

Front Porch Series

Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions, and Why We Should Care

Sarah Lytle: Hello, everybody, and welcome to the Front Porch Series. I'm so pleased to have you join us today. Front Porch is a series of webinars for teachers, providers, and home visitors and childcare programs. Working with preschoolers, serving Head Start, These webinars will introduce you to some of the latest research on child development, and give you ways to connect the research to your practice. I'm Sarah Lytle from the National Center for Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning. We have asked some of the country's leading scientists to join us for the Front Porch Series and present on their research.

Before we begin, let me give you a little information about how the webinar platform works. Please try to connect to the webinar via hard-wired Internet as opposed to Wi-Fi if at all possible. Also, you can improve the speed of the connection by closing other programs you might have running, like email. During the call, your phones will be on mute. If you would like to make a comment or ask a question, please type it into the chat box. I see lots of people saying hello already in the chat box. That's a fantastic use of -- of that space. If there's time at the end of the webinar, you will be invited to ask questions.

This webinar is being recorded and will be posted on ECLKC. This presentation includes three short videos. You will only be able to hear the videos if you are viewing the webinar on a computer. If you're only calling in, or if you experience technical difficulties, you can access the entire presentation later with the videos on ECLKC.

So, today, I am please to introduce you to Walter Gilliam. Dr. Gilliam is an associate professor of child psychiatry and psychology at the Yale University Study -- Child Study Center, and director of the Edward Zigler Center on Child Development and Social Policy. Dr. Gilliam has conducted extensive research involving early childhood education and intervention policy analysis, ways to improve the quality and mental health of pre-kindergarten and childcare services, early childhood mental health consultation, early childhood expulsions and suspensions, and the impact of early childhood education on school readiness. His scholarly writing addresses early childhood care and education programs, school readiness, and developmental assessments of young children. Today, the title of his presentation is "Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions, and Why We Should Care." So, please welcome Dr. Gilliam.

Walter Gilliam: Thank you for joining us today for this Front Porch Series, where we're gonna be speaking about preschool expulsions and suspensions and why we should care. First off, there's been a lot of increased attention to the issue of preschool expulsions and suspensions, and the attention has been increasing at the Federal level, State levels, and Municipality levels regarding just trying to understand how they can prevent so many children from expelled or suspended from our preschool settings, but in also trying to focus on solutions and preventions regarding things like early childhood mental health consultations we'll talk about more later.

There was in 2014 a joint position statement from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education, both of those departments calling for an end to preschool expulsion, whether those are happening in state-funded pre-K programs or public-school-based programs or childcare or Head Start. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights also started collecting data on this just recently and issued some reports in 2014 and 2016. And with the 2014 reauthorization of CCDBG, which is the main funding strand in the United States for funding subsidized childcare, there's been a lot of attention within that legislation, too, requiring states to provide parents with information regarding what the preschool expulsion and suspension policies might be for those states and also guidance for states regarding the use and the appropriate use of quality-enhancement Funds in order to be able to support efforts like early childhood mental health consultation and improved training for teachers in social-emotional areas.

And, also, the Head Start Performance Standards, which were recently revamped from scratch, have

some very clear guidance in there regarding early childhood expulsions and suspensions. And so you can see, the amount of attention has been really quite large. But in order to be able to understand this issue better, we really need to flashback and go back to 2002, when we first started collecting data on this topic. I was at the Yale Child Study Center at the time and couldn't help but notice that children were being referred to us for evaluations -- evaluations because they had been expelled from a preschool program or they were sent to us telling us that if they didn't come to Yale to get an evaluation, that they would be expelled from their preschool or childcare program.

And so we -- we became very curious about what the rates of expulsion might be and what children might be most vulnerable for expulsions and suspensions, and we also became interested in whether or not things like early childhood mental health consultation might be a way to be able to reduce the likelihood of these expulsions. And so, our curiosity led us to throw some additional questions into a large-scale national study that we were conducting at that time. In this study, we were looking at nearly 4,000 state-funded pre-kindergarten teachers from across the nation, and all the 40 states with funded pre-K at the time. Most of them were in the public school, but quite a few of them were in Head Start, too. 29 percent -- were in Head Start, and 13 percent -- of them were in other types of settings such as childcare programs and other types of nonprofit agencies.

And when we asked the question of the teachers, we asked them, "Over the past 12 months, have you ever required a child to terminate participation in your program because of a behavioral problem? Please don't include children who are transitioned directly from your program to a therapeutic preschool program or special-ed program or some other potentially more appropriate setting." And so, we were really looking to see how many of these teachers would say, "Yes, indeed, in the past 12 months, we've had to expel a child from our programs." And so, the answer that we got were that 10 percent -- of the teachers said yes, they had expelled at least one child, and usually it was just one child, but sometimes two, sometimes three. Occasionally, we had a teacher who would say that they expelled as many as four children. We piloted this study in childcare programs in Massachusetts before we went national with it. We found one teacher who reported expelling six children out of a class of 16 in the course of a 12-month period of time, and that's -- that's an awful lot of expulsion.

