

**EDUCATION
LAW CENTER**

Ending Preschool Pushout in Pennsylvania

PARENT TESTIMONIES
AND A PATH FORWARD



COMPILED BY EDUCATION LAW CENTER - PA

APRIL 2026

Content Warning

Content Warning: This report shares family experiences of preschool pushout, including detailed accounts of racism, ableism, and the exclusion of young children from educational settings. It includes descriptions of harm, such as denial of services, lack of support, and emotional distress affecting children and caregivers. We share these stories to highlight systemic harm and the urgent need for change, while honoring the experiences of families who have been impacted. We encourage readers to engage with this material at their own pace and take care as needed.

Definitions

This report uses the term "**preschool**" to encompass early learning programs administered in the Commonwealth, including child care and day care centers, Early Intervention programs, Head Start, private academic preschools, and school district prekindergarten (pre-K) programs.

Preschool pushout refers to the practice of formal and informal suspension, exclusion, expulsion, or practices that otherwise prevent our youngest learners from accessing the preschool programs and services they need to thrive.

Our Gratitude

The team at ELC-PA is incredibly **grateful to each of the families who generously shared their experiences and expertise** with us so that we can collectively fight for an equitable, just system of early childhood education—a system that too often fails our youngest learners, particularly children who are Black and Brown, children with disabilities, and children who share these identities.

Each family's story is rooted in unconditional love for their child. We recognize the trauma that families have experienced in what has often been a years-long journey to ensure their child receives the supports that they need and are entitled to receive.

It is not lost on us that the families who are telling their stories are doing so because they know that their action will benefit other families. The families featured have already completed (or will soon complete) their preschool years. The changes for which they are advocating will likely not directly benefit their own children. **This generosity of spirit is deeply moving.**

For each of the families sharing their stories in this report, for each family that has engaged in our advocacy work, and for each family that has trusted us to represent them, **we are immensely thankful for their compassion, bravery, and partnership.**

Their stories, advice, and a path forward follow.

Table of Contents

OVERVIEW: PRESCHOOL SUSPENSION & EXPULSION	<i>Page 4</i>
THE IMPACT	<i>Page 5</i>
PARENT TESTIMONY: IRELYN (SON XAVIER)	<i>Page 6</i>
PARENT TESTIMONY: BARBARA (DAUGHTER HANNAH)	<i>Page 7</i>
PARENT TESTIMONY: RITA (SON ZEUS)	<i>Page 8</i>
PARENT TESTIMONY: PAMELA (SON ALEX)	<i>Page 9</i>
PARENT TESTIMONY: GEN (DAUGHTER KK)	<i>Page 10</i>
PARENT TESTIMONY: MARGE (SON HANK)	<i>Pages 11-12</i>
LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERTS	<i>Page 13</i>
THE PATH FORWARD	<i>Page 14</i>
RESOURCES	<i>Page 15</i>
REFERENCES	<i>Page 16</i>



Introduction: Decision-makers Must End Preschool Pushout

Education Law Center-PA and parent advocates urge leaders in Philadelphia and across the Commonwealth to develop and implement policies, regulations, and legislation to end preschool pushout.

Our youngest learners deserve inclusive and supportive education spaces that nurture their growth and development and prepare them for their bright futures.¹ For too many children, however, early learning spaces become sites of pushout and exclusion, the impacts of which can last a lifetime.² Research is clear that, despite no difference in young children's behaviors,³ preschools choose to exclude Black children through suspensions and expulsions at a rate 3.6 times higher than is imposed on their white peers for similar behaviors, and at three times the rate of K-12 exclusion.⁴

The root causes of this racial disproportionality stem from systemic barriers,⁵ including structural and systemic racism, lack of equal access to Early Intervention services and health care to address the developmental and behavioral needs of Black and Brown children, and adult decision-makers' racial biases.⁶

School rules and their disproportionate enforcement often reinforce racism and ableism, thereby driving these preventable disparities. The key difference often lies in how adults respond to children's behaviors by choosing to harshly discipline a child for what is often developmentally appropriate behavior for a preschool-aged child, or a behavior that directly results from the child's disability. These practices often violate children's rights.⁷

Racism drives exclusion.

Nationwide, in a single year, preschools chose to suspend an estimated 174,000 preschool students, and nearly half of the suspensions of public preschoolers were Black children — even though Black children represented less than 20 percent of enrolled preschoolers.⁸

Ableism drives exclusion.

