

The ECSE Update

A newsletter for professionals interested in supporting and educating young children with developmental delays and disabilities in Vermont.

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Welcome Back

It's hard to believe another school year has begun - especially since our sunny days this summer were few. Whether this is your first year or your fortieth, the butterflies of anticipation never seem to go away. As you settle into your space, curriculum, practices, and supports for a new group of preschoolers, we think highlighting the [Division for Early Childhood \(DEC\) Recommended Practices: Environment](#) area is a perfect match. We also bring focus to inclusion and exclusionary discipline in this issue. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) released several guidance documents and recommendations to help move toward the elimination of suspension and expulsion in early childhood. Exclusionary discipline removes young children from their preschool environment and creates stressful and isolating experiences for both the child and their family. Data shows that young children with disabilities and Black male students are much more likely to be suspended and expelled which brings up the matter of equity in early education.

DEC Recommended Practices: Environment

Young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays/disabilities learn, play, and engage with adults and peers within and across a multitude of environments such as home, school, childcare, and the neighborhood. [Environmental practices](#) refer to aspects of the space, materials (toys, books, etc.), equipment, routines, and activities that practitioners and families can intentionally alter to support each child's learning and functioning across developmental domains. The environmental practices we address in this section encompass the



physical environment (e.g., space, equipment, and materials), the social environment (e.g., interactions with peers, siblings, family members), and the temporal environment (e.g., sequence and length of routines and activities). They relate not only to supporting the child's access to learning opportunities but also ensuring their safety.

It is important for practitioners to remember that these environmental dimensions are inextricably intertwined for young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays/disabilities and their families. Through implementation of the environmental practices, practitioners and families can promote nurturing and responsive caregiving and learning environments that can foster each child's overall health and development.

There are six recommended practices found under the topic of Environment including *E1. Practitioners provide services and supports in natural and inclusive environments during daily routines and activities to promote the child's access to and participation in learning experiences.* Check out the [Environment Practice Improvement Tools](#) to aid you in implementing evidence-based practice and the [Environment Practice Guides for Families](#) which are intended for you to share with families. The Practice Guides are formatted for print as well as for viewing on mobile devices.

Suspension, Expulsion, and Special Education

Background

According to the most recent Civil Rights Data Collection (2017/2018), 7% of the nation's 1.5 million preschoolers were children with disabilities served under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and were expelled at rates 2.5 times greater than their share of the total preschool population. The disproportionality in suspension and expulsion is especially felt by Black, Native and multiracial children. Data from the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights show that students with disabilities were 200% more likely to be subjected to restraint or seclusion compared to peers without disabilities. Exclusionary discipline removes children from their preschool environment and creates stressful and isolating experiences for both the child and their family, leading to possible lifelong negative effects.

Vermont Act 35 states no child under 8 to be suspended or expelled except in the rarest occurrence of imminent threat. Additionally, [S.283 introduced an amendment to Act 35](#) expanding these restrictions to approved independent schools and private prekindergarten education programs. However, suspension and expulsion of preschoolers, including those with disabilities, continues to occur, reflecting national data.

Manifestation determination is a process, required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), which is conducted when considering the suspension or expulsion of a student with a disability that constitutes a change of educational placement. If a child is suspended or expulsion occurs for a child with a disability on an IEP or 504 Plan, for more than 10 days (consecutive or cumulative), the LEA must convene a manifestation determination hearing to determine if the removal is considered change of placement for the child.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has expressed concern with informal removals and shortened school days, practices in which a child is removed by school personnel for part or all of a school day, or even an indefinite period of time, in response to the child's behavior. OSEP addressed this concern in the [IDEA discipline requirements guidance package released in July 2022](#). In this guidance, OSEP reminded stakeholders:

- Despite their young age, preschool children with disabilities are too often removed from their current educational placement for disciplinary reasons.
- IDEA's disciplinary protections are available to children with disabilities who attend public preschool programs operated by a school district, those who attend preschool programs operated by another public agency (such as Head Start or community-based childcare), and those who are placed in a private preschool program by the school district to ensure the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

Evidence-Based Practices in Vermont

Research shows that implementing evidence-based, multi-tiered behavioral frameworks can help improve overall school climate, school safety, and academic achievement for all children, including children with disabilities. In general, behavioral supports are most effectively organized within a multi-tiered behavioral framework that provides instruction and clear behavioral expectations for all children, targeted intervention for small groups not experiencing success, and individualized supports and services for those needing the most intensive support.

