
School District	13	5.2	5.0
Other	4.5	0.5	-
Funding			
No Tuition	23.4	27.8	46.4
Some Tuition	62.3	48.5	32.1
Tuition Only	14.3	23.7	20.7
QRIS			
%Gold	20.1	21.6	18.6
% Silver	18.2	13.4	20.0
% Bronze	16.9	11.3	11.4
% Licensed	44.8	44.3	41.4
Did not know /		9.3	
Missing			8.6

Survey

The content and scope of each survey was determined in collaboration with members of the advisory coalition (described in the 2017-2018 report). Beginning with the second survey (2018-2019), administrators specifically reported on the number of children displaying challenging behaviors who left their programs via three exclusion types: those who were expelled, who transitioned into another program, and whose family voluntarily withdrew them before formal action was taken. For each child excluded, administrators were also asked to provide child-level demographic data and details about the exclusion process. In the 2018-2019 survey, administrators also reported on their knowledge of children's prior experiences with adversity and completed an assessment of their understanding of the critical components of the legislation. The 2019-2020 survey also included questions around how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted the programs' enrollment, as well as access to and use of resources and supports for challenging behavior.

As this is a voluntary convenience sample and there is, at present, no state-wide systems for reporting on exclusionary discipline (although such a mandate is expected shortly), respondents were free to skip items. Findings reported here are based on incomplete data. While this is a significant limitation and a threat to the generalizability of the results, these are the only data presently available to stakeholders and policymakers. For example, one key data quality concern is incomplete data on the demographics of excluded children. In the 2017-2018 report, administrators routinely failed to provide information about the excluded children, to the extent that we could not report any findings in that arena. In collaboration with coalition members, we revised the methods of collecting child-level information to improve response rates. At the same time, in 2018-2019, we only have complete data on 70.8% of excluded children, and in 2019-2020, that number is only 48%.

	2018-2019 (N=97)	2019-2020 (N=140)
Total Children Served	6774	9039
Avg. Enrollment	69.12	64.11
St. Dev Enrollment	127.57	81.97
% Male	52.3	43.4
% English Language Learner	28.8	16.2
% Diagnosed Disability	5.2	7.9
% Black	17.2	16.8
% White	54.0	47.4
% Hispanic/Latino	16.2	13.6
% Asian	10.0	5.2
% Other/multi-racial	3.1	7.3
% Birth-2	35.9	29.5
% 3 Years	29.4	29.9
% 4 Years	27.1	30.1
% 5 Years	7.6	10.5

Data Recoding

As was evident in the 2017-2018 report, confusion and misunderstanding of the law persisted through the 2019-2020 survey, especially around what constitutes a planned transition. By law, when a program feels it cannot adequately meet a child's behavioral needs, even after exhausting all available resources, they are obligated to arrange for and facilitate a child's transition into a new program while maintaining continuity of services. This transition must happen in collaboration with the family. In the second and third waves of the survey, for each excluded child, administrators responded to open-ended items inquiring about

the process by which a child left the program. These responses were qualitatively coded as "expelled," "transitioned," or "withdrawn" based on the details provided.

Frequently, administrator-reported exclusion type in the forced choice item described above did not match the qualitatively coded exclusion type based on the administrators' description of the process. For example, if an administrator selected "planned transition," but their description entailed something not aligned with the legislation definition, such as "providing a list" or "making recommendations," we recoded these responses.

By comparing administrator responses with recoded responses, we computed an error rate for each year which we used to adjust the distribution of reported exclusions. Therefore, in this summary of results, we report only the corrected exclusion types for both 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. Full data tables, including the raw director reports, are available from the authors upon request.

RESULTS

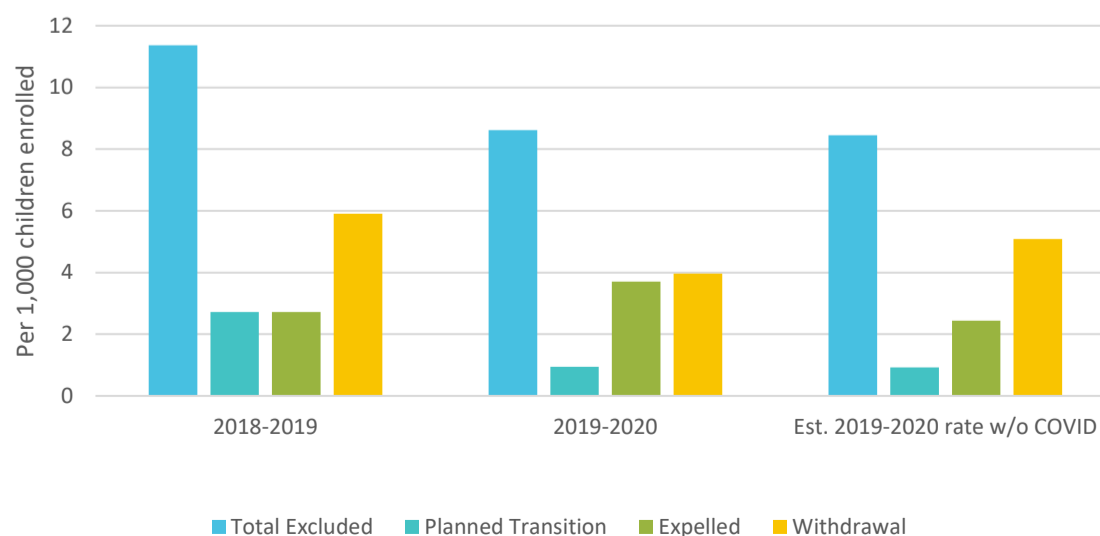
Rates of Exclusionary Discipline Past and Present

