

In Brief: Enrollment, Expulsion and Resource Use in Wisconsin Child Care¹



Summary

This brief report provides information from a survey of Wisconsin's providers of regulated early care and education services about how they address the needs of young children with challenging behaviors. A key finding indicates that almost half of respondents report the use of community and regional resources - school staff, early intervention specialists, peers, mental health specialists and primary care providers - for information and support. Another important finding was that respondents reported expelling children most often due to children's challenging behaviors but parents most often removed children from care due to conflicts with staff.

The survey indicates an expulsion rate among respondents of 6.5 per 1,000 young children enrolled. The data also reflects a rate of 4.9 per 1,000 young children removed by their parents or guardians from early care and education (ECE) settings. Findings from the survey indicate that low income black boys appear to be expelled more often than their non-Hispanic white peers at a rate of 9.4 per 1,000 and disproportionately to the percentage of black children enrolled. This finding is consistent with national data showing inequities in early childhood expulsions.

Despite a number of limitations, the study confirms existing research on preschool and child care expulsions and suggests several paths to strengthen ECE providers' ability to address the needs of children with challenging behaviors. Among the recommendations is ensuring that providers are aware of and have access to community and regional resources; expanding access to consultants with expertise in young children's social and emotional development; and enhancing providers' skill in developing positive relationships with parents.

Background

Children's earliest experiences matter. During the first few years of children's lives, the brain undergoes its most rapid development. Brain science confirms that early experiences determine whether there will be a solid or weak foundation for development of the architecture of the brain and sets the stage for all future learning, behavior and health. There is also compelling evidence that low-income, minority children benefit the most from high quality child care. A number of studies tells us that these children are also the most likely to be expelled or removed from these settings due to challenging behaviors.²

Expelling and removing young children from early care and education settings often sets a negative trajectory that impacts their ability to be successful in school, establish trusting relationships with adult

¹ This project was a collaborative undertaking by the Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health, Supporting Families Together Association, Wisconsin Early Childhood Association and the Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health with support from the Wisconsin Departments of Children and Families, Health Services and Public Instruction.

² U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. "2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First Look." June 7, 2016.

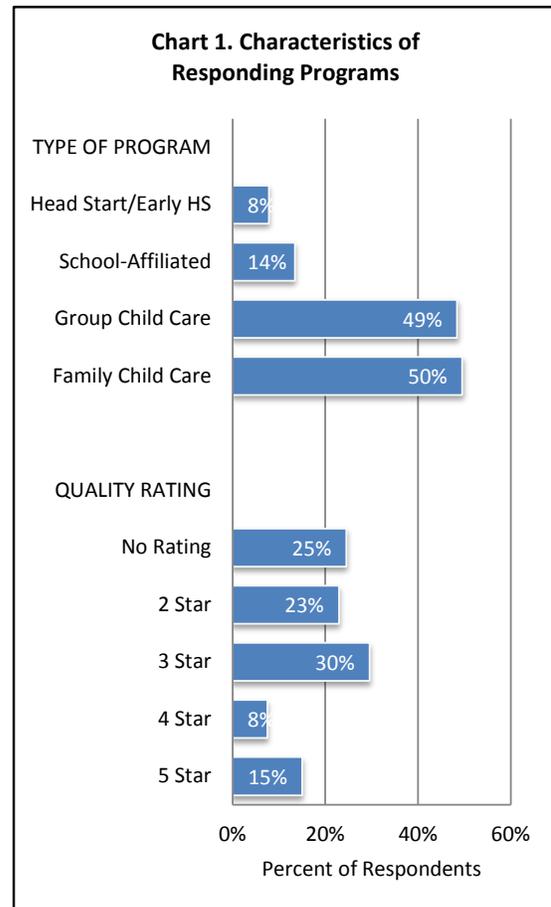
caregivers and be physically and emotionally healthy.³ Research tells us that young children who are expelled are 10 times more likely to drop out of school, experience academic failure and grade retention, and enter the juvenile justice system than those who are not expelled.⁴ In addition, parents of expelled children may have difficulty finding alternative care resulting in missed work and even job loss.⁵

In November 2015, an on-line survey was distributed to more than 4,100 early care and education (ECE) providers – child care, public preschools and Head Start – via list-serves managed by the Supporting Families Together Association, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). About 1,000 surveys were mailed to providers with no known email address. The overall response rate was 12 percent (n = 621).