Similarly, preschools choose to suspend and expel preschoolers with disabilities, largely for disability-related behaviors, at a rate 14.5 times higher than that of their peers without disabilities.⁹

Intersectional discrimination compounds harm.

This intersectional discrimination compounds to cause even more deeply disproportionate harm to Black and Brown children with disabilities.

Exclusionary discipline practices cause long-lasting harm, especially to very young children, and are not appropriate for any child.

The preventable practice of excluding young children causes grave future harm:¹⁰ undermining a child's self-esteem by reinforcing racist and ableist attitudes;¹¹ pushing families away from engaging with schools; and jeopardizing academic achievement¹² and lifelong well-being.¹³

When preschools exclude young children, they push them into the preschool-to-prison pipeline and significantly increase the likelihood that children will later experience exclusion from school and justice-system involvement.¹⁴ These harms are the result of decisions by schools to exclude rather than support young children. Suspensions and expulsions are health-harming practices that undermine opportunities for academic attainment and associated positive education and life outcomes.¹⁵

Decision-makers must end preschool pushout and enact comprehensive reform.

To effectuate lasting change, comprehensive reform is essential. We must not only address individual and program-based racist and ableist discrimination that harms our youngest learners, but we must also dismantle broader systems of racism and ableism that are reinforced through policies, practices, and funding decisions at the core of preschool pushout. Policy changes must be coupled with appropriate training and significant funding increases for early childhood programs.

The Impact: Family Stories

Below are words parents used to describe their child's preschool experience, compared with words they wish they had been able to use.

LIVED EXPERIENCE	WISHED FOR EXPERIENCE
Heartbreaking; Nightmare	Supportive
Dramatic	Awesome
Irregular; Disorganized	Good process
Disappointing; Difficult	Easy; Smooth
Unfair; Overwhelmed	Balanced; Aware
Uncertain	Supported



Parents Answered: *What resources would have helped your family?*



- A **guide** to support families with navigating the preschool system, and specific **information** about individual schools' policies and procedures. **Clear protocols.**
- Access to **consistent, supportive Early Intervention programs** to set children up for success.
- **Clear, transparent communication from providers and schools.** Parents need to know their children's rights.
- **Training for adults** to support students with disabilities.

The accounts that follow are told by lived experience experts: parents whose children have been directly impacted by preschool pushout.

To protect the privacy of each family, pseudonyms have been used and some identifying details have been changed. Demographic information was provided by parents. All of the language below has been shared with each parent's express permission. Language has been anonymized, updated, and edited with parent feedback and approval. Photos included do not depict the children or schools featured in the testimonies.

Xavier, Age 5

AS SHARED BY HIS MOM, IRELYN

Xavier is an amazing 5-year-old Black child with autism who is teaching himself multiple languages. Xavier is currently in kindergarten and loves his speech therapist at school, which makes speech one of his favorite parts of the day. Below, Xavier's parent, Irelyn, shares their family's experience with preschool pushout.

Xavier is five years old, and he is an **incredible** child. He is teaching himself multiple languages, loves music, and is learning to play the piano. He can even read music notes. As parents, **we want to nurture every part of who our children are.** I want Xavier **to grow, to thrive, and to have everything he needs and deserves.**

When I began noticing concerns, I started researching autism and brought him to his pediatrician. The evaluation and diagnosis were emotional, but they also gave us direction. Xavier began receiving Early Intervention services, and those supports made a real difference.

At the age of two, I knew he needed to be around other children—to play, learn, and grow. Xavier's preschool experience started at a wonderful early childcare program. However, when our family needed to relocate, everything changed.

We found a new center, and I met with the director. I was very transparent about Xavier. **I shared everything—his autism, his personality, his strengths, and his interests. I wanted them to truly see him.** The director reassured me that everything would be fine.

Shortly after Xavier started, I was called in and **told that he was “no longer a good fit.”** There were **no solutions** offered. **No supports** discussed. **No conversation** about what could be done differently. **Despite our efforts to advocate for Xavier to remain in the program, we were told the decision was final.** Xavier was not allowed to return—something I now understand was discriminatory.

I carried a lot of guilt. I questioned whether I had placed my son in an environment where he was not safe, understood, or valued. It felt like our only option was to keep him home again.