In the 2017-2018 school year, administrators in Illinois ECE programs reported that 12.61 children were expelled for every 1,000 enrolled. In subsequent years following the enactment of PA 100-0105, rates of expulsion have declined. Although we cannot infer causality from these data, it is notable that **far fewer children are being expelled now than before the law's passage**. For example, in the 2018-2019 school year, administrators reported that only 2.72 per 1,000 children enrolled were formally expelled. In the most recent school year (2019-2020), that rate rose slightly to 3.71 per 1,000 children registered.

Despite this marked improvement in formal expulsion rates, we know that children are excluded from early childhood programs in several other ways. As shown in [Figure 1](#), in 2018-2019, nearly twice as many children were withdrawn by parents before a formal expulsion occurred as were formally expelled. Further, about three out of every 1,000 children enrolled were transitioned to another program because of their behavior. When summed together, the total number of children leaving programs for behavior reasons in the 2018-2019 school year (11.37 out of every 1,000 enrolled) is nearly equivalent to the expulsion rate in the preceding school year before the law went into effect.

The 2019-2020 survey (collected in September 2020) necessarily attempted to consider the disruptions, enrollment fluctuations, and program closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, from March 21, 2020 until May 30, 2020, Governor Pritzker enacted a shelter-in-place order forcing the temporary closure of nearly all child care programs and schools in the state, except for those operating under emergency licenses to serve the children of essential workers. Therefore, in the 2019-2020 survey, administrators reported on their enrollment and exclusionary discipline practices separately for the period between September 1, 2019 and March 20, 2020, during the shelter-in-place order (if they had an emergency license), and between reopening and August 31, 2020. [Figure 1](#) above reports both the exclusion rates as reported by administrators and estimated rates of exclusion should COVID-19 have not forced programs to close. Compared to the preceding year, administrators reported that fewer children, overall, were excluded from care but most of this change came from the reduction in the number of parents withdrawing their children. Another key finding from the 2019-2020 survey is the precipitous decline in planned transitions. Of the 8.62 per 1,000 children enrolled who administrators reported excluding, less than one child was transitioned per the law's stipulations. This makes sense considering the COVID-19 interruptions and restrictions in programs that commonly evaluate and serve children displaying challenging behaviors (e.g., early intervention and school-district special education).

