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## Preschool Expulsion Rate Is a Surprise

**A study finds that more young children are asked to leave such programs than older students, showing a need for early intervention.**

By Carla Rivera  
Times Staff Writer

Children attending preschool in California and the nation are expelled at three times the rate of older students, according to a landmark new study that is provoking surprise and alarm among educators and parents.

In a report scheduled for release today, the Yale Child Study Center found that nearly seven preschool children per 1,000 are being expelled — for behavioral problems — from state-funded programs, compared with 2.1 per 1,000 elementary, middle and high school students.

In addition, 4-year-olds are expelled more often than 3-year-olds, and boys are expelled at 4.5 times the rate of girls. African American children are twice as likely to be expelled as Latinos or whites and five times as likely as Asian American children.

"There are two reactions of shock to this report: from those with intimate knowledge about this problem and are shocked that there is finally data to back up their experience, and from the other group that doesn't spend a lot of time in classrooms and is shocked that any young child would be expelled," said study coauthor Walter S. Gilliam, an assistant professor of child psychiatry and psychology at Yale University.

The study, "Prekindergarteners Left Behind," explored the expulsion rates of 52 state-funded preschool programs

in 40 states and serving nearly 800,000 children. Providers included public schools, Head Start, nonprofit and for-profit centers, faith-based and other community programs.

The study was based on data gathered by the Yale center's National Prekindergarten Study. Teachers in a random sample of about 4,800 classrooms were surveyed about children expelled for behavioral problems during the previous year. About 81% of teachers responded.

New Mexico had the highest rate, with 21 children expelled per 1,000 enrolled; Kentucky reported none. Expulsions for prekindergarteners exceeded those in elementary, middle and high schools in all but three states.

Expulsion rates also varied by classroom setting: the lowest in classrooms located in public schools and in Head Start programs, and the highest in faith-affiliated centers and for-profit child care.

Gilliam said many of the programs, including California's, are intended for poor families, where children would tend to have more special needs.

One implication of the findings is that children most in need of early intervention and counseling services are not receiving them.

In California, where about 135,000 students are enrolled in state-funded full-day and half-day programs, an estimated 1,008 preschoolers are expelled each year. Twelve percent of teachers in the state's 5,800 classrooms reported expelling a child, according to the report.

Michael Jett, director of child development for the state Department of Education, said officials were surprised at the findings. The state does not keep expulsion data for preschoolers, and Jett said he could remember only a handful of appeals from parents after children had been asked to leave a program. Policies surrounding such expulsions are largely a matter of local jurisdiction.

But he did not dispute the Yale numbers.

"What this study implies is that we have to examine ways in which to diagnose problems and provide support in the classroom in a way that doesn't take away from other children," Jett said. "It's an important policy question.

We need to talk about what it would take to address the issue, whether it requires legislation or [more money] and what we can and can't do given our resources."

Jett said that in California, the average funding for preschool students is about \$3,100 per pupil, compared with \$6,000 for K-12 students.

Preschool expert Karen Hill-Scott, who headed the team that developed the tobacco tax-funded Los Angeles Universal Preschool program, said there was little direction for preschool providers or parents in how to handle difficult cases.

"There are no requirements that programs have to keep children who are highly disruptive, and if you watch [the television reality program] 'Supernanny,' you know that these children are around," she said. "But what's disturbing is that there's no apparatus to help parents navigate services, no institutional preparation for [dealing with the] extent of this problem."

Natasha Brown, a San Francisco mother of two, said her son Isaiah was repeatedly suspended from a licensed private preschool for disobedience and acting out.

As a single, working mother, Brown said she often had to jeopardize her job to pick up Isaiah and care for him. Brown said she was frustrated because even though she sought help for her son, the center had no one on site to deal with issues like hers. Now 5 and in kindergarten, Isaiah receives regular counseling and recently earned a certificate for good behavior.

"I wanted to ask, 'How do you want us to handle this child?' " she said. "I'm doing the best I can on my side, but you guys should have better-trained employees. They are too ready to expel or suspend to alleviate the problems."

Martha Elias, an Echo Park provider, said she was on the other side of the dilemma when another day-care center sent her a 4-year-old boy who was disruptive, hitting and kicking other children. Elias said she gave the parents two weeks to control the child or she would ask him to leave. In that case, the parents worked to improve their home life, and the boy's behavior changed.

"He was able to stay and graduate to kindergarten, and the parents thanked

me for my help," said Elias, who has operated an academic day-care program for 27 years.

Elias attributed part of her success to special workshops she attended designed to educate and support teachers serving students with physical, learning and other kinds of disabilities.

Researchers said the expulsion rates are highest in classrooms where teachers lack support from counselors or other specialists to contend with disruptive children.

Such programs are key to reducing the expulsion rates, said Marilou Hyson, a senior advisor for the National Assn. for the Education of Young Children, which represents preschool providers, teachers, parents and administrators.

"We know that a good curriculum and well-trained teachers can reduce numbers of children who show those kinds of behaviors," she said. "More needs to be done to stop the problem before it starts, not by kicking children out of preschool but by supporting teachers and parents and providing special consultation to help meet needs."

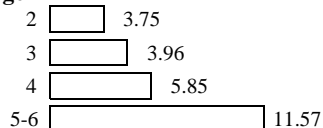
## Early expulsion

A study by Yale University Researchers found clear differences in expulsion rates on the basis of children's age, gender and ethnicity.

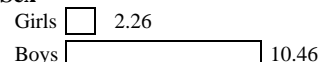
### Expulsion of children

(Rate per thousand)

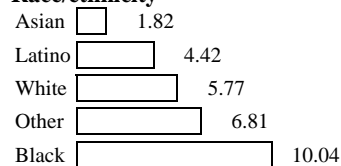
#### Age



#### Sex



#### Race/ethnicity



Sources: Walter S. Gilliam, Yale University Child Study Center

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