We did the math on this and found that the expulsion rate was 6.7 expulsions per 1,000. And when we consulted the K-through-12 rate, the expulsion rate in K-through-12 grades was only 2.1 per 1,000, which basically means we're expelling children from state-funded pre-K programs at a rate more than three times that of grades K through 12 combined. And in some states, the rate seemed to be higher than in others. You can see on this map from back in 2005, the states in red were the states that had the very highest expulsion rates, followed by yellow, green, and blue. A lot of media attention came as a result of this and pretty much hit the front page of just about any major newspaper in the United States. And when this happened, we received lots of information from other locations where they had conducted smaller studies, but had never published them.

One of them in particular that I want to draw attention to is the one from Illinois, and in that study, they asked center directors whether they'd had an expulsion in the past 12 months. 42 percent -- of the centers said that they had expelled at least one child in the past 12 months. But what's unique about this study is, they were only looking at infant-toddler centers in that study. And so, that -- That's particularly concerning, because it's not even just an issue having to do with preschoolers, but this might then have something to do with infants and toddlers who tend to get expelled from these programs. When we look at the rate of expulsion, in K through 12, it's kind of rare.

In pre-kindergarten programs largely in the public schools, it's quite a bit higher. So, when we look at childcare programs outside of the public-school setting and outside of Head Start, the rates are -- are by far the highest. A lot of factors predict the likelihood of a child being expelled. Teacher-child ratio. The more children per adult in the classroom, the more likely a child is to be expelled. Length of the day. Half-day programs expel the least, full-day programs more, extended-day programs that are open 8 to 10 hours a day expelling the very most. Teacher job stress predicts expulsion. The more job stress a teacher reports, the more likely they are to expel a child.

And, in fact, teachers who screen positive for depression expel at twice the rate of teachers who screen negative for depression. And so that certainly raises the issue that we need to be thinking not

just about the mental health of -- of children, but also the mental health of our staff. Access to behavioral supports. The more access that a teacher reported to having somebody to come into the classroom and work with the teacher, the less likely that a child will have to be expelled. Now, of course, when we look at all these factors, one thing stands out, and that's that none of these factors that predict preschool expulsion really have anything to do with children and children's behaviors.

These are adult factors. These are program factors. And so that really raises the issue and certainly the question of preschool expulsion is not a child's behavior. It's really an adult decision. And by that, I mean that it's probably likely that the behavior of the child has something to do with a child being expelled or not, but it's really -- It's really adult decisions that really generate the -- the decision as to whether a child is going to be expelled or not. So, who is it that gets expelled? Well, in mixed-age classrooms where you have 3s and 4s together, 4-year-olds are more likely than 3-year-olds.

We pulled together a group of teachers and asked them why, and basically the consensus of these teachers is that it's different if a child's a little bit taller or bigger and they might have a behavior problem than if the child is smaller. And we -- we asked these teachers why, and they said, "Well, if the child is bigger, than maybe the child will be bigger than the other children and might harm the other children."

And so, this is, again, another example of the fact that it's not just the behavior. It's also our perceptions as teachers of what that behavior means and whether or not children might get harmed and whether or not we might be held liable for that harm. Black preschoolers expelled at twice the rate of white preschoolers, and boys expelled at more than four times the rate of girls. So when you think about it, really, there's three different risk factors for preschool expulsion, and they all start with "B." We have "big," "black," and "boy." And the more of these risk factors you have, the more likely that a child could be expelled.

The U.S. Department of Education released in 2014 and 2016 their own data on this and basically confirmed the disparities that we were finding. But in 2016, the rates that they were finding were that black preschoolers were 3.6 times as likely to be suspended as white preschoolers -- actually, a rate much higher than we had found back in 2005.

So, why is that our boys and our black children are most at risk? Well, there's a lot of potential reasons. We -- We do know from other studies that boys tend to be more susceptible to stressors in their environment. They tend to show more of the symptoms of stress in the way in which they interact with other children in the classroom. We know that our children of color oftentimes have more stressors in their life simply because they're more likely to live in households and in communities that are struggling with economic challenges. And then, those challenges, of course, are felt by the children, and then they carry that stress with them, and they carry it into their early care and education settings. We also know that our children of color are often in programs of poorer quality and programs that have fewer resources. They're more likely to attend unlicensed childcare programs or license-exempt programs of unknown quality in their younger years. And then, when they graduate from these programs, they go on to, in many cases, public schools that are less well-resourced than -- than children who are not of color. Yet, even when we add up all of these potential reasons, it just didn't seem like enough to account for all of the disparities that we were seeing in preschool expulsions and suspensions, which raised the issue of whether or not other factors could also play a role -- factors such as implicit bias.

Now, we know that black boys are more likely to be suspended or expelled for similar behaviors in elementary school. We know this from studies that have looked at behavioral records in elementary schools where they -- the severity of the behavioral problem was rated by people who didn't know if the child was black or white or a boy or a girl. And then, when they looked and analyzed the results, even when the behavior problems were similar, black children and especially black boys were more likely than white children to be suspended or expelled. We know that there's lots of biases that we typically have about our black boys. We tend to view them as more culpable or more guilty of things. We tend to view them as older. I'll tell you about a -- a study that was done not too long ago where adults were given pictures of children in a story, and the story was a story where a child may or may not have done this -- this misdeed. And the adult was asked whether or not they thought that the child

broke the vase or the child did this or the child did that.