Figure 1: Exclusions per 1,000 Children Enrolled



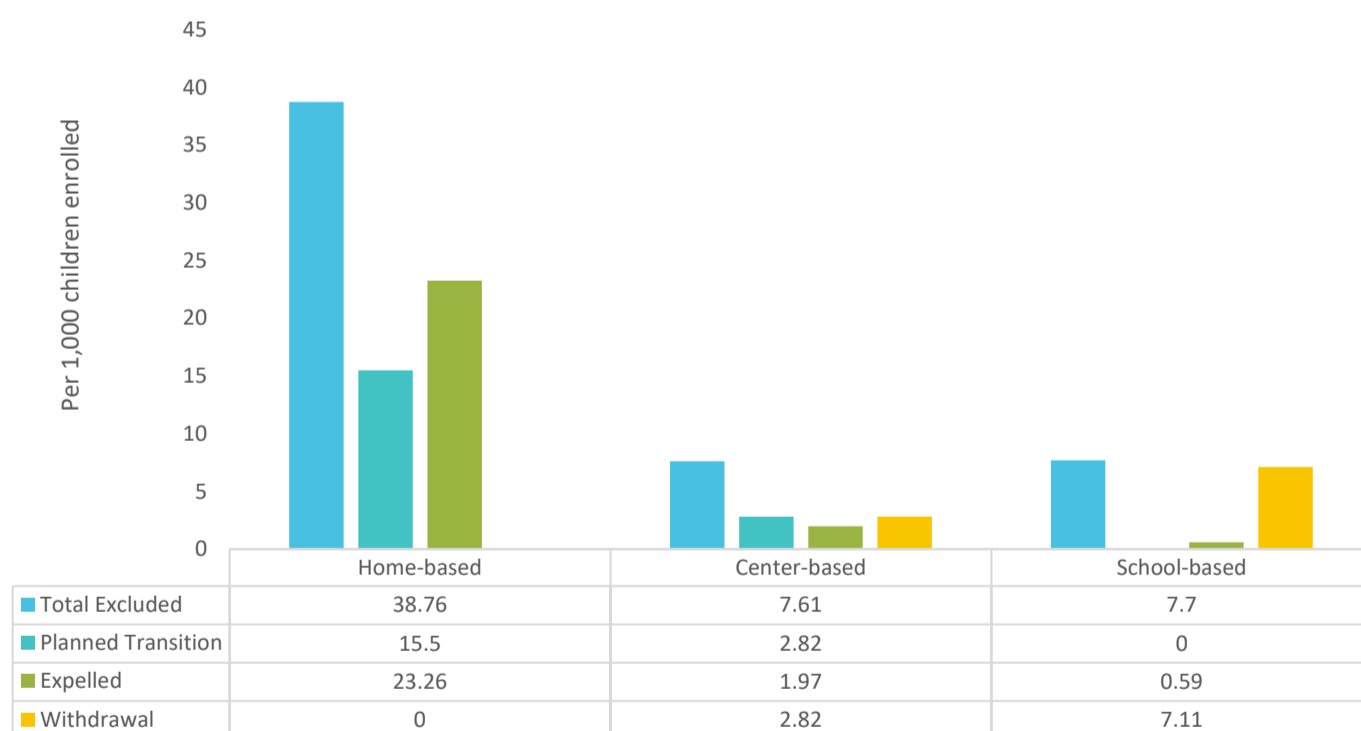
Expulsions, on the other hand, increased compared to the prior year. An examination of the dates of expulsion revealed that a number of these occurred in the short period between programs reopening in June and the end of the survey period in August. To understand how the pandemic and program closures influenced exclusion rates, we used dates of exclusions reported by administrators to calculate the rate of exclusions in the first 28 weeks of the school year. Then, assuming that rates would remain stable over time, we estimated the number of exclusions for the remaining 23 weeks of the reporting period.

By comparing reported rates to those estimated if rates from the first half of the year had remained stable, we can see that comparatively more exclusions occurred in the summer of 2020 than we would have predicted. **COVID-19 related closures were associated with one additional expulsion per every 1,000 children enrolled compared to the prior year.** If programs had not closed, we would have expected fewer children to be expelled and instead, more parents likely would have withdrawn their children voluntarily. It is not yet clear how these different ways of leaving a program impacted families, but it is likely that in a time of great stress and difficulty already, the sudden loss of childcare was harmful.

From Where are Children Excluded?

As in the prior report, stakeholders were interested in knowing how exclusion rates varied by ECE program and funding type. Center-based programs made up over two-thirds of our sample and tend to serve a greater number of children than home-based programs. As such, it is not surprising that 70.13% of children were excluded from center-based programs. However, when we calculated rates of exclusion using the same per 1,000 enrolled formulas as above ([Figure 1](#)), we see a very different story. **Even though home-based programs made up just over a quarter of the sample, they excluded proportionally far more children than center-based or school-based programs** (38.76 compared to 7.61 or 7.70 children per 1,000 enrolled respectively). Further, as [Figure 2](#) depicts, the program-type differences are most stark with regards to rates of formal expulsions. Home-based programs in this sample expelled children more than 10 times the rate of center-based programs and transitioned them out at over 5 times the rate. Exclusion rates per 1,000 enrolled were comparable between center based and school-based programs but when children left school-based programs it was almost always through parental withdrawal. By comparison, children were similarly likely to be excluded from center-based care by all three mechanisms.

Figure 2: Exclusions per 1,000 Children Enrolled by Program Type



Differences by program funding types were less dramatic but still notable. Programs in which no parents paid any tuition (i.e., fully publicly funded programs) excluded the most children (9.47 per 1,000 enrolled) with the majority being transitioned out. By contrast, programs in which some parents paid tuition excluded slightly fewer children (8.70 per 1,000 enrolled) and most were withdrawn (6.53 per 1,000 enrolled). Transitions from partially tuition funded programs were rare (0.54 per 1,000). Finally, **although exclusion rates were lowest in tuition-only programs (6.43 per 1,000 enrolled) these programs formally expelled more children** (2.41 per 1,000 enrolled) than programs receiving no tuition dollars (2.37) or only some tuition (1.63) from parents.

Who is Excluded?

Considering the nationally reported trends of racial and gender disproportionality in early childhood expulsion, it was a priority of the coalition to understand whether and how children of different backgrounds and identities were over-represented among those excluded from Illinois ECE programs. Therefore, below we contrast the proportion of children excluded overall and by exclusion type to the demographic characteristics of children enrolled in all responding programs.