The goal of the survey was to assess providers’ use of community resources to aid in addressing young children’s challenging behaviors, including hitting, throwing items, screaming, being defiant or non-compliant, inhibited or withdrawn, overly anxious or very sad. The survey was also designed to determine the extent to which young children, those ages 5 and under, were being expelled from ECE settings to update data from a similar survey completed in 2010.⁶

The Respondents

Chart 1 summarizes information about the 621 ECE programs that responded to the survey. Head Start and Early Head Start programs made up about 8 percent of the sample. Child care programs affiliated with or in partnership with a school district comprised 14 percent of the sample.⁷ Nearly half of the respondents were



Note: Percentages under “Type of Program” sum to more than 100% because respondents could select more than one category to describe their program.

³ Maryam Adamu and Lauren Hogan. “Point of Entry: The Preschool-to-Prison Pipeline.” Center for American Progress. October 2015.

⁴ Administration for Children & Families. “State and Local Action to Prevent Expulsion and Suspension in Early Learning Settings. 2016.

⁵ PDG*TA. “Suspension & Expulsion in Preschool Development States: Policies and Practices.” 2016.

⁶ Supporting Families Together Association. “Child Retention in Wisconsin Child Care Settings: Understanding the Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors that Impact Expulsion and Retention in Early Care and Education. 2010.

⁷ School district 4K programs are not included among the survey respondents. While the initial survey invitation was sent to school district programs, ambiguities in the wording of questions about program type made it difficult to determine the nature of programs operated by school districts. Because school 4K programs operate under different rules regarding expulsions than other ECE programs do, programs operated only by school districts were

family child care providers, and a nearly equal percentage of providers identified themselves as providing group child care.

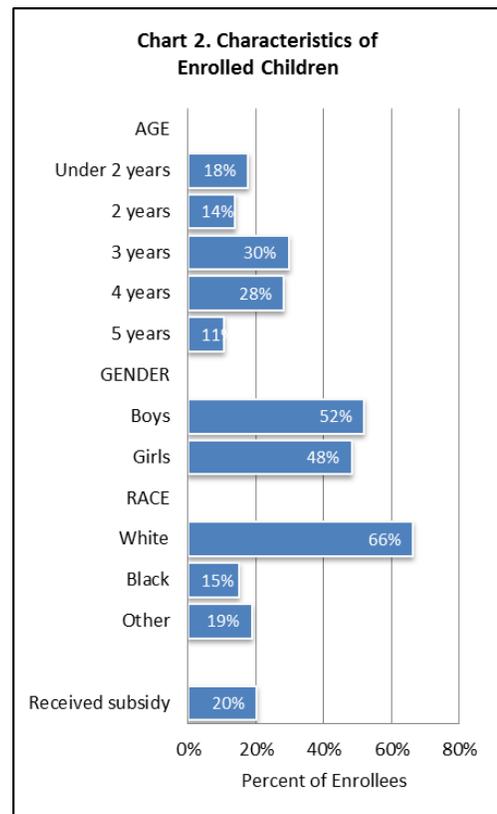
Program Quality. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were participating in YoungStar, Wisconsin's child care quality rating and improvement system, administered by DCF. Any child care provider serving children from birth through school age can participate in YoungStar. Participating programs are rated from 1 Star (for programs that do not meet health and safety standards) to 5 Stars (for the highest quality of care). The system is intended to help both parents and providers; parents use the ratings to locate quality child care, and providers receive training, technical assistance and support to help them improve their programs and achieve or maintain a higher rating.

The survey respondents did not include any providers with a 1 Star rating. Just over half of the respondents represented programs with a 2 Star or 3 Star rating, while programs with the highest ratings - 4 Star or 5 Star programs - made up less than a quarter of the sample.

