



Maryland's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project

2018 Legislative Brief

Maryland has utilized Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) as a strategy to promote positive social emotional development and address behavioral concerns in young children for more than a decade. The **Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE)** funds **11 ECMHC programs** that serve early care and education programs statewide.

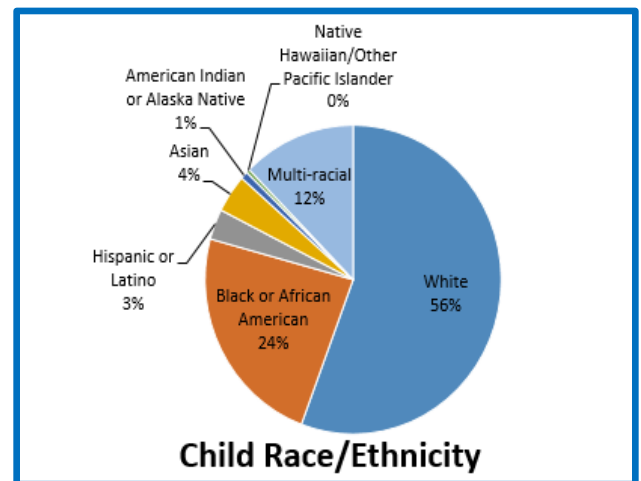
ECMHC is an **evidence-informed intervention** for supporting young children's social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors in early learning and home environments (Cohen & Kaufmann, 2005). **ECMHC has been shown to improve school climate and child behaviors, and to reduce preschool suspensions and expulsions** (Brennan, et al., 2011; Perry et al., 2009).

In State Fiscal Year 2017, **597 children received supportive intervention services to promote more positive behavior for approximately 4 months.**

- A majority of ECMHC services were provided in Child Care Centers (84%)
- More than half of the children served (65%) were boys.
- Children ranged from 2 months to 6 years, with 83% ages 3-6.
- Children served were diverse and reflect the varied state demographics
- *11% of children identified as in need were not served due to lack of an available consultant demonstrating increased need for consultants*

Maryland ECMHC benefits to children and their caregivers:

- Child and the classroom observation and assessment;
- Referrals to Maryland's Infants and Toddlers program, Child Find, and other appropriate mental health services;
- Parent/teacher training and coaching to meet children's social and emotional needs;
- Specific behavior modification skills;
- Strategies for retaining and serving children with behavioral and other mental health needs; and
- Additional resources (e.g. trainings, parent groups)
- Connections to community partners (i.e., providing trainings, connecting families and providers to resources).



Children served reflect families in need:

- Single-Parent Household (29%)
- Receiving Child Care Subsidy (8%)
- Public Services such as WIC, TANF (12%)
- Developmental Delay (8%)
- Child was adopted/foster care, drug exposed, homeless or had an incarcerated parent (5%)

Classroom Climate Improvements

ECMHC services led to significant increases in positive classroom climate indicators including more:

- positive transitions during the school day;
- provision of appropriate directions and rules;
- staff awareness of social emotional needs;
- cooperation among children;
- positive affect of staff;
- positive staff-child and child-child interactions; and,
- identification of feelings & problem-solving strategies.ⁱ

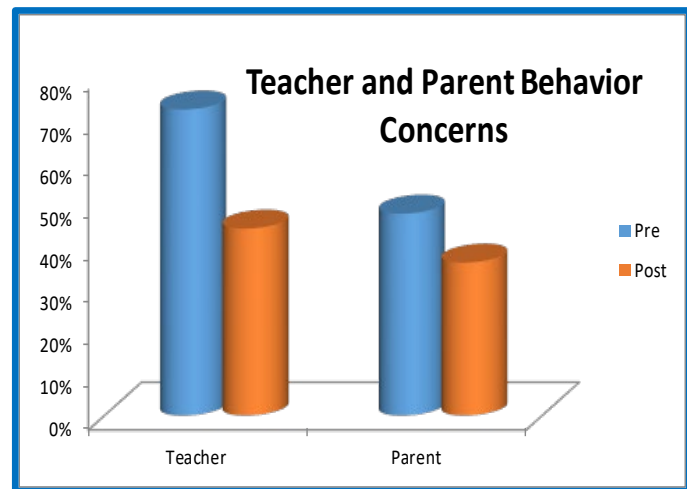
Overall, classrooms were observed to be more positive after receiving ECMHC.

Child Behaviors Improvementsⁱⁱ

Teacher reported child behavior significantly improved with reported behavior problems reduced from 72% to 44%. Teacher reports also indicated improvements in children's ability to be independent and persistent, stay calm and demonstrate self-control and, form relationships.

Parent reported child behavior significantly improved with reported problems reduced from 48% to 36%. Parent reports also indicated improvements in children's ability to be independent and persistent, and form relationships.

Therefore Maryland's ECMHC workforce leads to measurable improvements in child behavior for both teachers and parents.



Impact on Expulsion Rates

Data on expulsions and suspensions for children in early education programs indicate rates triple that of expulsion rates for school aged peersⁱⁱⁱ and national attention has been given to utilization of ECMHC as a primary mechanism to address this concern. Within this cohort of children, only 3.8% (n=23) were formally reported as expelled after initiation of consultation services indicating that **ECMHC services contributed to preventing suspensions and expulsions in many of the remaining 96.2% of this year's consultation cases.**

Why ECMHC in Maryland Is Important

- Social emotional competence is related to school success in kindergarten and beyond (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). ECMHC can decrease negative behaviors and improve independence, self-control and relationship building skills which can increase school readiness and success (Perry, et al., 2009).
- ECMHC has demonstrated positive outcomes on school climate including staff affect and skills (Brennan et al, 2009) indicating that ECMHC builds workforce capacity and contributes to reduced staff turnover. In Maryland, as in the rest of the country, child care staff turnover rates are high^{iv}, and ECMHC is a vital part of training and retaining the early childhood workforce.
- ECMHC is part of the core recommendations in national guidelines^v for reducing preschool suspensions and expulsions along with developing clear policies and using data to track outcomes, and thus Maryland ECMHC project is helping programs meet national guidelines

"Our consultant's guidance and advice was the right step in helping our son through this hard time. I am forever grateful!" - Anne Arundel County Parent

ⁱ As measured by the Preschool Mental Health Climate Scales (PMHCS)

ⁱⁱ As measured by the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)

ⁱⁱⁱ Gilliam, W. S. (2005). Prekindergartners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center.

^{iv} <http://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/StaffTurnover.pdf>

^v <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>