Findings from both the 2018-2019 ([Table 3](#)) and 2019-2020 ([Table 4](#)) school year surveys replicate the reported gender and racial disproportionality observed in public PreK programs. In the former, **boys made up just over half of all enrolled children in participating programs but were all or nearly all of those excluded** across all three exclusion categories. Likewise, in the more recent survey, although participating programs served proportionally fewer boys, they were equivalently more likely to be excluded, be it via expulsion, transition, or withdrawal.

Although only around 17% of children enrolled in responding programs were identified as Black, they were 25% or more of those excluded each year of the survey. Moreover, by comparing the proportion of all exclusions to the ratio of each exclusion subtype, we can also see that Black children were especially over-represented among those expelled in the 2019-2020 school year when they made up a third of all children forced out. While this disproportionality is still lower than that reported federal for public PreK, it is important to remember that these expulsions are occurring despite a state-wide law prohibiting the practice. Thus, even though rates have come down overall, the racial disparities persist.

Compared to total enrollment in both years, children with **diagnosed disabilities or individualized learning plans** are slightly over-represented among those excluded. While they make up less than 10% of the children served on average, those with disabilities were 16.7% of those excluded in 2019-2020, and they were 50% of those who were transitioned into another program. New to the 2019-2020 data collection, directors also reported on the language learning status of excluded children and whether they were new to the program that year. As shown in [Table 4](#), new students were not over-represented relative to their enrollment, but those for whom English was not their primary language (ELLs) were somewhat over-represented, especially among those withdrawn by parents.

As reported elsewhere, **older children were also over-represented among those excluded** across both years. Infants and toddlers tended to make up about a third of the total enrollment of responding programs but were between 7.8% and 12.5% of those excluded. By comparison, 5-year-olds were the smallest age group enrolled but made up a quarter of those excluded at both time points.

Table 3: 2018-2019 Demographics of Excluded Child Compared to Total Enrollment

	%Total Enrollment	% All Exclusions	% Expulsions	% Transitions	% Withdrawals
Gender					
Girls	47.7	14.3	9.9	0	24
Boys	52.3	85.7	90.1	100	76
Race & Ethnicity					
Black	17.2	27.7	27	25	30.4
White	54	59.6	54	58.3	58.3
Hispanic/Latino	16.2	8.3	16.7	0	15.4
Asian	10	6.4	18.2	0	4.3
Other/Multi-racial	3.1	6.4	0	16.7	0
Diagnosed Disability or IEP	9.3	12.5	16.7	8.3	23.1
Age					
Birth-2	35.9	7.8	25.0	0	3.8
3 Years	29.4	29.4	16.7	31	34.6
4 Years	27.1	37.3	25	53.8	34.6
5 Years	7.6	25.5	33.3	15.4	26.9

Note: Administrators only provided demographic data for 50 of the 72 total reported excluded children (70.8%).

Table 4: 2019-2020 Demographics of Excluded Child Compared to Total Enrollment

	%Total Enrollment	%All Exclusions	% Expulsions	% Transitions	% Withdrawals
Gender					
Girls	56.6	19.4	20.0	25.0	18.8
Boys	43.4	75.0	73.3	75.0	81.3
Missing	-	11.1	6.7	-	-
Race & Ethnicity					
Black	16.8	25.0	33.3	-	25.0
White	47.4	52.8	46.7	25.0	68.8
Hispanic/Latino	13.6	8.3	6.7	50.0	-
Asian	5.2	-	-	-	-
Other/Multi-racial	7.3	-	-	-	-
Missing	16.8	13.9	13.3	25.0	6.2
New to the Program					
Diagnosed Disability or IEP	24.84	19.4	20.0	-	25.5
English Language Learner	7.88	16.7	6.7	50.0	18.8
	16.17	19.4	20.0	-	25.0
Age					
Birth-2	29.5	12.5	9.1	-	18.2
3 Years	29.9	25.0	18.2	50.0	18.2
4 Years	30.1	37.5	18.2	25.0	54.5
5 Years	10.5	25.0	36.4	25.0	9.1

Note: Administrators only provided demographic data for 36 of the 77 total excluded children (48%) in the 2019-2020 survey.

