

Dear Chair Dembrow and members of the Senate Education Committee:

I am writing in support of SB 236 and the proposed amendment to eliminate suspension and expulsion.

Research has made it clear that too many young children (ages 0-5) are being suspended and expelled from infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms. The data also makes clear that Black, Brown, and Indigenous children are disproportionately impacted. The data also makes clear that children who experience suspension and expulsion in preschool are more likely to experience suspension and expulsion in later grades. This fact demonstrates that suspension and expulsion are not the solution. Expelling a 4-year-old boy from preschool does not set him up for future academic or social success. It does the opposite, and it leaves him with the internal message that something is wrong with him.

However, in the words of Dr. Rosemarie Allen, "expulsion is an adult decision." It is NOT a choice made by the child through his or her behavior. Behavior is a child's way of communicating. Behavior contains a message for the adults. It is imperative that adults take the time to listen, observe, and understand what the child's message is. It is imperative that adults receive high-quality coaching that teaches them the skills they need to listen, observe, and understand the child's message. These children have not been in this world for very long -- 2 years, maybe. Or perhaps 5 years. Many behaviors labeled as "challenging" are age-appropriate: biting, hitting, kicking, throwing things. No matter how challenging a child's behaviors might seem, adults have had more years of life to develop their capacity for solving problems than any preschool child has.

There is no question that teaching young children can be tiring and exhausting. There is also no question that the quality of care children receive between 0-5 has a direct and lifelong impact on their development and future success. If suspension and expulsion is allowed to continue, it is a statement that Oregon is okay with limiting access to high quality care for some of the most vulnerable children in this state.

SB 236, with the proposed amendment, is not intended to saddle providers with difficult children that they don't know how to handle. It is intended to protect children from suspension and expulsion AND provide the coaching and professional development that will make it possible for early education providers to successfully support and maintain ALL children in their care.

Please act to support the early childhood workforce and protect Oregon's youngest children from suspension and expulsion.

Sincerely,

Katrina A. Miller