This guidance document supports Pennsylvania's Office of Child Development and Early Learning's (OCDEL) *Announcement regarding the Reduction of Expulsion and Suspension in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania*. The following Federal and Pennsylvania offices have created program policies applicable to any and all of their programming:

- OCDEL, which administers Child Care Works, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts (PKC), Pennsylvania's Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP), provides Early Intervention Service (EI) Services, and manages Keystone STARS;
- The U.S. Departments of Health & Human Services and Education, which administer The Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act;
- The Federal Offices of Head Start and Child Care

These agencies have come together to support the children we serve. It is vital to have a collaborative, coordinated, and responsive system. It must be one in which we work together to create supports for children, and the adults in their lives. When we do this, we prevent, and reduce the use of exclusionary discipline practices regardless of the funding source supporting a child's attendance in an early learning program.

In July 2017, all Pennsylvania early learning programs were informed of the need to develop program specific policies to prevent, and support the reduction of the suspension and expulsion of young children from their programs. A key part of maintaining a child's enrollment in any early learning setting is supporting the promotion the child's social-emotional health using evidence-based practices such as: quality coaching for teachers, positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) models, and infant and early childhood mental health consultation (ECMH). Starting in July 2018, early learning programs can expect their Keystone STARS administrator, PKC Program Specialist, and/or HSSAP Program Specialist to begin asking to see a copy of the policy during annual review. A copy of the policy must also be made available to Certification Representatives during annual inspection.

Expulsions and suspensions are not child behaviors; they are adult decisions.
– Dr. Walter Gilliam

Suspension is an action that is administered because of a child's developmentally inappropriate behavior and requires that a child not be present in the classroom or the program for a specified period. Expulsion is defined as the complete and permanent removal of a child from an early childhood program because of challenging behavior or non-infectious health condition (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). For example:

1. Excluding a child from the classroom, whether by placing them in another part of the building, or excluding a child from the building; or
2. Sending a child home early or limiting the number of hours per day they can attend; or
3. Un-enrolling a child because they are "not a good fit" with the program.

Suspension and expulsion does not occur when a program works with a child's supports team to determine that there is a more appropriate placement available for the child.

Suspension and expulsion are not effective discipline strategies. They do not result in positive outcomes for children, their families, or their teachers or programs. In fact, the opposite is true. Suspension and expulsion can cause several negative outcomes across development, health, and education (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Developing fair and effective policies around suspension and expulsion is a great opportunity to connect with the families you serve and with community resources. Below is a list of required and suggested activities and considerations to ensure your program's policies and practices are appropriate and effective in reducing suspensions and/or expulsions:

ALIGN WITH FEDERAL POLICIES

New program policies need to align with existing federal policies

- Your program policies are already compliant with the law. When developing new policies, it is important to refresh your memory of what the law requires.
- Re-familiarize yourself with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Civil Rights Compliance.
    - Attend professional development workshops and trainings to ensure a robust understanding of the law.
- Remember, federal and state laws protect children in publicly funded programs (Head Start, CCDBG programs). Any child with a disability or **one suspected of having a disability** has additional legal protections under the ADA, IDEA, and Section 504, including the right to notice of any change in placement, and an opportunity to challenge that recommended change.

HIGHLY SKILLED WORKFORCE

Teachers need support through education and technical assistance

- Assess what professional development your staff needs; use individualized training plans that can be used to build your program's Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) plan.

- Do your teachers come from the community you serve? Seek training for all staff on Cultural Competence and Implicit Bias. Talk frequently together about what you have learned.
    - Topics include Race and Gender Equity, Homelessness, and English Language Learners.
- Ensure intentional teaching of social-emotional skills for all children.
- Consider implementing Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS) in your program.
    - For more information about PBIS go to EITA's Professional Development page and scroll down to PBIS Administrator Overview.
    - To learn how to get started check out PaPBS Network.
- Encourage your leadership team and staff to analyze how classroom function affects child behavior. Things to consider:
    - Transitions
    - Daily schedule
    - Physical environment
    - Lesson planning
    - Assessment

- Consider the regular and ongoing use of research-based Social Emotional Curriculum or homegrown curriculum that is cross walked with the PA Early Learning Standards. Make it an integral part of everyday life in your classroom.
  - Paths Training
  - Second Step
  - The Incredible Years
  - Visit the Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation for other suggested curricula

- Reach out for onsite coaching/consultation, and group training to support the use of developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, trauma informed practices as an alternative to disciplinary action. These forms of individual assistance are available from your Quality Coach, PKC/HSSAP Specialist, EI Supervisor, or the OCDEL CONNECT line can refer you to supports.