After Xavier's third birthday, I began searching for a place that would truly welcome him. That is when we found a new preschool—and from the very first conversation, everything felt different. They not only welcomed Xavier and supported him, but they made space for him to be himself.

For the first time, outside of his family and support team, Xavier truly felt safe and seen. With the right supports in place, he began to thrive. His confidence grew, and his personality blossomed.

Today, Xavier is in kindergarten, and we continue to advocate to ensure he receives the supports he needs and is legally entitled to. Being expelled from preschool was a traumatic experience for both Xavier and our family. **Moments like this stay with children and their families**—and they should not happen.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share our story. I am currently working on a three-part series to bring awareness, acceptance, and inclusion to the forefront. When people do not understand something, they often fear it—and many people still do not understand autism. That lack of understanding is what drives my advocacy.

I stand with other families because we should not have to fight this hard for basic inclusion. **No child should be pushed out because they learn differently. No parent should have to question whether their child will be accepted or rejected.**

We can do better—and our children deserve better.

Hannah, Age 5

AS SHARED BY HER MOM, BARBARA

*Hannah is a bubbly 5-year-old African American girl with autism and ADHD. At school, she loves to dance. Below is Hannah's parent, **Barbara**, recounting their family's experience with preschool pushout.*

Hannah is five years old, and she is a **bubbly child**. She **loves to dance**, and she **loves to play with her sisters**. Hannah is autistic, and she is learning how to communicate. Before enrolling her in pre-K, she had Early Intervention services including speech therapy, occupational therapy, and more, and this was all legally required to follow her to pre-K. Getting these services was hard, even though she needed to have them. There were constant issues of short staffing and programs dropping the ball, and my child suffered.

When I met with the school before she started pre-K, we let them know about Hannah's needs. She had not yet been diagnosed as autistic, but I had shared the needs I knew she had. They said no problem. They assured us she would be fine. But the teacher had no idea how to support Hannah, and she did not meet her needs.

The school began calling us every other day to come pick Hannah up. On her first day of pre-K, less than two hours after dropping Hannah off, the school called me and told me I had to pick her up. It was so traumatizing for Hannah and for us as her parents. This was her first school experience, and it was a large class with no support services. Hannah was overstimulated, and I knew she did not feel comfortable, and when that happens, Hannah suffers.

I would drop her off in the morning as her bubbly self, and by the time I picked Hannah up she would be having a hard time expressing her needs. When we would pick her up, she would be in tears and run to us.

We did not want to pull her out of school, but **the truth is the school never even gave her a chance**. I felt completely lost. Communication from the school is so important, but it was just not there. I did not get feedback from the principal, from the school, or from the providers that were supposed to be supporting Hannah. Even when I tried to share information with the school, it was ignored. I alerted them that Hannah gets overwhelmed during a fire alarm sound, and I would have even been ready and able to make sure she was not at school at the time of a planned drill. But instead of telling me in advance, I arrived at school to respond to my distraught daughter, when it was a **preventable** situation.

The impact on me as a mom has been profound. I feel so much more overprotective of Hannah, knowing how she was treated and excluded.

I am happy to share that we eventually found a pre-K where Hannah got all the services she needed, and she did wonderfully. She graduated from the program. Now that Hannah is in kindergarten, we are still working to ensure she has her legally mandated supports.

We are still dealing with the impact of the pre-K suspensions. I feel like we have to be "on call" and I am always worried about a call from the school.

No child or family should experience this.



Zeus, Age 5

AS SHARED BY HIS MOM, RITA

Zeus is a crafty 5-year-old Latino boy with a diagnosis of autism, and he is always happy. Zeus is currently in kindergarten and is very agile with technology. Below is Zeus's parent, Rita, recounting their family's experience with preschool pushout. Interpretation services were used.

Zeus is five years old and is in kindergarten. He loves to use the tablet and phone, loves to eat, and loves to watch cartoons. He is very crafty, and he is really agile with technology. **He is always happy.**

By the time Zeus was enrolled in pre-K, he had been evaluated for Early Intervention services, and they identified that he may be autistic. They recommended services, such as speech therapy, to happen before Zeus started preschool. We had an IEP in place, but not all of the services happened.