And any time that the story was paired with a picture of a black boy, the raters tended to rate that child as more culpable. And what's -- what's important to note about this is that the stories were all the same. All the details were the same. The only thing that was being changed was the picture of the child. And -- And the pictures that they were using of these children, black and white, were children who were about -- about 10 years old. And then after the study was over and after they'd collected the data, they asked the respondent to guess how old the children were. And on average, people tended to overestimate the age of the black children by about 4 1/2 years. And 4 1/2 years is an awful lot of overestimation when you're talking about children who are only 10 years old to begin with. There's a study that was also done with -- with children 5, 7, and 10 years old, and they asked them to rate how much it would hurt if certain things happened to them -- if they bit their tongue, if they hit their head, if they stubbed their toe. And then, they showed them pictures of children -- some black, some white -- and they asked them, "How much would it hurt if this child hit his head, if this child bit his tongue, if this child stubbed his toe?"

And at age 5, there was no significant differences, but starting at about age 7, children started perceiving the black boy -- whenever a picture of a black boy was shown -- as feeling less pain than the other children and feeling less pain than themselves. And by the time the children were 10-years-old, those -- those findings were very strong. And when you think about it, this really isn't a study of pain. This was study of something else. It's a study of empathy. And the fact that by the time our children are about 7 years old, we tend to become less -- less likely to give our empathy to black children, in particular, black boys. We withhold it from them. There's another phenomena, too, that I'll tell you about called shifting standards. In this phenomena, what happens is, we tend to hold children to different standards based on stereotypes that we have in our mind. I'll tell you a quick story. Just imagine yourself at a -- at a co-educational softball game, and at the co-educational softball game, the boy comes up to the plate, and he's ready to bat.

And the pitch comes in, and the boy [Clicks tongue] hits the ball and gets a standard base hit, and he runs to first base, and everybody politely applauds. And then, here comes the girl, and she stands at the plate, and she's ready to hit the ball. And the pitch comes in, and [Clicks tongue] she hits the ball, and she runs to first base, just the same as the boy does, but everybody stands up in a -- in a roaring standing ovation. And it may feel like it's being kind to the girl, but what it is really showing is an underlying stereotype. And that underlying stereotype is that the -- the boy did what he was supposed to do, but the girl actually violated what she was supposed -- She wasn't supposed to be able to get that base hit. And so as a result, she's judged in comparison to our expectation for girls. Now, keep that in mind as we go further into some of the things that I'm going to be describing here in a minute and think a little bit about how we shift our standards when we're working with children of different colors in our classroom.

There had not been a study of implicit bias in preschool teachers that we knew of until we conducted one just recently. We collected the data in 2015 with funding that we had received from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and released a report of the findings in September 2016 for the United States Administration for Children and Families. We had 132 teachers participating in it. Most of them were women. Most of the teachers were, indeed, classroom teachers, but we also had a few center directors and student teachers come in there. You can see there's a wide variety of different types of settings that these teachers were employed in. Many of them were white, but about 1/4 of them were black, and many of them had been teaching in the field for quite a few years.

The first part of the study was an eye-tracking experiment, and what we did was, we gave the teachers a six-minute video clip to watch. And this six-minute video clip had children of different races and gender. We had a black boy, a black girl, a white boy, and a white girl sitting at a table and interacting and -- and doing just very typical kinds of classroom behaviors and classroom kinds of activities. And what we did was, we -- we had the teachers watch the video while there was an eye-tracking device attached to the screen that could tell us exactly where the teacher was looking at any given moment on that screen. And the instructions that we gave them were this -- "Now -- Now you're ready to view a series of video clips lasting six minutes.

We're interested in learning about how teachers detect challenging behavior in the classroom. Sometimes this involves seeing behavior before it becomes problematic. The video segments you are about to view are of preschoolers engaged in various activities. Some clips may or may not contain challenging behaviors. Your job is to press the enter key on the external keypad every time you see a behavior that could become a potential challenge." And the experimenter shows them how to do that. "Please press the keypad as often as necessary or as often as needed."

That's what we told them, but the part we didn't tell the teachers was this, until later when we debriefed them. What we didn't tell them was, there were no challenging behaviors in any of these video clips. In fact, the children in the video clips were all child actors that were hired by us to pretend to be playing at a table. And what we were really looking at is, when teachers expected a child to have a behavior problem, who did they look at? When they felt that a child might misbehave, which child did they spend more time looking at? Who did they look at first? Who did they look at longest? Who did they keep going back to when they thought that a challenging behavior might happen?

And so, let me show you a little bit about what one of those video clips actually looked like. And you can see the children just kind of sitting there and interacting, and we had a series of about 12 of these little, short 30-second video clips that the teachers had watched. You see any challenging behaviors? Probably not, because, again, they're all child actors. So, after we showed them that video clip... Let me see -- I'm going to show you a -- something here of what it actually looked like when the teachers were... Oops. Let's see if we get to the next video. Okay, in this video, you can see what it actually looks like. Now, these -- The teachers you're seeing in this video are -- are not the teachers that were in the study. They were just helping us out by allowing us to video them.