One-quarter of the responding programs did not have a YoungStar rating. These included programs that had not yet been rated at the time of the survey, those not participating in the rating system, and those who did not respond to the relevant survey question.

The respondents in this study include more 4 and 5 Star rated programs than is true of the population of ECE programs in Wisconsin. For example, 2 Star rated programs make up 23 percent of the survey respondents but 50 percent of YoungStar programs statewide, and are thus considerably under-represented in this study. The highest quality programs are somewhat over-represented among the survey respondents compared to their representation statewide.

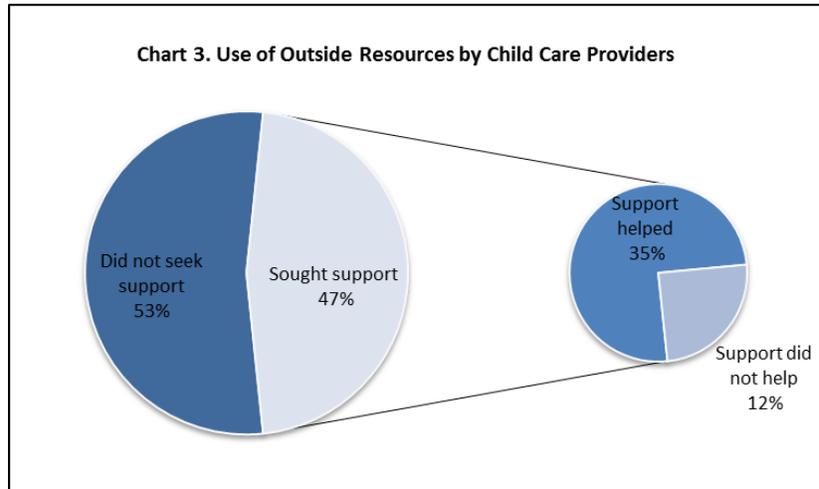
Enrollment. The ECE programs responding to the survey reported enrolling a total of 30,500 children who were 0-5 years of age in the previous 12 months. Enrollments ranged from one to 1,300 children, with a median of 17 and a mean of 49. Chart 2 summarizes the characteristics of the children enrolled in these programs. Nearly one-third of the children were 2 years old or younger, almost 60 percent were 3 or 4 years old, and 5 year olds represented about 11 percent of the children in these programs. Just over half of the children enrolled in programs operated by the survey respondents were boys.



Two-thirds of the children were reported as white, 15 percent were black, and the rest were another race. This last group includes children who were reported as Hispanic, Asian, American Indian or "Other Race"; these groups were combined due to the small numbers of children in these groups.

excluded from the data set. Only child care programs operated in partnership by a school district and some other entity were retained.

Finally, about 20 percent of the children enrolled in these programs were financially supported via Wisconsin Shares. Shares is a federal child care subsidy program that helps low income families pay for child care while the parents work and/or go to school. Providers who accept children from families participating in the subsidy program are required to participate in YoungStar.



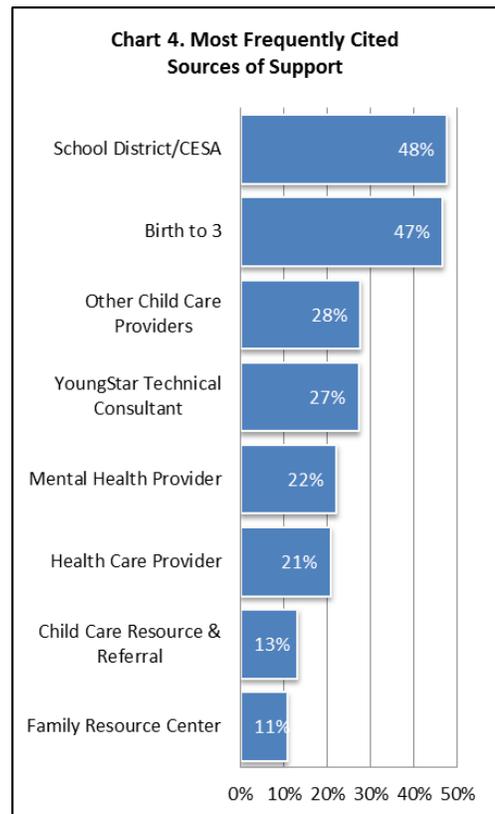
The Findings

The following charts and text highlight findings from the 621 survey respondents.