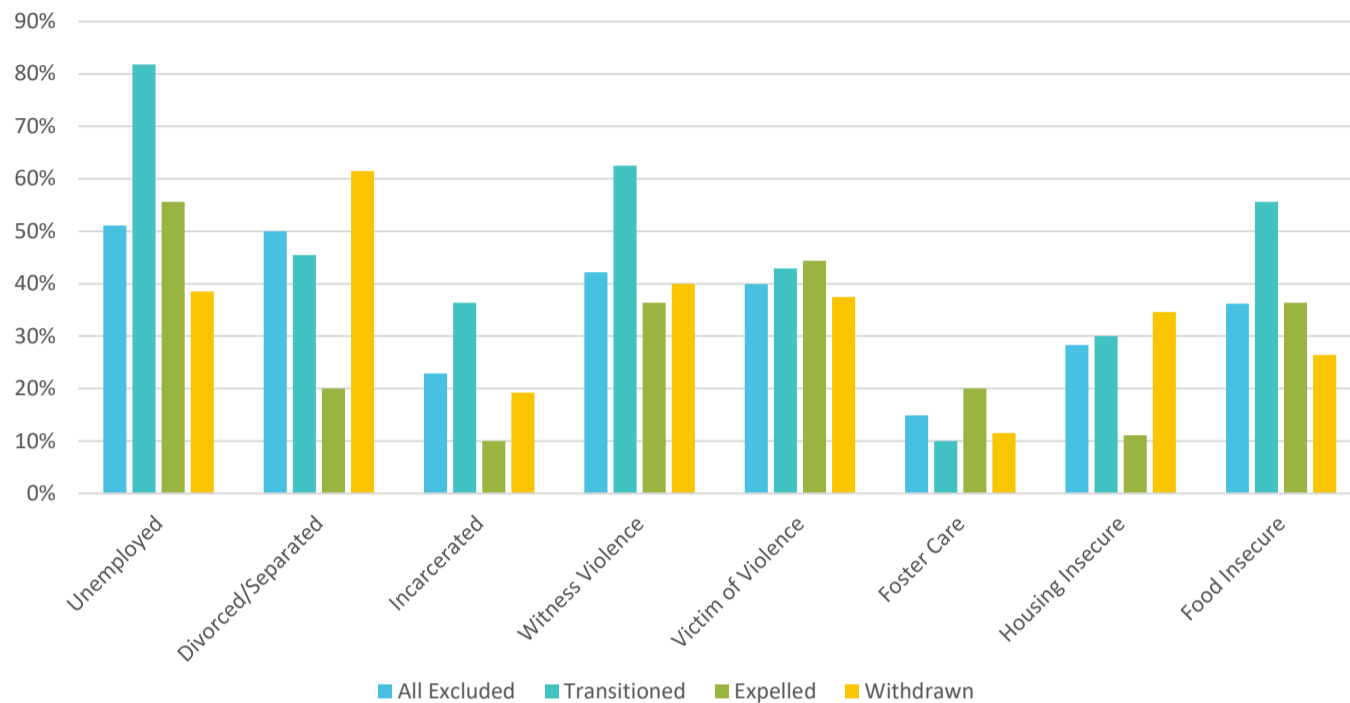
Adversities and assets.

In the 2018-2019 survey, we also asked administrators to report their knowledge of the adversities excluded children had faced. Using an adapted version of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Questionnaire (Felitti et al., 1998), directors indicated that, on average, excluded children had experienced 2.6 ACEs (SD 2.12). Nationally, just over 12% of children ages 0-5 years old have experienced two or more ACEs (National Survey of Children's Health, 2017).

As can be seen in [Figure 3](#), many children excluded in the 2018-2019 sample had witnessed (42.2%) or been the victim of violence (39.9%), experienced housing or food insecurity (28-36%), or had parents who were unemployed (51%) or divorced (50%). By disaggregating data by the way children left programs and comparing proportions to the total proportion of ACEs across all children excluded, we can see that withdrawn children were only over-represented in the ACEs categories of divorced parents and housing insecurity. Expelled children were over-represented among those involved in the foster care system. Transitioned children, by comparison, were over-represented among those with unemployed, separated, or incarcerated parents; those who had witnessed violence; and those facing food insecurity. At the same time, transitions were still relatively rare compared to combining expulsions and withdrawals across ACEs categories.

Administrators also reported on known community assets of each excluded child. Specifically, they indicated whether the child had a "best friend" in their program; a "trusted adult" in their lives other than their parent(s); a member of the staff who advocated for them; and if their family was active in the community (e.g., member of a local church). On average, administrators indicated that two out of four of these statements were true for excluded children. Notably, while the majority had a staff member advocating for them (76.5%), less than a third has a strong peer relationship in their classroom (31.8%). In addition, compared to the other exclusion types, expelled children were least likely to have a staff advocate (66.7%) or a best friend (22.2%).

Figure 3: Children's Adverse Experiences by Exclusion Type



Challenging behavior.

In both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 surveys, administrators provided information on why children were excluded. Free responses were categorized using two deductively coded themes: 1) Displaying physically dangerous or aggressive behavior to staff, students, or themselves; and 2) Disrupting the classroom in a non-aggressive way (e.g., excessive crying, tantrums, and damaging materials). Less than 5% of responses fell into an "other" category and are omitted here. In 2018-2019, **children were more likely to be excluded for displaying physically dangerous or aggressive behavior** overall, but when we examine trends by exclusion type, we see that most of these children were transitioned out. By comparison, children who left because they were disruptive tended to be expelled. This may indicate that programs had resources and knowledge about how to refer children who are physically challenging (e.g., referring them to the school district for evaluation), but there was less knowledge of how to help emotional and disruptive children. By comparison, in the 2019-2020 school year, children were more likely to be expelled when they displayed aggressive or dangerous behavior. Again, this likely reflects the fact that COVID limited the accessibility of alternative programs and resources.