But you can see what it was like. Here's a teacher that's looking at the screen. The teacher's in the foreground, and the woman in the background is our research assistant who was actually running the experiment for us. And if you look really closely at the bottom of the screen, you can see a little black bar. That's the eye-tracker. That can tell exactly where the teacher's looking. And now you can see our research assistant. The little yellow dot is exactly where that teacher is looking at that specific moment. And you can see how the dot moves around, showing you exactly where the teacher's looking. And then, where we had to do, of course, on the -- on the videos, is, we outlined each one of the children so that we could know exactly which child the teacher was looking at any given moment. At the end of the eye-tracking, we asked the teachers, "Which child do you think required the most of your attention?" And then, we had them look at the child that they thought they had to watch the most and remember the letter that was next to that child's face. The results, basically, were this. And you can see some of the results shown there on the -- on the left-hand side.

At the top left, there's a spotlight analysis. The lighter the area, the more that some of that -- the more that all the people that were -- that were participating in this were looking in that area. And at the bottom left, you can see for every one of those little tiny circles, that's where somebody at that particular moment was looking. Every one of those circles is a teacher, and every one of those circles shows exactly where that teacher was looking at that specific moment. And you can see where most all of the -- Most all of the circles are clustered. And, in fact, when we run our statistical analyses, what we found was that there was a clear bias towards expecting that the black children would misbehave more. Much more time spent watching black children when teachers were led to believe that a child might misbehave. When we asked at the end which -- which child they thought they were looking at the most, there was a bias towards them thinking that they were looking more at boys. Now, in terms of where they actually looked, they looked more at the black children, and especially the black boy.

But when asked where they thought they were looking, they thought they were looking more at boys, and especially the black boy. And -- And so what that tells us is that, either way, the black boy's coming out at the short end of the stick on this. There's more attention being focused on the black boy when somebody thinks that -- when a teacher thinks that a child might misbehave, and teachers actually know that they're focusing more specifically on the black boy. We found this to be true regardless of teacher race. This was true that there was a bias towards black children, and particularly a black boy, for white teachers, and it was also true for our black teachers.

Now, there was a second part of the study, too, where, with a vignette, a short story that we described a child with a significant behavior problem, a child that most teachers would say, "Yes, this is -- This is pretty significant." It was a behavior problem where the child was hitting other children and sometimes scratching them and leaving marks on their arms, every once in a while, might hit the teacher, would burst into loud, inappropriate laughter at strange times, would be hard to calm down, and just generally very disruptive in the classroom. And we randomized teachers to read this with one of four names attached to the vignette.

Either the vignette, the story, was describing a child named DeShawn or Latoya or Jake or Emily. And these are names that -- that researchers who do studies of race bias use often, because DeShawn and Latoya tend to conjure in people's mind the image of an African-American child, whereas Jake and Emily are names that are very rarely used in the African-American community and are much more associated with children who are white. And so we used these kinds of names in order to be able to see whether or not the name alone causes the behaviors to seem different. Again, every teacher's reading the exact same details, the exact same behaviors. The only thing different is the name that's associated with it.

We asked the teachers to pretend that this child they're reading about is a child that might be in their classroom, and we also randomized one other element. And this where it gets really interesting. Teachers either received or didn't receive a second paragraph. And in that second paragraph, the teachers were given information about the child's homelife. And it was written in a way to provide information that many might think would be explanatory of why this child might have these kind of challenging behaviors. The background information described Mom as working three jobs just to make ends meet. All the jobs were low-paying jobs. We suspect that she's depressed, but she doesn't seem to have the resources or the ability to be able to get treatment. Dad is not around much, and when he is around, Mom and Dad fight a lot, and sometimes the child's there to be able to see this. And we gave that paragraph in order to see whether or not there were biases towards thinking that -- that black children might behave differently than white children, but we also wondered, "When given that second paragraph, is it possible that the empathy that would come from that would cause there to be a reduction in the amount of bias that we found?"

And what we found was this. Overall, white teachers seemed to show an evidence that they expected lower -- They expected behavior problems out of African-American children. So as a result, when they heard that story about an African-American child, they actually rated the child's behavior as being kind of average, kind of typical. And, of course, these aren't very typical behaviors.

And very much in line with what we were saying before about shifting standards. The African-American child was behaving as a African-American child or children were being expected to behave. Whereas black teachers did the exact opposite. They rated children -- The African-American child's behavior as being significantly more disruptive and significantly more severe, almost as if to imply that they were really being much more vigilant with their African-American children and -- and on top of it -- and on top of them just to make sure that they -- that they were behaving well. When we gave the teachers the second paragraph, it worked, but only kind of.

