

March 11, 2015

Members of the Education Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Hartford, Connecticut

Re: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED SB 1053: *An Act Prohibiting Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two*

Re: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSED BILLS 780, 6521, 6522: *Proposed Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism*

Dear Honorable Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Walter Gilliam, and I direct the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, where I am also an associate professor of child psychiatry and psychology. For over 12 years, I have been actively conducting research on the topic of preschool expulsion and suspension practices in Connecticut and across the nation. Based on the findings of this research and my experiences as a nationally- and internationally-regarded educational policy researcher, a licensed psychologist, and a former public school teacher, I offer my strong support for Raised Senate Bill 1053: *An Act Prohibiting Out-of-School Suspensions and Expulsions for Students in Preschool and Grades Kindergarten to Two* and Proposed Bills 780, 6521 and 6522: *Proposed Act Concerning Chronic Absenteeism*.

In 2005, I released findings from the first national study of the rates of preschool expulsions and suspensions, also highlighting gender and racial disparities in expulsions and suspensions, school and teacher factors that contribute to expulsions and suspensions, and effective methods for preventing expulsions and suspensions. In the years after this research, I have been working closely with federal legislative and executive branch decision makers on this topic and conducting highly-rigorous evaluations of Connecticut's Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP) program, funded primarily by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF). It is primarily on the basis of this ongoing work, as well as my experiences as an educational policy scientist, psychologist, and former public school teacher, that I base the comments in this testimony.

Both expulsion/suspension and chronic absenteeism are issues regarding maximizing our public investment in education by ensuring that the students who need these educational services most are actually attending.

Just the Facts – What We Know about Preschool Expulsion and Suspension

Based on data released in 2005, nationally preschoolers (3-5 years old) are expelled (totally and permanently removed from the program because of challenging behaviors) at over three times

the rate of students in grades kindergarten through 12 combined. And the rates of expulsion in child care programs that are not affiliated with the public education system are far higher still.

There are considerable gender and race disparities in expulsion rates. Boys are expelled at 4½ times the rate of girls, African-American preschoolers are expelled at over twice the rate of other preschoolers, and being both African-American and a young boy places a child at especially high risk for being expelled from our preschools. However, expulsions and suspensions do impact students of all races, ethnicities, and genders.

Connecticut, in 2005, ranked seventh in the nation in terms of expelling prekindergarteners, with 15.5% of the teachers having expelled at least one child in the past 12 months. The rate of prekindergarten expulsions in Connecticut was 10.4 times higher than the rate of K-12 expulsion. Recent data suggest that the rate is still high, despite the state having several highly effective prevention programs.

Connecticut's Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP) is a highly effective and cost efficient method for preventing preschool expulsions and suspensions. ECCP is funded by DCF as a means for preventing preschool expulsions and suspensions as a service available at no cost to any private or public funded early care and education program in Connecticut. In 2007 and 2014, I released findings from two separate scientifically rigorous random-controlled evaluations of ECCP. In both evaluations, ECCP directly caused significant reductions in children's behaviors problems, dramatically reducing the likelihood for their being expelled in a low-cost program of only three months in duration. (Copies of these reports available on request.)

The Clear Implications regarding Expulsion/Suspension

1. Preschool expulsion and suspension rates are high in Connecticut.
2. Preschool expulsions and suspensions undermine the return on our public investment in early education, because the children with the most likelihood for significant school readiness gains are the ones most likely to be expelled and miss the program.
3. Preschool expulsions and suspensions likely increase the school achievement gap.
4. Preschool expulsions and suspensions create a burden on businesses by increasing employee absentee rates when parents are forced a little notice to either stay at home with a young child or leave the young child unattended and at risk of harm.
5. Connecticut has at least one highly effective and cost-efficient program (ECCP) for preventing preschool expulsions. Prohibiting expulsions and suspensions would encourage more programs to benefit from ECCP, maximizing the impact of our school readiness programs and helping to reduce the achievement gap.

What We Know about Chronic Absenteeism

1. Chronic absenteeism is a very strong predictor of later educational failure and dropout. Students who are chronically not in school (for whatever reason) are at great risk of falling hopelessly behind on academic work, leading to a quickly escalating cycle of absenteeism, failure, and extremely costly remediation.

2. Chronic absenteeism places many children at elevated risk for harm and exposure to delinquent/criminal activity. When chronically absent students are not in school, they unfortunately are often in unsafe circumstances and at-risk for exposure to criminal activity.
3. Efforts to prevent the escalation of chronic absenteeism are far less costly than the combination of public costs we assume from lack of prevention, including educational remediation, school failure, child protection, criminal justice expenses, and health and mental health expenses from harm.
4. The current reliance on average daily attendance (ADA) data misses opportunities to identify early patterns of chronic absenteeism, leading to increased later costs to the educational, justice, child protection, and health and mental health systems.

Recommendations

1. Prohibit expulsion and suspension of young children in all public and publically-supported preschool and early elementary school programs, encouraging teachers and directors/principals to take advantage of the highly effective expulsion prevention services that are already available free of charge throughout Connecticut.
2. Require school districts to collect and publically report rates of chronic absenteeism within schools and districts, rather than reporting only average daily attendance (ADA) data that are virtually useless in identifying student-level patterns of absenteeism.

Thank you for your consideration of these two very important issues, and for your commitment to effective no/low-cost prevention of what would otherwise become high-cost problems. If I may send you any of the reports mentioned in this testimony, please feel free to email me at walter.gilliam@yale.edu or download the reports from www.ziglercenter.yale.edu.

Sincerely,



Walter S. Gilliam, PhD
Director, Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy
Associate Professor of Child Psychiatry and Psychology
Child Study Center, Yale School of Medicine