Efforts to Prevent Exclusion

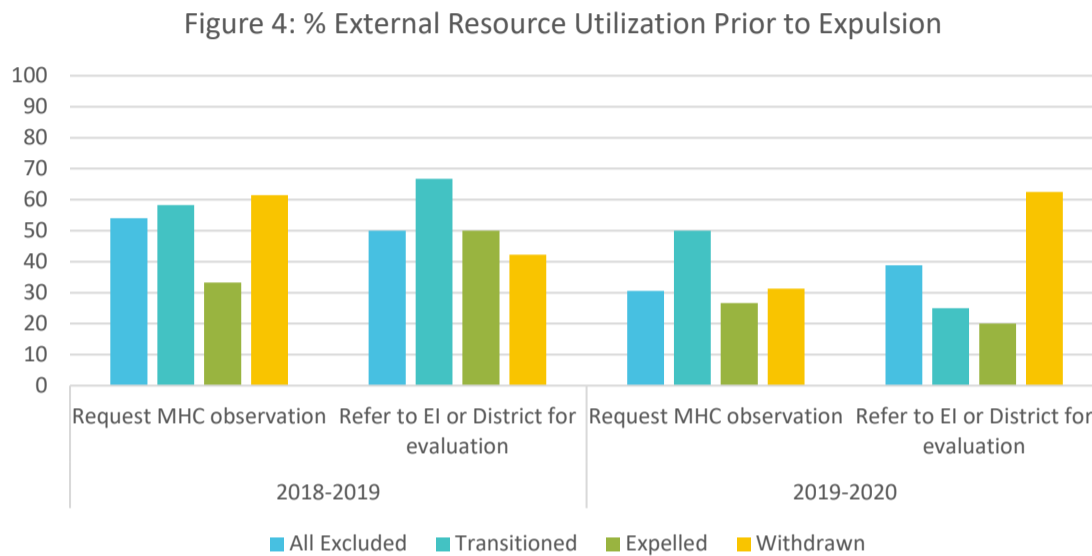
Use of resources and supports.

In both the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 surveys, administrators reported on what steps their program took to attempt to accommodate and retain children who were ultimately excluded. Items covered a range of possible internal and external supports and activities. For example, before almost all exclusions, administrators reported that their teachers modified and changed a classroom routine to accommodate a child (80-91.67%). In addition, about a third of excluded children were first moved to another classroom room in case it was a better fit. In 2018-2019 programs reported providing additional training to staff before nearly 60% of exclusions, and almost a quarter of exclusions were preceded by a program hiring other staff to help in their classroom.

In 2019-2020, administrators reported adding a behavioral aide to the excluded child's classroom in 22.2% of cases. In 2019-2020, an additional item was also added, asking if programs met with parents before the exclusion. Overall, the rate was high; administrators indicated that they met with parents of 77.8% of excluded children. At the same time, this means that nearly a quarter of children were excluded without the administrator meeting with their parents. **In line with the expectations of the law, however, parent meetings happened before 100% of the reported planned transitions.**

Mental health consultation & evaluation referrals.

Figure 4 depicts programs' use of two key resources highlighted in the language of the legislation: Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC), and evaluations for Early Intervention (EI) or School District Special Education Evaluations. In 2018-2019 barely half of the excluded children received either of these prioritized interventions, indicating that **programs are not exhausting all resources stipulated in the law**. At the same time, transitioned children were more likely to be observed by an IECMHC or referred for evaluation. **Children who were expelled were the least likely to be observed by a consultant** although it should be noted that observation is not always necessary for a child to benefit from consultation services. **In 2019-2020, service utilization declined precipitously**. Less than a third of excluded children were observed by a consultant, and less than half were referred for evaluations. This most likely reflects the effects of COVID-19 related closures and restrictions to specialists entering classrooms to prevent transmission.



In response to stakeholders' requests, additional questions were added to the 2019-2020 survey about the program's IECMHC experiences regardless of expulsion. In the original 2017-2018 report, 44% of programs reported having used consultation in the past, and most had favorable experiences but excessive wait times or lack of availability in their region precluded their use of the resource to respond to challenging behavior. In the more recent survey, utilization rates were lower (37%) despite many efforts to raise awareness and increase accessibility as part of the 2019 Preschool Development Block Grant. Most requests for consultation were made before the shelter-in-place order, and over half of requests were in response to a specific child's challenging behavior. Comparatively, fewer requests for consultation were for proactive support such as professional development for teachers (20%) or to help support a parent or family (10%).