And what I mean by that is, when the teacher got a second paragraph explaining the child's homelife, it tended to cause them to rate the behavior problems as being less severe, but only if the teacher's race was the same as the race they thought the child's race was. If the race of the teacher and the child was the same, knowing the background information caused the teacher to feel more empathic to the child and rate that child's behavior as being less severe. But if the race of the child was different than the race of the teacher, it tended to have the absolute opposite effect. And as a result, the teachers tended to view those behaviors as being even more severe.

And that raises some really interesting questions about what that means. There's quite a bit of research on empathy that suggests that when we hear about the misfortunes of others, we tend to rate them more -- more favorably. We tend to like them better. We tend to be kinder to them. But only to the degree to which we feel they are similar to us. And the more dissimilar we feel that person that is to us, the more likely, when we hear about their misfortunes, that we actually rate them negatively, almost as if we thought they had it coming. And that tells us that, really, it's probably not

enough for parents -- for teachers just to know about the background information of the children. They need to also feel some kind of connectedness to that child's culture, to that child's family, in order to be able to make sense of that information, or else it actually might just further support stereotype biases that might also be already within the teacher. We asked some teachers to reflect on that. And if you're able to listen to this thing on your computer, you'll be able to hear about two minutes of clip here of what teachers, after they had been given the eye-tracking experiment -- reflecting on what they thought it meant. I'll go ahead and play that right now.

Teacher: There was one particular child that stood out who was playing with playdough, and each time, he was just grabbing instead of using his words or asking for turns. Really, just, I could foresee that being a problem with the other children eventually.

Teacher #2: In my head while I was watching it, I was like, "Oh, maybe the teacher said, "Oh, you know, he can just stay over here, because if I say, 'You need to go to a different area,' then he might, like, throw a chair or flip out." So they said, "Oh, you can just stay at this table."

Teacher #3: Boys are more active. Girls are acclimated. Like, girls like to sit in the kitchen area or dramatic play and rock the babies and be helpful, whereas boys at 3, 4, and 5 like that rough and tough and tumble. And, well, in a classroom, you can't do rough and tumble, so the boys tend to get called out more than the girls.

Teacher #4: I would say, you know, that situation with those kids, you know, taking away the toys, you know, who's to say, you know, later on down the road a couple months from now, he's gonna start getting aggressive if the kids don't give him his toys back or something like that. Do you know what I mean? Like, if you were to take the playdough, and the kid doesn't want to give it back. So what happens if he becomes aggressive because he's not getting his way anymore?

Teacher #2: If you knew a family that had similar struggles as you, then you might be able to relate to them more. But if you don't, then you might just blame it on their race or something different and just say, "Oh."

Teacher #3: One thing about our society -- They fear black men, so boys get labeled, especially young black boys. And they learn that at a young age. And they grow up with that, and it follows through all their schooling.

Walter: You see there with that video, these were -- These were very typical preschool teachers that were working in a local childcare program near us at Yale, and we -- we asked them to do the eye-tracking experiment. And we asked them a series of questions about what they thought was happening with it. And then, we also told them that -- that the children were actors. Then we asked them again what they thought and why they thought that they were looking more at some children than at other children. And you can hear from their answers a wide variety of things. I mean, in some cases, lots of -- lots of very vivid ideas and -- and thoughts in their minds about how children would behave of different races and what these kinds of behaviors might mean and what it might mean in terms of whether or not a teacher understands the child's home environment very well or can relate to that child on a cultural basis. So, all of it begs the question, "Well, why do we care so much about disparities in early education?" I-I do a lot of research on early care and education programs, and I oftentimes am called upon to make the case to decision-makers, elected officials, and other folks about why it's important to invest in early care and education.

And for those of you who -- who have heard these kind of arguments before, usually they take the form of, "Every dollar that's invested in early care and education yields back \$7.14 in societal savings." I mean, you've heard -- You've heard those kind of statements before, and those are based on -- on economic analyses of studies of early childhood care and education where they look at how much money was actually saved to society on the basis of the child attending a high-quality preschool program. And there's really only three studies that we typically cite in this, and we cite them over and over and over again. We cite the Perry Preschool Study in Ypsilanti, Michigan. That's the number-one most-cited study. We cite the Abecedarian Study in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

And we cite the Chicago Child Parent Program, obviously in Chicago. Those are the studies that people

cite over and over again. Economists cite them, psychologists cite them, researchers cite them in making the case for why it's important to invest in early care and education. But there are some things that we typically don't talk about or think that people don't typically know about, and -- and here's one of them. The Perry Preschool Study, the most widely-cited study in all the field of early care and education, had 123 children in it, and all of them were black. Every single one of the children in the Perry Preschool Study was African-American. The Abecedarian Study was 98 percent African-American. The Chicago Child Parent Center Study -- 93 percent African-American. These are the studies that we use to build the case for why it's important to invest in preschool and Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs and childcare programs. In other words, we've taken data in this country that belonged to our black children and black communities, used it to make a case for investing in early care and education programs for all of our children, and then, when no one's paying attention, we kick out the back door the children who gave us the data in the first place. And there's a lot of problems with that.