When it was time for Zeus to start preschool, I chose the center because it was close to my house, and I liked the structure. **On the first day of school I took a picture of Zeus outside the center, and I brought him in and dropped him off. I still have that picture showing him ready to go into school for the first time. By the time I came back to pick him up, the director wanted to meet with me, and I did not know why.** But then when I met with the director, everything made sense.

The preschool director said that Zeus was having sensory overload and overstimulation, and they didn't have the resources to take care of him, but that she would recommend another place that can support him.

I was so scared. I talked with the school a few more times. I was devastated. I was crying. I begged the director. The school refused my offers of support and my ideas for how to best support my child. Racism played a part in my experience.

I had to start all over and visit pre-K centers near me, and almost everything was full. But I finally found a place that told us they will accept Zeus gladly. They had availability; they had kids with autism. Everything was beautiful. They needed Zeus's IEP from the preschool center, but the center never sent it, and soon, the school was full, and I had to start again.

Parents need **support and guidance** to know what to do when children are not getting the support they are entitled to.

Many months went by. When we enrolled into a preschool near my new home, Zeus was there with his two teachers, and we started to see the light. Both took my kid with love, kindness and determination to support him in all ways. I am grateful to them. Along the way we have met many people that have supported us, but parents need more information and support.

We are all so happy that he is improving.

“

I want to help out so that this does not happen to other families.

-Rita

”



Alex, Age 6

AS SHARED BY HIS MOM, PAMELA

Alex is a “water baby” who loves to swim. He is a 6-year-old Black boy who is autistic, and he is currently in kindergarten. Alex comes alive when it’s time to go to school, and he loves to be in the company of other children. What follows is Alex’s parent, Pamela, recounting their family’s experience with preschool pushout.

Alex loves to cook, and his play kitchen is where he goes first every morning. He’s a water baby, and he loves swimming. **He loves his older brother, loves hugs, and loves school.** He likes routine.

Alex is autistic, and he communicates with his AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) device, and he is making great progress using it in kindergarten. **He is finally getting resources that he needs to grow and thrive.** Just seeing how much progress he is making right now is so wonderful. He now loves tracing all the letters and numbers. But seeing how much progress he is making also reminds me of how much the **preschool programs he was in failed him by not providing support that I now know is required.**

I did not have guidance that really showed me how to navigate the complex systems. One of Alex’s therapists told me about a school where she thought he would thrive. We liked the school, and when we toured it, we explained that Alex would receive Early Intervention services, including a one-to-one aide, at the school to support his learning. In fact, before we even toured the school, I shared his IEP with them. And when we toured the school, I brought Alex’s behavioral therapist. **They did not tell us about any requirement that Alex have a one-to-one present with him in order to attend.**

One day I dropped Alex off, and the school director called me to say that his assigned one-to-one aide had not shown up, and so I had to come pick him up. It was hard to find a consistent solution, and the **school was refusing to allow him to attend.** I was not getting clear answers from anyone.

Throughout all of this, **communication from the school had been a huge issue,** and I think **racism played a part in how the school chose to communicate with me.** I think the school thought there were things they did not have to tell me. I felt a bias towards me and my son. **Because our family is Black, I think the school communicated with me differently and did not share essential information.** For example, there was a time when a virus was going around the classroom, and no one even shared it with me until I found that Alex had it, and I informed the school. Why was I never told this? If I knew Alex had a virus, I would have brought it to the school’s attention right away.

Alex was excluded for well over a month of preschool at the start of the school year. When Alex missed school because the preschool excluded him, he also missed the therapies he had in school, like physical therapy, speech, occupational therapy, and behavioral therapy. Alex was isolated.

The impact on our family has been a lot. My husband and I missed a lot of work time. It impacted our employment and our income. **The stress and worry are severe.** Alex suffered and experienced regression. **I know I won’t be around forever. Who will be there to make sure Alex is treated fairly? I am not seeing a world that is compassionate.**

The preschool should not have pushed my son out, but they did. The entire system needs to do a much better job of giving families the information they need to navigate this process. **I support Alex in any way I can, and I felt ignored.** It was not until I got a lawyer involved that Alex started to get the supports he needs, and it should not be that way. **My son is not just a number on a report.** He should be seen for who he is. We really need pathways that show us what our children are entitled to and how to get those services. My son deserves better, and he is entitled to better.