Use of Resources. The primary purpose of the survey was to assess the extent to which providers used external resources to address challenging behaviors sometimes exhibited by young children. When asked whether or not they sought outside support or consultation in the previous 12 months to help manage a child with challenging behaviors, 53 percent of the ECE providers who responded to the survey reported that they did not seek help. Of the 47 percent of providers who did report seeking such support, most said that doing so helped them to keep the child in their program.

The respondents who reported using outside resources to help them deal with challenging behaviors were asked to select the type of resources they had used from a list of options. The items selected by at least 10 percent of respondents are shown in Chart 4.

The resources cited most often, by almost half of those who reported using outside resources for support, were school districts and CESAs⁸ and the Birth to 3 Program⁹ (47 percent). Just over a quarter of those using outside resources turned to other childcare providers or to consultants with the YoungStar quality rating and improvement system. Primary



⁸ Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESAs) are regional agencies that partner with school districts, schools and educators, providing services to help educators meet the needs of their students.

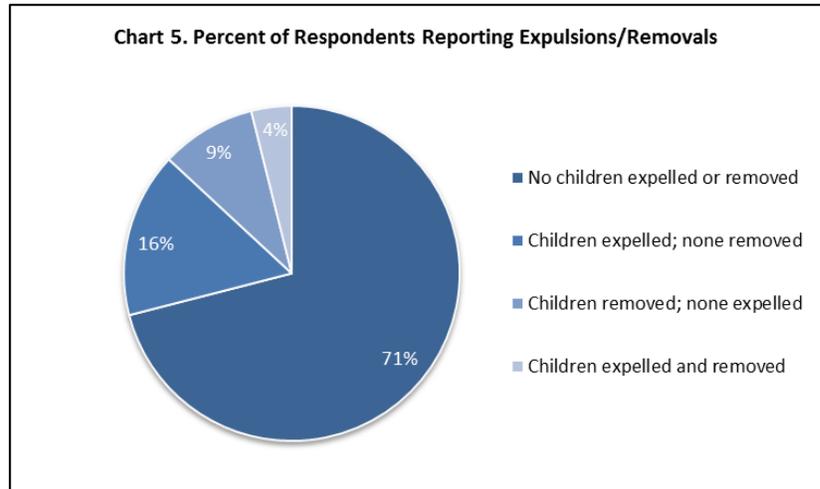
⁹ Birth to 3 is Wisconsin's early intervention program that provides services and supports for families with infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.

care providers and mental health specialists were less often used as resources (22 and 21 percent, respectively).

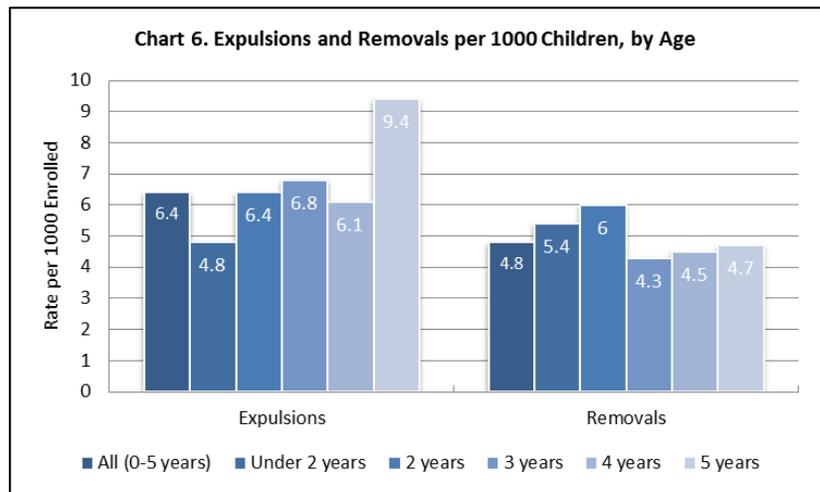
Respondents also added a number of resources not included on the original list, such as:

- Training, both classroom and online
- Teachers and administrators in own program
- Internet resources
- Consultation with parents
- Educational institutions such as universities and community colleges

Expulsions and Removals. The survey asked ECE providers to indicate whether any children had been expelled or removed from their program in the previous 12 months, excluding children removed because the family moved, the parents decided against having the child in the ECE setting, or the family could not pay for the care. “Expulsion” refers to a situation in which a child was terminated from a program at the provider’s initiative, while “removal” refers to a child being removed from a program by a parent or guardian.