One -- One problem is that it just doesn't make much sense to kick out the children who gave us the - the information in the first place that allows us to be able to know that this provides this positive return on investment. But aside from that, it's just not very fair to take data from our black communities and children, use it to create a program for all of our children, and then disproportionately kick those same kids out. We do it all the time, though. We do it in medicine. We conduct lots of research studies on medical innovations in communities of color, knowing full well that those same children and families in those communities will probably be the last to ever benefit from those studies. But that's not good enough for us in early care and education.

Our whole field of early care and education is based and steeped in social justice. We have early care and education programs in the United States because of a deep and abiding belief in the importance of providing every one of our children the very best possible chance in life. And that's why our programs exist. When we think about early care and education programs in the United States, really, the social justice that we're providing and civil rights that we're providing through this are really about matters of access. And when you think about access, access can either be access to a seat on a bus or a seat at a deli counter or a seat at the voting polls or in higher education or a seat at an elementary school. Or in this case, we're talking about an opportunity to be able to benefit from the positive outcomes that can be provided through an early care and education program. But when we're talking about early care and education programs, it's not just about making sure that these children can get in the front door of early care and education.

We also have to make sure that we're guarding the back door and that we're not pushing our children out the back and we're just paying attention to getting our children in the front door. I'm not naive enough to believe that all of our children in life are gonna hit a home run. But I do think that all of our children -- and when I say all of our children, I mean all of our children -- deserve a chance at the plate with a decent bat and a fairly pitched ball. And that's what high-quality early care and education programs are about -- about making sure that all of our children have the very best possible opportunity to succeed later in life. Now, the question, of course, is, how do we know, as teachers, that we may have a bias? You know, how do you know if you've got a little bias stuck between your teeth? Well, I suppose one way is to check the mirror often and look in the mirror and be reflective and to think about, "What is it that I'm doing with my children?" and, "How will this come across to our children?" But being reflective is not always as easy as it -- as it sounds like. One of the things that we have going for us in the early care and education field is that our teachers are typically not alone as teachers. In K through 12, if you're a teacher, chances are very good that you're the only teacher in that room all day long.

But in early care and education programs, we have lead teachers and assistant teachers and paraprofessionals and co-lead teachers, and this gives us an opportunity for us to be able to watch each other and to be able to tell each other what it is that we see in our own behaviors. You can -- You can tell if you have a little bias stuck between your teeth two ways -- either checking the mirror or having a friend by your side who's courageous enough to say, "You know, I think you may have a little bias stuck between your teeth," and for us to be courageous enough to listen to that and to take that into account. I think we should probably be paying more attention to how we can do this in the early

care and education field. We've been focusing in Connecticut on early childhood mental health consultation for quite some time now as a way to be able to reduce the likelihood of children being expelled from programs. We have a program of early childhood mental health consultation in Connecticut that was created back in 2002 and funded by our state child-protection agency. It's available to all programs, public and private, free of charge.

All they have to do is ask for a consultant, and the consultant will come out and work with that teacher. We have over 20 masters-level consultants that are trained throughout the state. It's a fairly brief intervention -- only a three months long -- but it's pretty intense. And the teach-- The consultant is in the classroom with the teacher about six to eight hours a week during that time and also does home visits and spends quite a bit of time working with the teacher and working with the parent and working with the teacher and the parent together. And I can't stress that last part enough. I've been studying preschool expulsion and suspension for a very long time now, and in the 15 years that I've been studying it, I've heard an awful lot of stories of children being expelled and suspended. But I'll tell you something that I've never heard. I've never heard of a child expelled or suspended when the teacher and the parent knew and liked each other.

That, I have never seen or heard. And so a big part of early childhood mental health consultation is making sure the parent and the teacher are able to get together, and using that consultant as, at the beginning, an arbitrator between them -- because some of the time, the relationship's not all that good -- and then slowly, the consultant removing herself from that relationship and then leaving behind a stronger relationship than what that consultant had found when she first came into the classroom. You remember what I said before about the more access teachers have to a behavioral consultant, the less likely a child is to be expelled. And so in Connecticut, we wanted to see if that was really a causal relationship. Is it possible -- Is it possible that just having the consultant actually causes that reduced likelihood of expulsion? So we conducted a state-wide random-control trial of early childhood mental health consultation in Connecticut.

And what we found with the results were this. In just three months, a significant reduction in teacher ratings of children's oppositionality and hyperactivity, behavioral problems, and total overall acting-out behavior problems. And to be able to get that kind of an impact in just three months is really quite, quite, quite strong. And the intervention is not very expensive, either. It's really just about providing support to the teacher and providing someone into the classroom who can provide a little objectivity and also maybe be able to pass along some general ideas, and being a support to the teacher. Not somebody coming in and telling the teacher what to do, but somebody who can come in as a partner with the teacher and provide those kind of supports.

