

# Understanding the Experiences of Suspension and Expulsion from Early Childhood Education Settings: Parents' Perspectives

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## INTRODUCTION

- The State of Vermont (VT) received federal funding to improve their early childhood education (ECE) system.
- The ECE system in Vermont includes care and education for children ages 0 to 5.
- Families can access the ECE system through publicly funded pre-K, Head Start, and childcare centers.
- The state's Child Development Division (CDD) decided to partner with researchers from the University of Vermont (UVM) to learn more about the strengths and challenges of accessing the ECE system in VT.
- Specifically, the CDD team wanted to know:
  - How many young children (ages 0-6) with disabilities are being suspended or expelled from ECE settings?
  - What supports are in place to help families of children with disabilities gain access to and remain in their ECE settings?
  - What are the barriers to including children with disabilities in ECE settings?
  - What recommendations are suggested to improve the ECE system in VT to ensure inclusion and accessibility for children with disabilities?

## METHODS

- The research team worked with CDD to complete this work in a 3-month period.
- Information was gathered from many sources, including VT state leaders, professionals in the field, and parents.
- This poster focuses on what was learned from parents of children with a disability that experienced suspension or expulsion from an ECE setting in VT.
- This work was determined to be quality improvement (QI) by the Internal Review Board of UVM.
- The authors share their findings from this project as an example of ways in which the experiences of those with lived experience of disability can be included in QI initiatives that bridge evaluation and policy advocacy.
- The researchers worked with CDD to create a recruitment flyer for parents inviting them to participate in a focus group.
- The flyer stated that the purpose of the research was to learn how CDD could better support families and young children with a disability in their ECE setting.
- The flyer was shared through social media outlets and targeted email listservs.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all focus groups were held virtually.
- Parents were given the choice to complete an electronic survey or to participate in the focus group.
- Parents were offered \$25 for their time if they participated in a focus group.
- Only four parents participated in a focus group, so they were interviewed individually.
- Sixteen parents completed the electronic survey.
- This poster focuses on what was learned from those that completed the electronic survey.

## SAMPLE

- All 16 parents identified as female. Fifteen were moms. One was a grandmother.
- Different kinds of moms were represented in the sample. Nine (56.3%) were biological moms. Five (31.3%) were adoptive moms. One (6.3%) was a foster mom.
- Fourteen (87.5%) identified as White. One (6.3%) identified as Asian. One (6.3%) identified as Native American. All 16 parents identified as non-Hispanic.
- Ages ranged from 24 to 55, with a mean of 37.75 (SD = 6.97).



## What Did We Learn?

Children with disabilities are at increased risk of being suspended or expelled from their early childhood education settings. Many families and their children are not receiving any support or services in these settings despite their need for them.

## Why Does It Matter?

Those with lived experience have an important form of expertise that should be included in quality improvement projects. In this project, parents' experiences provided evidence for the set of recommendations that were put forth to the state of Vermont to improve the early childhood education system for children with disabilities.

## FINDINGS

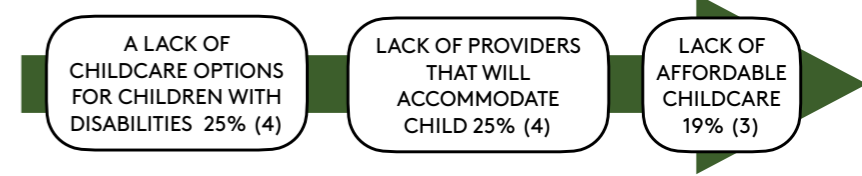
Answering Question 1: How many young children with disabilities are being suspended or expelled?

Questions for Parents	Yes	No
Were you successful in accessing childcare?	69% (11)	31% (5)
Did your child ever receive an in-school suspension?	56% (9)	44% (7)
Did your child ever receive a soft suspension?	63% (10)	37% (6)
Was your child ever expelled?	56% (9)	44% (7)

Answering Question 2: What supports are in place?

- In the survey, parents were asked to write in what supports they had access to in order to support their child in their ECE setting.
- The parent responses were categorized by the lead author based on similarity in content and theme, a process called open coding.
- Parent responses fell into the following categories:
  - Individualized Education Plans (IEP), 19%, 3
  - Case Management, 13%, 2
  - NONE, 50%, 8**

Answering Question 3: What barriers are in the way?



Answering Question 4: What recommendations did parents make for improving the system?

Recommendations from Parents	Response Count
Increase providers' knowledge, including knowledge of trauma-informed practices	31% (5)
Make it easier to access 1:1 aides	19% (3)
Lower student to teacher ratios	13% (2)
Increase the number of providers, including those willing to accommodate children with disabilities	13% (2)
Increase provider access to consultation services	6% (1)

## DISCUSSION

- The researchers gathered information from parents of young children (age 0-6) with a disability who had experienced, or were at risk for, suspension or expulsion.
- A majority of parents reported that their child had been suspended or expelled.
- A majority of parents reported that their child and family did not receive ANY supports.
- The primary barrier to enrolling their child in an ECE setting is a lack of options.
- Parents provided a number of recommendations about how to make the system work better for them.
- In this project, the authors wanted to include the experience of parents of children with disabilities because the parents understand what is and is not working well.
- Those with lived experience have an important form of expertise that should be included when considering how to improve the ECE system.