

Addressing Suspensions and Expulsions: A Guide for Families

Children cannot learn if they are excluded from places of learning. Exclusionary discipline practices like suspensions and expulsions threaten the well-being of children during an important time in their development. To reduce and prevent these practices, early learning programs and schools should engage families in conversation about behavioral expectations.

“Expulsions and suspensions are not child behaviors; they are adult decisions.”

—Dr. Walter Gilliam, Associate Professor of Child Psychiatry and Psychology at the Yale University Child Study Center, and Director of the The Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy



The Trying Together public policy agenda calls for an end to suspensions and expulsions for children birth through age nine in all early childhood settings.

Suspensions and expulsions are not developmentally appropriate ways to address behaviors.

- Removing a child from the classroom due to a behavior may damage the relationship between the child, their family, and the teacher.
- Children need support to learn and develop social and emotional skills. Just as students are not punished for needing to develop a specific cognitive skill, they should not be punished for needing to develop a social or emotional skill.

Exclusionary discipline is a problem.

- Racial disparities exist in both pre-kindergarten and K-12; Black students are three times more likely to be suspended and expelled than white students.
- Students with disabilities are two times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions.
- Choosing to exclude a child may lead to more negative behaviors.
- Suspensions in the early years increase the likelihood of suspension throughout a child's school years.





Defining Suspensions and Expulsions

- In-School Suspension—child is removed from classroom or activities with other children
- Out-of-School Suspension—child is removed from the school or program for a certain period of time
- Expulsion—child is permanently dismissed from school or program; this includes if a school or program encourages a family to voluntarily leave based on a child's behavior
- Exclusionary Discipline—disciplinary practices that remove or exclude a child from the classroom and peers, including suspensions and expulsions

Resources

Research shows that suspensions and expulsions disproportionately impact students of color and students with disabilities. Locally, organizations are working to ensure all students are treated fairly and to end these practices. Below are a few organizations and resources in Western Pennsylvania for families with concerns about children receiving suspensions and expulsions.

- **A+ Schools** serves as Pittsburgh's community alliance for public education and advocates for equitable education for all students. In addition to offering trainings and workshops for families, the organization also provides guidance about suspensions and expulsions. For questions contact Amie Matson, Director of Family and Youth Engagement at 412.697.1298 x113 or amatson@aplusschools.org.
- **Education Rights Network** of One Pennsylvania develops and strengthens parent leaders to advocate for inclusive and quality education, focusing on collective action to achieve disability and racial justice in public schools. The Education Rights Network advocated for the suspension ban in Pittsburgh Public Schools. Learn more on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/EducationRightsNetwork/>
- **The Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership** (PEAL) Center works with families, children, and youth with disabilities to help them understand their rights. PEAL parent advisors offer individual assistance to support families in advocating for their children. PEAL also hosts events and trainings to educate and empower families and to ensure children, youth, and young adults with disabilities and special healthcare needs can participate as full members in their schools and communities. Visit the PEAL website to get more information: <https://pealcenter.org/>
- **The Education Law Center** (ELC) works to ensure all children have access to quality public education. ELC leads work nationally and throughout the state against the use of exclusionary discipline. The Education Client Assistance Program (ED-CAP) provides services free of charge which include information, referrals, legal advice, and advocacy to families, youth, community members, etc. Call 412.258.2120 to ask a question or identify an issue. www.elc-pa.org/about/contact/
- **The Local Task Force** (LTF) provides opportunities for parents, guardians and community members to ask questions about special education services as well as address concerns that affect students with disabilities. In addition to the State Task Force, there are 29 others in the area. For other LTFs, reach out to your local Intermediate Unit.
Pittsburgh LTF
<https://goo.gl/UhK71f>
412.529.2300
Allegheny County LTF
<http://www.ltf3.org/>
412.323.3996

For more information or to view the full white paper, visit www.tryingtogether.org.