I know that it might seem a little scary sometimes to think about a person coming in and working in your -- in your classroom and watching you and observing you, and I can appreciate that. I used to be a public-school teacher myself. And I heard somebody once say, "Well, you have understand -- Teaching is a very private job." And I said to this person, "Well, what do you mean, it's a private job?" And he said, "Well, when you walk into the classroom, you close the door, and nobody knows what -- what you're doing all day long. So it's a private job." And -- And I said, "Well, I guess that's true, but isn't that only true if you don't think of the children as if they're people? Because if you think of the children as if they're people, then it's not -- It's not a private job at all. It's the most public job you can possibly have. You have 16, 18, 20 sets of eyes watching every single thing you do." But I can understand that it's much easier to not think of the children as people, 'cause when you do, it creates such a huge burden on us to know that what we're doing with our children has such a strong, profound impact. You know, it's -- what we do with our children in an early care and education program is so important that it -- it really, truly requires us providing our teachers with all the support possible. And if we're not gonna pay our early childhood care and education workforce the pay that they deserve, the very least we can do is give them the support they need. I'd prefer we do both. I'd prefer we pay them better and provide them support, but if we're not gonna provide them enough pay, the very least we can do is provide them support in an area that's as important as this.

Now, one of the things that we've also been focusing on lately is trying to find better ways to measure the overall mental healthiness of preschool classrooms -- pre-kindergarten, childcare, Head Start. And

so we've created this measure called the Climate of Healthy Interactions for Learning & Development. We call it "CHILD." And it's a new observational measure that tries to look at, just how mentally healthy is this environment for all of the people that are in it? And by all the people, I mean the children and the adults. I-I've never seen a classroom that was healthy for the children that wasn't also a healthy environment for the teachers and the adults that are in it. You can't have a healthy classroom environment just for children. It's got to be healthy for -- for everyone that's in it. So it measures all the classroom interactions that you might find -- staff to child, child to child, staff to staff -- and measures things that are fairly overt, but also very subtle clues and subtle things that children might be doing that teachers may or may not be picking up on. And it also specifically looks at equity and inclusion issues within that measure.

Now, I'll tell you a little bit more about it. There's 28 items in it. It's an observational measure. Somebody has to come into the classroom and -- and watch the teacher interact for about two to three hours and watch the child -- teacher in various different blocks. And there's several different domains -- nine different domains. Now, you'll notice that the first domain there is the domain called "transitions." And the reason why we have the transitions domain in there is, when we were developing the measure, it turned out that -- that the transition moments were the moments in classrooms where most of the behavioral problems typically happened. Now, my guess is that this is not gonna surprise anybody who's listening to this webinar. Challenging behaviors often happen during these transition moments, especially when these transition moments might be either too many or these transition moments might be too protracted or too complicated or difficult for children to be able to maintain their attention. There's a whole section in there about looking just at the teacher and staff affect.

What kind of mood does the teacher show on his or her face? I've been in preschool classrooms before where the teachers were concerned about the -- the children being angry or upset all the time. And - - And I couldn't help but notice that, in some cases, the teachers looked pretty angry and upset all the time, too. And unless we're thinking about and focusing on what kind of an emotional state we're projecting to our children, it's not likely that we're gonna get very much of a -- of a positive response coming back from them. To a large degree, our children will mirror the emotional responses that we -- we show to them. An awful lot in the measure also focused on whether or not teachers take advantage of opportunities to be able to teach social-emotional skills when challenging behaviors happen. It's nice for a teacher to be able to come in and quickly solve and get past a behavior problem. If a child is hitting another child or trying to take a toy away from another child, for the teacher to be able to come in and -- and stop that behavior. But it's far better -- It's far better to be able to use that opportunity as a way to be able to teach that child pro-social behaviors and to teach both of those children how to be able to manage their interactions better.

How this measure differs from other types of measures that are being used right now are this. Currently, classroom observation measures tend to under-emphasize the importance of transitions. And they do that on purpose. They're -- They're really attempting to look at the time on task that the children are engaged in. But we know in early childhood education that a lot of time that children are spending in classrooms are in transition moments, and they're also in free-play and in choice-time and meals and outdoor play. But most of the measures that exist in the field right now totally, totally ignore those moments. And it's unfortunate, because it's a huge part of what early childhood care and education is about. They also tend to ignore most of the adults in the room.

Most of the measures that we use focus specifically on the interaction between the lead teacher and the other child-- and the children in the room. But what we've found to be equally important is to focus on the interactions between all of the adults and the children in the room. I have yet to find a 3- or a 4-year-old child who can tell me accurately the difference between a lead teacher and an assistant teacher or a paraprofessional. They don't know the difference, and they don't care. It's really to them all about, "Are these adults in this classroom focused on my needs, and are they here for me?" And so, as a result, I think that we need to have measures that value the importance of our assistant teachers and our paraprofessionals just as much as our lead teachers. And finally, most measures that exist totally ignore the issue of equity and inclusion. And by this, what I mean is that in the scoring itself, it says to score it on the basis of how the teacher's interacting with "the majority of

the children in the classroom."

And as long as we're looking at how we, as teachers, are working with the majority of the children in the classroom, we are, by design, going to miss issues of equity, because equity is not what teachers do with the majority of the children in the classroom. It's what they do with the minority in the classroom, too, and with the individual children in the classroom. As long as we're only focusing on what teachers do with the majority of the children, we will always miss issues having to do with equity. So, I'm keenly aware of the fact that today is Groundhog Day, so happy Groundhog Day. And I'll ask this question for us -- How many weeks are we gonna have left of expelling our preschool children and suspending our preschool children? I can't think of anything more -- more severe than to expel a child from a preschool classroom or to expel a child from any classroom. It's really the capital punishment of education, when you think about it.