KK, Age 3

AS SHARED BY HER MOM, GEN

KK is a smart 3-year-old who learns quickly. KK is a multiracial girl with autism, and she is currently in preschool. She loves building with blocks. What follows is KK's parent, Gen, recounting their family's experience with preschool pushout.

KK is three years old, and **she's smart**. She can see something one time and know how it works (like my phone, even with a password!). She **loves to jump, loves to build** with blocks, and she loves educational music and shows—like Miss Rachel, Gracie's Corner, and Mickey. **She should not be excluded from school due to her disability, but multiple schools have decided to do just that.**

I knew a little sign language before KK, but I learned a lot more now, and I use it to communicate with her. KK can sometimes communicate back with me in sign, and that makes me so happy. It took me a long time to understand and learn what KK wanted and needed before her services started. It was extremely difficult to read her emotions.

Infant-Toddler Early Intervention helped a lot, but when she aged out, she was supposed to start her preschool Early Intervention services right away. This is her right in her IEP. There should have been no break in services, and this transition was so important. **But that's not what happened. KK was enrolled in and kicked out of four preschool programs.** Her preschool Early Intervention services did not begin like they should have. In one center where KK was enrolled, instead of figuring out what supports my daughter needed (and was entitled to), they would **refuse to support her, or ignore her, and then immediately blame her. But it was their failure.**

Throughout all of this, **racism and colorism impacted my daughter**, who is multiracial. KK does not like being touched at all. At school, teachers touch her hair without permission. This **racist hair-based harassment** almost looks like they are petting my child, as if she were a dog and not a human being. Teachers have made comments like "she has soft hair and a cute skin color for a mixed child" or praising her skin tone that is closer to mine than her dad's, who is Black. It is extremely uncomfortable and disrespectful. These are **racist comments discriminating against my daughter on the basis of her skin color**, which is also against the law, and teachers should know better. One pre-K teacher let a stranger pick my daughter up to "calm her down" but it was actually harmful. **When we brought up our concerns, the school then called my daughter a "safety hazard" who needed to be controlled, as if she were a dog. These are responses that teachers would not have towards a white child. No one should experience that discrimination.**

Additionally, the **discrimination against my daughter due to her disability** is painful. I feel that as soon as the school learns KK has a disability, they do not set her up for success, but instead refuse to provide her with services she is legally entitled to.

The impact of these exclusions on KK has been a lot. Since the expulsions, I have noticed that KK has been more attached to me and afraid when I leave. I think she feels I am abandoning her, and I am her safe place. But school should be a safe place for her too.

The impact of the expulsions on me is a lot too. I never have a day off. I have had to miss a lot of work. And I feel like I can't ask for help, because if someone else cares for KK and it does not go well, the impacts of that can be long lasting for my daughter. She relies on routine and security. I go through my list to support KK: rub her hands, give her a little massage, sing to her, put on her show, give her food. And then I just have to keep going.

KK deserves to be in pre-K, and she deserves services.

Hank, Age 4

AS SHARED BY HIS MOM, MARGE

Hank is a sweet, bright, loving 4-year-old Black boy on the autism spectrum, and he is currently in preschool. He loves riding the bus to school, feeling the breeze, looking out the windows, and he enjoys that time so much. What follows is Hank's parent, Marge, recounting their family's experience with preschool pushout. The language below is authored directly by Marge and has been anonymized and updated with parent feedback and approval.

My name is Marge, and I am the mother of a 4-year-old autistic child named Hank. Before I share the concerns regarding his experience at a Philadelphia preschool, **I want to begin by telling you who my son truly is**, because he is so much more than the challenges we have faced.

Hank is one of the sweetest, brightest, and most loving little boys you could ever meet. His **smile lights up every room** he enters, and he **brings joy** to everyone around him. He loves singing along with Ms. Rachel and Sesame Street, playing instruments (especially his drum), dancing, climbing at the playground, snuggling with me and his dad, giving hugs and kisses, and enjoying the outdoors. Hank is nonverbal and requires substantial support throughout his day, and **his father and I are his biggest advocates and the foundation of his support system.**

Despite being nonverbal, Hank has an **incredible memory** that I call his superpower. He recognizes letters, numbers, colors, and shapes, and even knows his eight digit birthday so well that he independently enters it into his iPad to unlock it. He has been receiving therapies since eighteen months old, and every provider describes him as **persistent, determined, hardworking, and a joy to work with.** He pushes through tasks even when they challenge him, and he remains loving, gentle, and full of energy.

This is the child I entrusted to the preschool. **A child deserving of safety, care, and understanding.**

Unfortunately, **what we experienced was the opposite.** Hank has significant feeding challenges and relies on prompting and support to eat, which the school did not provide. At school meal and snack time, he shut down and stopped eating altogether. If his therapist was not present, they simply did not feed him. As a nonverbal child, Hank depends heavily on his AAC device to communicate essential needs such as hunger, thirst, discomfort, or help. Yet the device was routinely left inside the classroom while Hank spent hours outside on the playground. Without his AAC device, my son had no voice. When I picked Hank up, he was **extremely hungry and thirsty every single day.**

Although I referenced his IEP multiple times, the school never once asked for it, never reviewed it, and never followed it. For a child who requires substantial support, this was unacceptable and dangerous.

At one point, the school even suggested that Hank should have a **restricted school schedule** and should only attend when his therapist or an aide could be with him.

They repeatedly told me it would be better for him to attend part time in the afternoons because it would be less chaotic, and they would not have to offer feeding support during those hours. **These suggestions were never about what was best for Hank. They were about what was easiest for them.** They pushed for me to reduce his full-time schedule even though I work full time, manage daily therapies, and rely on consistent care.

(Hank's story continues)

The school's insistence on altering my son's schedule to accommodate their staffing issues and avoid supporting his needs made it **impossible for him to stay**. Entire days passed where he went without food, water, or communication access, and without staff following his support plans. **The school's refusal to accept free training, lack of structure, and disregard for his needs amounted to an indirect expulsion.** I ultimately had no choice but to withdraw him for his safety and well-being.

The impact on my son has been devastating. He experienced regression, emotional shutdown, and a loss of trust in school routines. He spent long days hungry, thirsty, overwhelmed, and unable to communicate. For me and his father, the emotional toll has been overwhelming. We are dedicated parents who have made nearly all of his therapy sessions, medical appointments, and responsibilities since birth. We advocate daily, communicate constantly, and do everything in our power to support him, yet the school still failed him.

As a Black parent of a child with disabilities, there is an added layer of concern that behaviors or needs associated with autism may be misunderstood or responded to differently. Families of color often have to work harder to advocate for the same supports, and assumptions about parenting, discipline, or behavior can influence how situations are handled. When those dynamics intersect with disability, they can create additional barriers to receiving understanding, patience, and appropriate accommodations. While each situation is unique, it is important to acknowledge that race can shape how families experience systems that were not originally designed with equity in mind.







I am not sharing this for sympathy. I am sharing this because **no autistic child should ever be ignored, silenced, left hungry, denied communication access, unsupported, or quietly pushed out of a school because their needs required effort.**

I am speaking up to protect children like my son and to advocate for accountability, training, and meaningful inclusion. Thank you for taking the time to understand what Hank experienced.

Learning from Lived Experience Experts

Marge offered a list of questions that parents could ask themselves in order to support families in learning about exclusion and expulsion, noting, **"These questions reveal patterns of 'soft exclusion' that may not appear in formal discipline records but still limit children's access to preschool."**

-  *Has your child ever been asked to stay home, attend fewer hours, or wait for support staff before returning to school?*
-  *Were you given clear written explanations when your child's attendance was limited or interrupted?*
-  *Did the school, transportation providers, and support agencies clearly explain who was responsible for ensuring your child could attend each day?*
-  *Were you offered solutions, or were you left to figure out how to maintain access on your own?*

Parents: If your answers to these questions raise concerns about preschool pushout, contact ELC-PA's [Helpline](#) at 267-436-6095 (Eastern and Central PA), 412-258-2120 (Western PA).

Learning from Lived Experience Experts

TIPS FOR PROVIDERS FROM PARENTS



“ Ask parents **details** about their child and what supports they might need.

-Rita”

“ Overall, tell parents what **supports** are in place. Be **transparent** about the program.

-Gen”



“ Ask parents: what would help your child feel **safe, comfortable, calm,** and **supported** in the classroom environment?

-Irelyn”

TIPS FOR PARENTS FROM PARENTS

“ I want to encourage parents: you have a **little one to advocate for.** Ask **questions!** Is this school a perfect fit for my child? I wish I had known to ask that, and ask about the supports in place for my child's specific needs.

-Barbara”



“ *Ask for specifics.*
How will the school help my child grow and support their needs?
Ask what your child's day will look like.

What are the accommodations in place so they can thrive?

-Pamela”



The Path Forward: Prohibiting Preschool Pushout

Preschool pushout must be prohibited. Preschool exclusion is a systemic injustice rooted in racism and ableism and is “harmful to early childhood development” and is “developmentally inappropriate” for any child.¹⁶ These exclusions are the result of decisions made by systems and leaders — not children’s behavior. We all have a role to play in ending this practice and challenging conditions that deprive our youngest learners from access to critical early education. Systemic solutions must center on eliminating racism and ableism in our schools.

ELC-PA appeals to decision-makers across the Commonwealth to make systemic changes through investments, regulations, law and policy changes, and reporting requirements to end preschool pushout.

Every Pennsylvania resident: Contact your elected officials.

Urge your elected officials to pass legislation that ends preschool pushout for all children.

Legislators must enact reforms that address the racial and disability-based inequities driving preschool pushout.

Legislators must also provide full and equitable **funding** for all preschool programs so that students have the resources they need to thrive.

All Pennsylvania residents:

Contact your State Senator and State Representative.

[Find their contact info here.](#)


Philadelphia residents:


Contact your District Council member.

[Find their contact info here by entering your address.](#)


Preschool/prospective preschool parents:

 Review the **parent advice** in this report.

 Ask to **review your preschool’s rules and regulations**. Inquire specifically about exclusion practices, and look for any discriminatory and criminalizing language. Report any concerns to school leaders and take further action if necessary.

 If your family has experienced preschool pushout, **[contact ELC-PA through our Helpline](#)**. Our intake coordinators will respond with compassion and identify if there are ways we can support your family through providing resources, advocacy, or advice.



 Review **[ELC-PA's Know Your Rights guide](#)**, which provides action items to ensure your child is free from discrimination in preschool.

Decision-makers:

Decision-makers must end preschool pushout. Preschool is an essential time to ensure that our youngest learners have every opportunity to develop and grow. Decision-makers must commit to eliminating racism and ableism in our schools and to equitably funding preschool and Early Intervention programs.

We will continue to amplify the lived experience experts who have generously shared their stories as we collectively work towards systemic change. **Decision-makers everywhere must center parent experts’ wisdom in devising solutions to the racist, ableist practice of preschool pushout, and in helping shape the programs and resources to which every child is entitled.**

Learn More & Contact ELC-PA

Contact ELC-PA's Helpline - Telephone



215-238-6970 (Eastern/Central PA)
412-258-2120 (Western PA)

Para español, llame al
215-789-2488



If you speak a language other than Spanish or English, please know you can still call our main Helpline numbers – we offer interpretation services for most languages.

Contact ELC-PA's Helpline - Online



Click here or scan the QR code:
[Online Intake Option](#)



Know Your Rights



Click here or scan the QR code:
[Your Child's Right to be Free from
Discrimination in Preschool](#)



Stay In Touch



Click here or scan
the QR code:
Sign up for [ELC-
PA's Monthly
Newsletter](#)

Follow us on social:



[@edlawcenterpa](#)



[@educationlawcenter](#)



[@edlawcenterpa.bsky.social](#)

**EDUCATION
LAW CENTER**

[ELC-PA.org](#)

REFERENCES

1. See generally ANNA D. SCOCH, CASSIE S. GERSON, TAMARA HALLE & MEG BREDERSON, CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FROM HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION: A SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE 3-6 (2023), <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/%232023-226%20Benefits%20from%20ECE%20Highlight%20508.pdf>; James J. Heckman, *Perry Preschool Project*, Center for the Economics of Human Development, https://cehd.uchicago.edu/?page_id=958; Beth Meloy, Madelyn Gardner, and Linda Darling-Hammond, *Untangling the Evidence on Preschool Effectiveness: Insights for Policymakers*, LEARNING POLICY INSTITUTE (2019); Allison Atteberry, Daphna Bassok & Vivian C. Wong, *The Effects of Full-Day Prekindergarten: Experimental Evidence of Impacts on Children's School Readiness*, 41 EDUC. EVALUATION AND POL'Y ANALYSIS 537, 550 (2019).
2. Zinsler, Katherine M., et al. A Systematic Review of Early Childhood Exclusionary Discipline, 92 Rev. Educ. Res. 691 (2022); Lily Steyer et al., *De Facto Suspensions: Informal Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Public Preschool and Early Elementary Settings*, 11 AERA Open (2025).
3. Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, KEY DATA HIGHLIGHTS ON EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY GAPS IN OUR NATION'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS (2014); Cristina Novoa & Rasheed Malik, Center for American Progress, *SUSPENSIONS ARE NOT SUPPORT: THE DISCIPLINING OF PRESCHOOLERS WITH DISABILITIES* (2018).
4. Songtian Zeng et al., *Adverse childhood experiences and preschool suspension expulsion: A population study*, 97 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 104149 (2019), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213419303266?via%3Dihub>.
5. Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, *Fact Sheet: Advancing Racial Equity in Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education* (Jan. 5, 2023), https://equity-coalition.fpg.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/FactSheet_RacialEquity_2023.pdf; Natalie Slopen et al., *Racial and Ethnic Inequities in the Quality of Pediatric Care in the USA: A Review of Quantitative Evidence*. 8 RACISM AND CHILD HEALTH IN THE 147 (Lancet Child Adolescent Health, 2024), <https://www.thelancet.com/series/racism-child-health-USA>.
6. Terri Sabol et al., *A Window into Racial and Socioeconomic Status Disparities in Preschool Disciplinary Action Using Developmental Methodology*, ANNALS OF THE N.Y. ACAD. OF SCI. (Sept. 2021), <https://nyaspubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/nyas.14687>.
7. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-336, 104 Stat. 327 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101–12213 [2025]).
8. Songtian Zeng et al., *Adverse Childhood Experiences and Preschool Suspension Expulsion: A Population Study*, 97 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 104149 (2019), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213419303266?via%3Dihub>.
9. Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, KEY DATA HIGHLIGHTS ON EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY GAPS IN OUR NATION'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS (2014); Cristina Novoa & Rasheed Malik, Center for American Progress, *SUSPENSIONS ARE NOT SUPPORT: THE DISCIPLINING OF PRESCHOOLERS WITH DISABILITIES* (2018).
10. See generally Anna D. Schoch et al., *Children's Learning and Development from High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Summary of the Evidence 3–6* (2023), <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/%232023-226%20Benefits%20from%20ECE%20Highlight%20508.pdf>; Heckman, at https://cehd.uchicago.edu/?page_id=958.
11. Akilah DulinKeita et al., *The Defining Moment: Children's Conceptualization of Race and Experiences with Racial Discrimination*, 34 ETHNIC & RACIAL STUD. 662 (2011).
12. D. C. McCoy et al., *Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes*, 46 EDUC. RESEARCHER 474 (2017); Sara Amadon et al., *Does Early Childhood Education Help to Improve High School Outcomes? Results from Tulsa*, 93 Child Dev. 379 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13752>.
13. Ctrs. for Disease Control & Prevention, *Universal Pre-K, VetoViolence*, <https://vetoviolence.cdc.gov/apps/main/prevention-information/policy-in-action/universal-pre-k/> (last visited Aug. 5, 2025); Ctrs. for Disease Control & Prevention, *CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT PREVENTION RESOURCE FOR ACTION: A COMPILATION OF BEST AVAILABLE EVIDENCE*, https://www.cdc.gov/violence-prevention/media/pdf/resources-for-action/CAN-Prevention-Resource_508.pdf (last revised Mar. 2025).
14. Jorge Luis García, James J. Heckman & Anna L. Ziff, *Early Childhood Education and Crime*, 40 Infant Mental Health J. 141 (2019).
15. Ismaila Ramon et al., *Early Childhood Education to Promote Health Equity: A Community Guide Economic Review*, 24 J. PUB. HEALTH MGMT. & PRAC. e8 (2018).
16. Susanna K. Jain, Nathaniel Beers, Ryan Padrez, Council on School Health; *School Suspension and Expulsion: Policy Statement*, Pediatrics October 2024; 154 (4): e2024068466. 10.1542/peds.2024-068466 at <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/154/4/e2024068466/199495/School-Suspension-and-Expulsion-Policy-Statement?autologincheck=redirected>.