Programs (N= 88) that did not use IECMHC in the 2019-2020 school year were asked to indicate why they had not made use of the free service. Interestingly, the prior complaints of long wait times and low availability made up less than 5% of responses. Instead, the three most common explanations were that programs felt they did not need the service, did not know what consultation is, or did not know how to access a consultant (see [Table 5](#)).

Further, programs that endorsed one of these knowledge barriers to using consultation were engaging in exclusion – a quarter of programs that reported they did not need services had excluded at least one child last year. **Nearly 40% who had never heard of IECMHC had made at least one exclusion during that same year.**

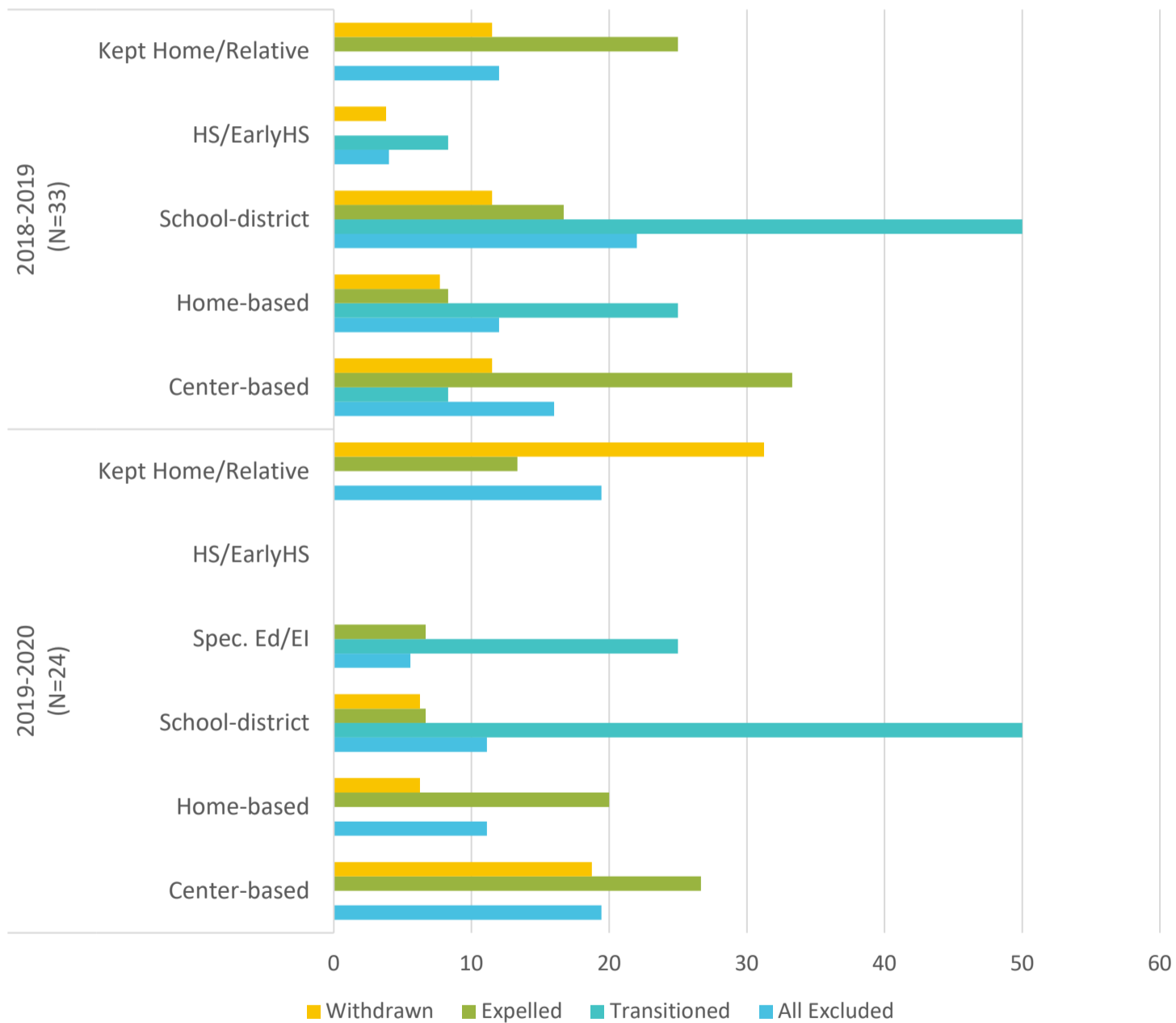
Table 5: Common reasons for not using IECMHC		
Reason for not requesting IECMHC	% endorsed	% excluding who endorsed
We have no need for services	35%	26.3%
I have never heard of IECMHC	22%	38.9%
I'm not sure where I would find one	20%	17.5%

Transitions after Exclusion

To ascertain what happens to children after they have been excluded from early care and education settings, administrators were asked to report to the best of their knowledge, where parents enrolled their child next, if at all. Unfortunately, there was significant missing data on this question, especially for children whose parents withdrew them. [Figure 5](#) shows the proportions for children with complete data. These data, like all in this convenience sample study, should be interpreted with caution. Future studies using parent reports will yield much more accurate and complete data around subsequent care following exclusion.