As Chart 5 shows, most of the providers (71 percent) reported that no children had been either expelled or removed from their program in the previous 12 months. Almost 20 percent of the providers responding to the survey reported expelling one or more children, and 13 percent reported that one or more children were removed from their program by a parent or guardian in the previous 12 months. A very small percentage (4 percent) reported that children were both expelled and removed from their program in the previous 12 months.

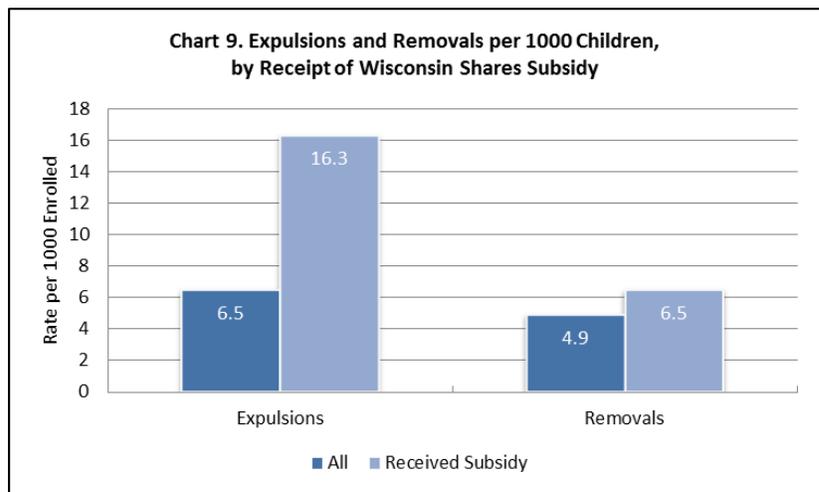
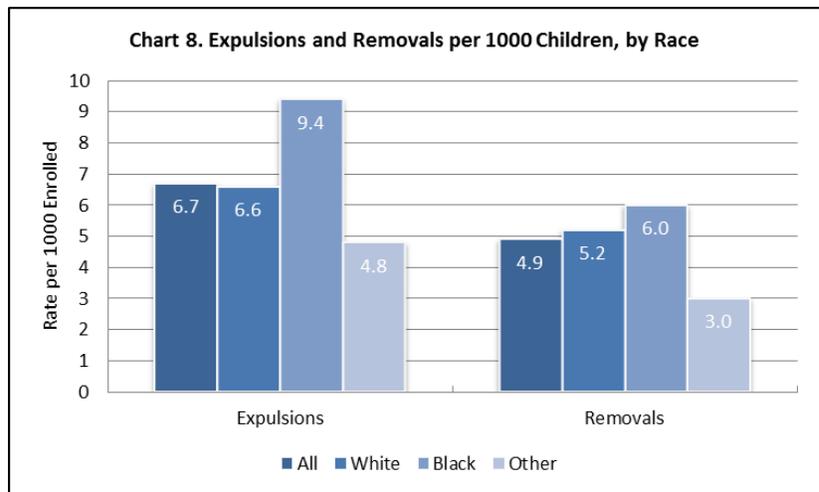
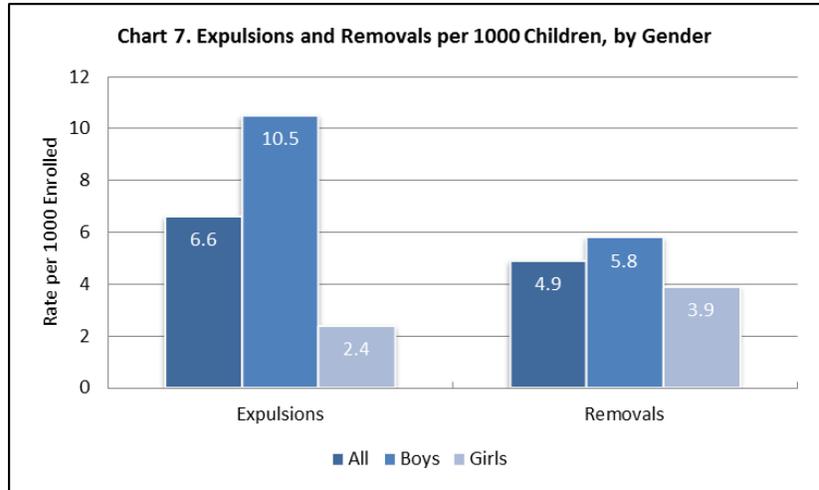