There's nothing more severe than telling a child, "Never come back." But at the same time, we know that we can't just ban the practice. We need to replace it with something else, and what we're suggesting replacing it with is true, meaningful supports to teachers so that teachers can be able to provide -- get access to the supports that they need in order to be able to try a variety of different types of strategies and to be able to feel fully supported in those efforts. So, if you're interested in reading more about the work that we're doing here, there's a slide right here that has lots of links that you can use to be able to get access to many of the reports that we've written over time. And you can also feel free to follow me on Twitter @WalterGilliam, and I tend to tweet some of these -- some of these findings out from time to time in reports when we finish them. So, thank you very much.

Sarah: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Walter. So, thank you so much, everyone, for listening. We hope this information will be valuable to you as you help programs consider ways to enrich the experiences for children and families. If you have thoughts that you'd like to share about how this relates to your work or questions on any of the content that Dr. Gilliam has covered today, we have about six or so minutes for some questions. I know I've seen a couple come across, so perhaps I'll get started, Walter, if that's okay, and -- and other people can chime in with questions as you -- as you think of them. But, you know, one question I saw come across is, if you could perhaps define what suspension is and what expulsion is. And I think people are looking, perhaps, for the difference between the two.

Walter: That's a great question. There's a whole bunch of groups right now that are working, trying to make better definitions for what this means, including even the American Psychological Association. We have a task force together that's interested in this topic and trying to work on definitions. And the Administration for Children and Families has been working on this, as well. Typically, people describe suspension, at least in early care and education programs, as preventing the child or telling the child that a child can't come to school for a certain number of -- of hours or a certain number of days. That might mean, like, the child has a behavior problem and the -- the program says, "Don't come back for two or three days." It's temporary. Expulsion is typically defined in early care and education as telling the child to never come back, and just basically saying, "This program just isn't right for you." I've heard it called a lot of different things. I've heard people refer to expulsion as not yet ready for school-readiness.

I've heard people refer to expulsion as giving children the gift of time. And these are all lovely-sounding ways of describing it, I suppose, but in the end, it's -- it's really about denying children access to the program. But there's another third category that's even more difficult to -- to really categorize, and that's -- that's when we end up telling our parents, "Johnny misbehaved today. You got to come pick him up early." And then the next day, we say, "You got to pick him up early." And then the next day, we want him picked up by noon. And the next day, we want him picked up by 11:30. And eventually, the program is no longer a viable source of childcare for the family, and the parents need to go to work.

And so, in those cases, sometimes the parents will actually remove the child themselves simply because they can no longer rely on the program for childcare. And in those instances, some people refer to these as soft expulsions. It's not really an expulsion, but it kind of ends up that way. It's -- It's a challenging thing to try to figure out exactly how to define these things. We don't typically have in

our early care and education programs in -- in America the same kind of in-school suspension option that you typically see in -- in the public schools, and so usually, you don't see that happening very much in early care and education programs. So, when people think about these definitions, usually it boils down to expulsion being permanent, suspension being something that's kind of temporary. And then there's other types of ways of excluding children from activities that are going on or making the -- the length of the day so small for them that eventually, the parents just have to withdraw.

Sarah: That's very helpful. Thank you. Somebody else asked about, with regard to the eye-tracking study that you described in the presentation -- people were wondering if the teachers' gender made a difference. So thinking about gender as opposed to race.

Walter: Yeah, we couldn't really do much with that because there just weren't enough male teachers in our study. We had a few, but not very many. In order to be able to really know that, we would have to do a study where we specifically went after and tried to find male teachers, or it would have to be a very, very, very large study. We just couldn't get enough sample size. It takes a while to get people through the eye-tracking experiment. That part of that study just took a long time. So we ended up with a sample size of 130 in which just the proportion of our workforce being male that it is, that just didn't leave us enough sample of men. It's a great question, though. I'd like to know more about it. I wish that we would just really, truly focus more on getting more male involvement in our early care and education programs. I-I've been a part of some groups before thinking about the topic of male involvement and the importance of men in early care and education programs. Not because people fight that it's a good idea to have a man involved in early care and education programs because many of our children don't have access to a stable male role model in their life. And I'm sure that that's true for many of our children.

But it's also true that many of our children do have strong male role models in their life. What I -- What I think would maybe be even more important for many of our kids is this. The more men we have involved in early care and education, the more opportunities, it gives all of our children an opportunity to be able to see a man and a woman working together as partners egalitarianly... because if you have a male teacher in the classroom, chances are the other adult, the other teachers in the classroom are gonna be women. And so the opportunity for our children to be able to see a man and a woman working together -- That's gold. I wish we could do more of that.

Sarah: Wonderful. Well, thank you so much. And that is all the time we have for today. So, thank you again, everybody, for joining our first Front Porch Series. And we hope you'll join us next time. Thank you. Bye-bye.