Nevertheless, there are some interesting themes to examine. Firstly, in both years, it is evident that most children whose transitions are planned end up in public school-district preschool (or EI/Special Education as was separately asked 2019-2020). Another sizeable proportion in both years attended center-based care following their exclusion, especially if they were expelled. Finally, it is concerning to see that **nearly 20% of excluded children do not attend another early learning environment and are cared for by a relative at home after being excluded**. While these data cannot explain why parents choose not to enroll their child elsewhere, it is likely that these children will miss out on the social, emotional, and academic benefits of early childhood education during a crucial developmental period.

Figure 5: % Receiving Programs by Exclusion Type



RECOMMENDATIONS

Although these data are not without limitations and findings described herein are not generalizable, they remain some of the only information available to stakeholders about the implementation and impact of IL PA 100-0105. Based on the findings described here, we offer the following recommendations:

Enhance commitments to equity statewide.

While it has been reassuring to see overall rates of exclusion come down over the past 3 years, our data continues to demonstrate the same disproportionality that is seen nationwide. Boys and black children are being excluded at higher rates compared to their levels of enrollment. Illinois currently has several initiatives and work groups related to early childhood racial equity and we hope that exclusionary discipline will continue to be a primary focus. While Illinois' legislation explicitly calls out training around implicit bias, programs may need a more concrete operationalization of this construct, and on-going time and space for reflective practice (in addition to one-time training) to support their staff in overcoming bias and disrupting systemic inequities. It is also important that conversations around the exclusion of children with special needs (IEPs and developmental delays) and children in foster care continue to take place. Although COVID shed new light on inequalities in many social service systems, challenges around finding and accessing adequate supports for children are not new. Finally, findings related to substantial variation in exclusion rates by program and funding type point to the need to ensure equitable access to knowledge and resources across all sectors of the early childhood system. Home-based programs in particular need additional supports given that they both excluded proportionally more children and tended to receive many children excluded from other programs. Beyond program administrators, other early childhood stakeholders such as DCFS representatives and social service caseworkers should have access to training about the law as well as how to monitor and support programs and families with appropriate resources.

Further clarify and support “planned transitions.”

These data indicate that higher-need children – those with IEPs or who faced greater adversity – are the ones experiencing planned transitions and they often are received by school district programs. However, various indicators collected from administrators since the beginning of this study have suggested a consistent lack of understanding of what is meant by a “planned transition.” Through self-evaluations, answers to objective questions, and descriptions of planned transitions, we know that this is a major knowledge gap. Thus, we encourage the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) to not only create guidelines around what is meant by “planned transition,” but to put forth a concerted training effort to ensure that this information is being disseminated to and understood by program administrators throughout the state. Further, given what is known about workforce shortages (Main & Yarborough, 2018) and administrators' job demands, we recommend that assistance or coordination be provided, possibly through local Child Care Resource and Referral Networks who can track openings across a community.

Relatedly, there continues to be a lack of awareness of available resources which programs can engage to support the retention of children. Most glaring are the gaps in knowledge of I/ECMHC which was explicitly named in the legislation. Educational campaigns should also include information on this resource and others (e.g., developmental screenings, referrals for evaluations, and multi-tiered systems of support such as the Pyramid Model). Beyond basic awareness, however, programs would benefit from understanding the structure and purpose of consultation so that it is not treated as an emergency response and is instead engaged proactively to build capacity before staff feel they are in crisis. Finally, these data point to the possibility of children's internalizing and externalizing behavior triggering different responses from programs. Information and training about how to support and retain children displaying emotionally disruptive classroom behaviors may be additionally beneficial.

Prioritize state-wide data collection and data literacy.

Though our longitudinal data collection has been critical to informing policy conversations for the past several years, we have been limited by the use of convenience samples and large amounts of missing data. Specifically, participants continue to not report demographic data on excluded children (particularly race/ethnicity), regardless of the several different survey techniques we have utilized. To fully capture the pervasiveness of exclusionary discipline in Illinois, and more accurately speak to disparities, it is critical that ISBE and DCFS utilize accessible data platforms that allow for disaggregated analyses. Further, while a system is the first step in this process, it is equally critical that the state contribute resources to building data literacy among our early childhood workforce. Programs should feel supported and empowered to use data to not only inform statewide policy, but to improve their own internal structures.

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Contribute to Ongoing Research

The Study of Families' Opportunities and Choices after Children's Early Exclusion

Families of children who have experienced exclusionary discipline may be eligible to participate in an ongoing research study. Please visit: <https://sites.google.com/uic.edu/focceestudy> to learn more.