The providers who reported expelling children indicated that a total of 198 children were expelled, which is less than one percent of the 30,500 children enrolled by all 621 providers during the period in question. This is the same as saying that these providers expelled children at a rate of 6.5 children per 1,000 children enrolled. One hundred fifty children in all were reported removed by a parent or guardian; again, this is less than one percent of all the children enrolled, and equates to a rate of 4.9 children removed for every 1,000 children enrolled.

Expulsion and removal rates varied for different groups of children, however.¹⁰ As shown in Chart 6, 5 year olds were expelled at a higher rate, 9.4 per 1,000, than younger children were, while children 2 years and younger were removed by a parent at slightly higher rates than were older children. Overall, expulsions occurred at a somewhat higher rate than removals.

Boys were both expelled by a provider and removed from a program by a parent at higher rates than girls, but the difference is especially great in the case of expulsions. The rate of expulsions for boys is 4.4 times greater than the rate for girls.

Black children were both expelled and removed from programs at higher rates than white children



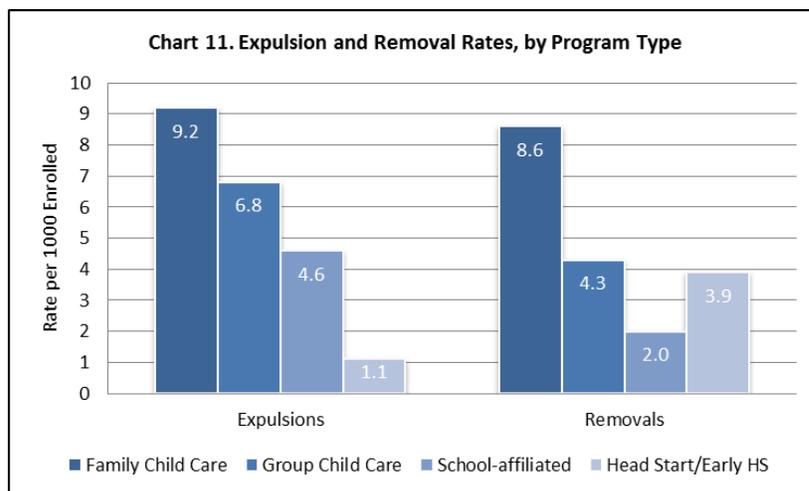
¹⁰ In the charts that follow, note that the expulsion and removal rates for “all” children may vary slightly depending on the analysis; this is the result of missing data to the questions about children’s demographic characteristics.

or children of other races. Black children were expelled at a rate that was 1.4 times higher than that for white children and 2 times higher than the rate for children of other races.

These findings are consistent with national data indicating that black preschoolers (children ages 3 -5) are 3.6 times more likely to be suspended or expelled as their white peers.¹¹ Studies of expulsion in child care settings are even higher, ranging from 4.5 percent to 40 percent.¹²

Finally, children whose family participated in Wisconsin Shares to help pay for child care were expelled at a rate of 16.3 children per 1,000, and were removed from a program by a parent at a rate of 6.5 children per 1,000.