STRONG FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Families and early learning programs are partners

It's extremely rare for a child to be expelled from preschool when the teacher and parent know and like each other. – Dr. Walter Gilliam

- Think about the teacher-family relationships in your program. Do teachers have the time and space they need to develop deep relationships with families?
- Develop a process for learning about the families your program serves. Find out what matters most to families and how they would like to communicate with your program and their child(ren)'s teacher(s).
- Develop ways to recognize and incorporate these values into daily practices and the learning environment. Suggested practices:
  - Home visits
  - Parent-Teacher Conferences
  - Intake questionnaires
  - Family visit nights
  - Expectations for staff-parent interactions in staff handbook

- Create a process for developing mutually beneficial partnerships with families including a family group to help co-construct policies and procedures around suspension and expulsion.

SETTING GOALS AND TRACKING DATA

Understanding the full picture in your program

- Identify ways to determine success of new policies and/or procedures.
- Include staff representatives in reviewing information on specific child behaviors and planning systematic responses to child and staff needs.

- Train staff on referral process, program policies, and goal setting for children.
- Identify resources for children in need of intensive services.
- Create a tracking process for steps taken to support child.
- Seek data for support; for more information check out PreventExpulsion.org.
- Allow the time that is necessary for staff to document behaviors, collect data, and set goals for children.
- Review and analyze data from previous expulsions/suspensions to determine root causes and inequities.
- Bring staff together to develop a family-program partnership plan (include trainings, discussion groups, staff meetings, policy review); for guidance check out PreventExpulsion.org.

UNIVERSAL SCREENING

Ensure all children have the supports they need and deserve

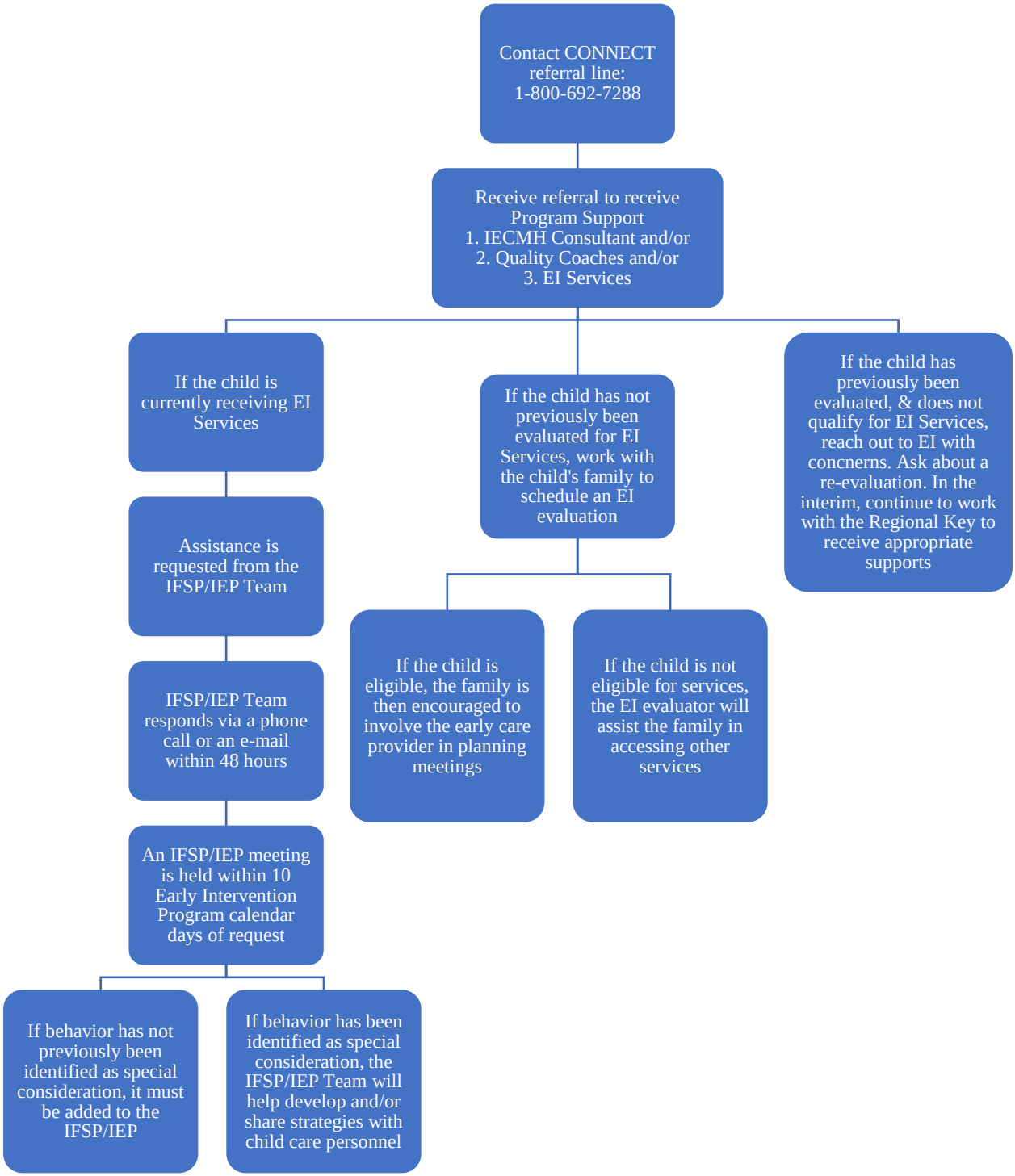
- Conduct developmental and behavioral screenings with children within 45 days of program entry and then follow the screening tool periodicity; monitor and follow up as necessary for early detection.
    - For help selecting developmental screening tools, check out Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!
- Choose teaching strategies that match children's developmental abilities.
- Consider intensive interventions when necessary; for guidance check out PreventExpulsion.org.
- Ensure that the tiers of the Pyramid Model are in place so that fewer children exhibit persistent, challenging behaviors that require the higher levels of intensive supports.
    - For a framework of practices that support social and emotional development, check out the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.