The Vermont Agency of Education has implemented a **multi-tiered system of support (MTSS)** as a major component of its school improvement and effectiveness work. MTSS is an evidence-based approach to assessing and maximizing learning opportunities for all children. The MTSS framework helps educators individualize teaching and learning. **Early MTSS** aims to improve early learning, social and emotional well-being, and competence for children from birth through age 8. Using lessons learned from previous professional development efforts, Vermont Early MTSS focuses on building a **two-prong approach**. Early MTSS balances **building a system of support** for school-based programs, families, health providers, and community partners with **supporting evidence-based inclusion practices** in the classroom. For more information on Early MTSS in Vermont, please contact Amy Murphy, amy.murphy@vermont.gov.

Recommended Resources to Support the Prevention of Suspension and Expulsion of Young Children

- [Early Childhood Resource Guide: Collection and Use of Data to Eliminate Exclusionary Discipline](#). This document released this July by the US Department of Education, offers supportive resources to schools and early childhood programs in order to help eliminate exclusionary discipline and respond to children's behavioral needs more effectively.

- The ED-funded National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI), has [FREE training modules](#), as well as new and updated information in its resource library. Check out these [books](#) to support social emotional learning.

Articles, Research, and Resources

- [Research shows disability is common factor in school suspensions Phys.org:](#) New research has found evidence of Queensland students from priority equity groups being unfairly suspended from school. The study is published in "The Australian Educational Researcher."
- [OSEP's September 2023 Update: Director's Message, ED Updates, Announcements, Featured Resources](#)
- [Natural Resources Newsletter Archive](#)

Professional Offerings and Reminders

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) topical webinars

Professionals with less than five years in their position or those needing a refresher on ECSE areas will find these webinars most beneficial. Each hour-long webinar will be followed with an hour-long open question and answer period to clarify, offer resources, and/or dive deeper into the webinar's topic. There is no prior registration, and all participants can join by going to the event webpage for meeting details. Certificate hours of attendance will be available upon request.

- [Indicator 6: Early Education Environments \(Preschool Environments\) - Friday, October 13, 2023, 1 p.m.](#); Participants may find reviewing their FFY22 Indicator 6 data prior to the meeting helpful.
- [Indicator 12: Part C to Part B Transition- Friday, November 17, 2023, 1 p.m.](#)

ECSE Community of Practice (CoP)

This is a CoP for ECSE Coordinators, ECSE Educators, Special Education Coordinators, and related service providers. Communities of Practice give the opportunity for educators and special educators to share problems, solutions, and resources with each other.

- [Thursday, October 19, 2023 1-2 p.m.](#)
- [Friday, December 15, 2023 2-3 p.m.](#)
- [Friday, January 19, 2024 1-2 p.m.](#)
- [Friday, March 22, 2024 1-2 p.m.](#)
- [Friday, May 17, 2024 1-2 p.m.](#)

Child Count Dates for School Year 2024

Here are some dates to keep in mind for Child Count this coming year:

- December 1, 2023, Child Count Data Collection: to open late November with a due date of December 15, 2023
- June 30, 2024, Exiting Child Count: to open late June with a due date of July 15, 2024

- Dates and times of Child Count Office Hours in November and December 2023 will be shared in the November nuggets. AOE is always here to help support your data reporting; reach out at any time to the Special Education Data Team at AOE.ChildCountInfo@vermont.gov.

Other Opportunities

The Vermont Higher Education Collaborative (VT-HEC) is looking for licensed and experienced Early Childhood Special Educators to serve as VT-HEC ECSE Internship Supervisors for students this academic year and the next. Please contact Manuela Fonseca manuela.fonseca@vthec.org.

Contact Us

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