Program characteristics also affected expulsion and removal rates. As seen in Chart 10, higher quality programs, as measured by YoungStar ratings, had lower expulsion and removal rates than lower-rated programs. Programs with a 2 Star rating, for example, expelled children at a rate that was more than 2.5 times higher than the rate of expulsion among 5 Star rated programs.



The type of program mattered greatly as to the rate of expulsions and removals. Programs which described themselves as family child care had the highest expulsion and removal rates, while Head Start and Early Head Start programs and school district-affiliated programs had the lowest rates.

The survey asked about the primary reason for the expulsion or removal of a child; these results are presented in Table 1. Providers most often reported that a child was expelled due to the child’s behavior rather than due to conflict with the family or being unable to meet the child’s needs. In contrast, the removal of a child by a parent was most often reported as being due to conflict between the parent and

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. “2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First Look.” June 7, 2016.

¹² Walter S. Gilliam. “Expulsion and Suspension in Early Childhood.” Slide presentation for the Preschool Development Grant Technical Assistance Webinar. September 9, 2016.

program staff rather than to the child’s behavior or an inability to meet the child’s needs. Because this information was being reported by ECE providers, it is unknown whether the parents of children expelled or removed from a program would have the same interpretation of the situation or if parents would cite the same reasons for such an action.

Table 1. Reasons for Expulsion or Removal	Expulsion		Removal by a Parent	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Child’s behavior	143	72.0%	22	14.7%
Conflict between staff and family	36	18.1%	89	59.3%
Program was unable to meet the child’s needs	54	27.2%	44	29.3%

Conclusions

The study has several limitations. Respondents were encouraged to gather any administrative data needed before commencing in order to respond accurately. Still, respondents may have reported the number and characteristics of children enrolled, expelled, or removed during the previous year based on individual recollection.

The main limitation, however involves the sample of programs that responded to the survey. There are concerns of self-selection bias based on the non-representative distribution of ECE providers who responded compared to the expected distribution of ECE providers in Wisconsin. Additionally, the response rate of 12 percent is low. Certain types of programs are either excluded or under-represented compared to what is known about the universe of ECE providers in the state.

Finally, the responding providers reported expelling less than one percent of the young children enrolled in their programs. Existing research in this domain has found higher rates of expulsions in ECE settings. For example, in a national study of preschool programs, including public preschools, Head Start and child care, the rates of expulsion in non-public child care settings ranged from 12.5 per 1,000 to 7.6 per 1,000.¹³ It seems likely that programs that did not expel children are over-represented in the sample, while programs that did expel children may have been less likely to decline to participate in the survey.

Despite such limitations, the study both confirms other research and points to several useful avenues to better support ECE providers and the children they care for. The findings indicate that about half of the respondents seek outside resources to help them identify strategies for addressing children’s challenging behaviors, thus, allowing the child to remain in the program. This suggests that more work is needed to further strengthen the ability of providers to support children’s healthy social and emotional development. Such actions should include:

- ✓ Encourage and support development of strong relationships between ECE providers, primary care providers and mental health specialists.
- ✓ Expand access to consultants with expertise in young children’s social and emotional development for ECE and primary care providers.
- ✓ Increase awareness of and access to existing resources among ECE providers.

¹³ Walter S. Gilliam. “Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion Rates in state prekindergarten programs. *FDC Policy Brief, Series No. 3*. May 2005.

- ✓ Provide technical assistance for ECE providers in developing positive relationships with parents, enhancing communication and problem-solving skills.
- ✓ Promote implementation of evidence-based strategies by ECE providers for supporting children with challenging behaviors.

Even with noted caveats, this project confirms national and other state data suggesting that the achievement gap in academic performance often begins with the youngest children. There is a robust body of evidence confirming that low-income minority children benefit the most from participation in high quality early care and education programs. There is also growing evidence that these children are the most likely to be expelled or removed from these settings due to challenging behaviors.



For additional information about the study, please contact the Supporting Families Together Association (SFTA) at info@supportingfamieliestogether.org or 1.888.713.5437. SFTA is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization working with community-based organizations to advocate, educate and build Wisconsin's capacity to deliver high quality early care and education experiences to all of Wisconsin's children.