ACCESS TO ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Additional support for early learning programs is available

- Because the early childhood community is diverse, there is no one right way to write a policy. Rather, the policy must reflect the cultural context and individual need of a program and its local community.
- Webinars were recently presented by the federal Administration for Children and Families to educate the community on the federal policy statement. Click here to watch.
- In addition to the suggested resources listed throughout this document, continue to check the PA Key website for up-to-date guidance and resources.

What to do when you have a child with unique needs/challenging behavior?[1]



[1] If you have pre-existing or established relationship with your local EI Services provider or Regional Key, please contact them directly to receive program support.

Resources:

(in the order in which they appear in the document)

Announcement regarding the Reduction of Expulsion and Suspension in Early Childhood Programs in Pennsylvania: https://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/Final_ELS_ Sus_Exp_2017.pdf

Commonly asked questions about child care centers and the ADA: https://www.ada.gov/childqanda.htm

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/

Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, Federal Laws and Guidance: http://ectacenter.org/topics/inclusion/legis/fedlegisl.asp#rehab

Race Matters: https://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=Programs_Other

Announcement: OCDEL -13 #01, Children Experiencing Homelessness: http://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/Early%20Learning/Early%20Intervention/Laws%20Regulations%20and%20Announcements/Announcements/2013/OCDEL%2013-01%20Children%20Experiencing%20Homelessness%20Announcement.pdf

Guidelines for Working Effectively with ELL Families: https://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/ELinPA/ELL%20Toolkit/Working%20Effectively%20with%20Families.pdf

EITA's Professional Development Page: http://www.eita-pa.org/professional-development/

Pennsylvania Positive Behavior Support: http://www.papbs.org/ContentLoader.aspx?PageID=8409ccda-b7ed-4188-87d5-00d1c638dad2

Paths Training: http://www.pathstraining.com/main/

Second Step: http://www.secondstep.org/early-learning-curriculum

The Incredible Years: http://www.incredibleyears.com/

Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: https://www.ecmhc.org/tools/curricula.html

Prevent Expulsion, Data Collection: http://preventexpulsion.org/1a-develop-processes-for-data-based-decision-making/

Prevent Expulsion, Developing Family-Program: http://preventexpulsion.org/1b-implement-processes-for-developing-family-programschool-partnerships/

Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive

Prevent Expulsion, Developmental Screening and Assessment: http://preventexpulsion.org/1c-integrate-developmental-screening-and-assessment-into-the-programschool/

Pyramid Model: http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, Practical Strategies for Teachers/Caregivers: http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html#teachingskills

Office of the Administration for Children and Families, Reducing Suspension and Expulsion Practices in Early Childhood Settings: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/child-health-development/reducing-suspension-and-expulsion-practices

PA Key, Reduction of Expulsions and Suspensions in Early Childhood Settings: https://www.pakeys.org/pages/get.aspx?page=expulsion

References:

Morrison, G. M., & Skiba, R. J. (2001). Predicting violence from school misbehavior: Promises and perils. Psychology in the Schools, 38, 173-184

U.S. Department of Education, (2014), *Guiding Principles A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*. http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf