



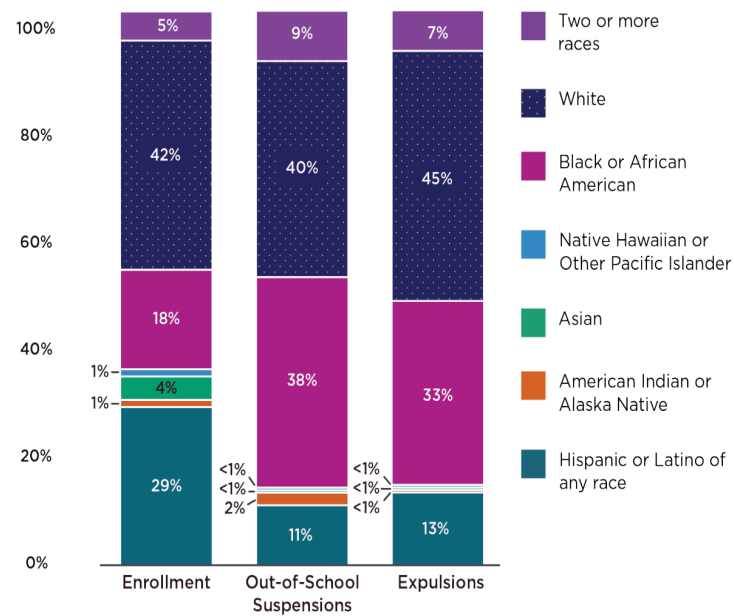
# Families Experiences with Preschool Suspension and Expulsion

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# Current Data on Preschool Suspension and Expulsion

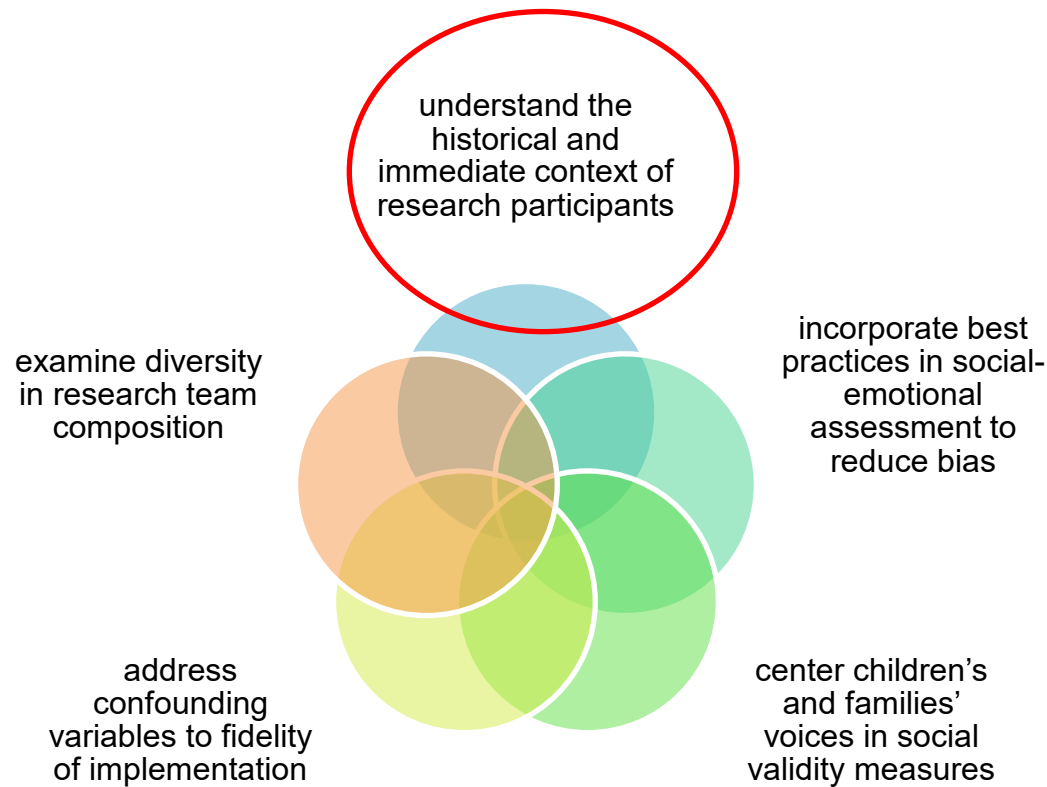
**Figure 11.** Percent of preschool children receiving out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, by race/ethnicity



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021-22 Civil Rights Data Collection, released January 2025, available at <https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov>.



# Social-Emotional Research as Justice (Wahman et al., 2023)





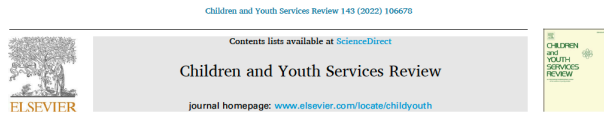
# Families' Experiences (Wahman et al., 2022)

Parents' mental health (i.e., guilt, blame, shame)

Parents' relationships with teachers

Quality of life outcomes (i.e., unemployment, finances)

Gap: What are families' experiences of young children?



"No Intervention, Just Straight Suspension": Family perspectives of suspension and expulsion\*

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## ABSTRACT

Research has revealed disproportional rates of suspension and expulsion for children with disabilities and children who are racially/ethnically diverse. There is less known about the impact of suspension and expulsion on the family unit. This qualitative study used focus group methodology and individual family interviews to explore the perspectives of families with a child who was suspended and/or expelled from school. The ecological systems framework was used to analyze findings regarding how families viewed their child's suspension and expulsion. Implications suggest the need for vast school reform that include teacher training on alternative discipline measures, a systematic focus on family-professional partnerships, and equitable policies that support the belongings of Black children in schools.

## 1. Introduction

The national attention on harsh disciplinary practices for Black students exposes the landscape of inequitable disciplinary practices in U.S. Education. Decades of research conducted over the last 40 years reveal a historic pattern of Black students being temporarily or permanently removed from their regular educational setting due to real or perceived violations of school policies (e.g., Borman et al., 2021; Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Gage et al., 2019; Paul et al., 2019; Skiba et al., 2002). Every year, approximately 1.2 million Black students are suspended from K-12 public schools, with over half of these suspensions occurring in Southern States (Smith & Harper, 2015). These non-evidenced based practices result in the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of Black students at higher rates than students from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2021). In fact, national data show that each year Black students receive at least one out of school suspensions which is more than three times their share when compared to White students (Gopalan & Nelson, 2019). Expulsion rates follow the same trend. Black students accounted for 15.1 % of student enrollment and were expelled at rates that were more than twice their share (38.8 %) of total student enrollment between

2017 and 2018 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021; Welsh & Little, 2018).

Black students with disabilities are grossly overrepresented in exclusionary discipline practices (Gage et al., 2019), with students with emotional or behavioral disorders being largely represented (Crosley-Boy et al., 2019). Between 2017 and 2018, students with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) represented 13.2 % of total student enrollment but received 20.5 % of one or more in school suspension and 24.5 % of one or more out of school suspensions. More specifically, Black students with disabilities accounted for 6.2 % of one or more in school suspension and 8.8 % of one or more out of school suspensions. These facts highlight the alarming consequence of exclusionary disciplinary practices for students with disabilities as removal from the regular learning environment limits access to legally mandated services under IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

### 1.1. Suspension and expulsion in early childhood

The disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion starts early with consequential effects for young children and their families. In a

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# Families' Experiences

(Wahman et al., 2024)

## Research Questions:

- How did families experience the early childhood program's use of suspension or expulsion?
- How did families perceive the support they received or did not receive from the early childhood program regarding their child's suspension or expulsion?



# Method

- Two focus groups
- Interviews
- Participants ( $n=20$ )
  - Female, White, Non-Hispanic
  - Biological
  - 34 and 56 years ( $M=41$ )
  - Master's ( $n=6$ ), Bachelor's ( $n=7$ )



# Common Themes

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Lack of clear and positive communication with school personnel (95)

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Requests to reduce the child's time or to pick up the child early from school (50)

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Abrupt/unexpected escalation to expulsion (34)

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Emotional experience of suspension and expulsion (165)

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School personnel did not provide adequate support (139)

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Use of inappropriate discipline practices (28)

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Parents needed to advocate for their child to get support (84)



# Discussion

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Emotionally fraught experiences

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Lack of family centered practices

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Influence of implicit racial biases in discipline decisions

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Lack of effective support for children with additional needs

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Program-wide SEL models

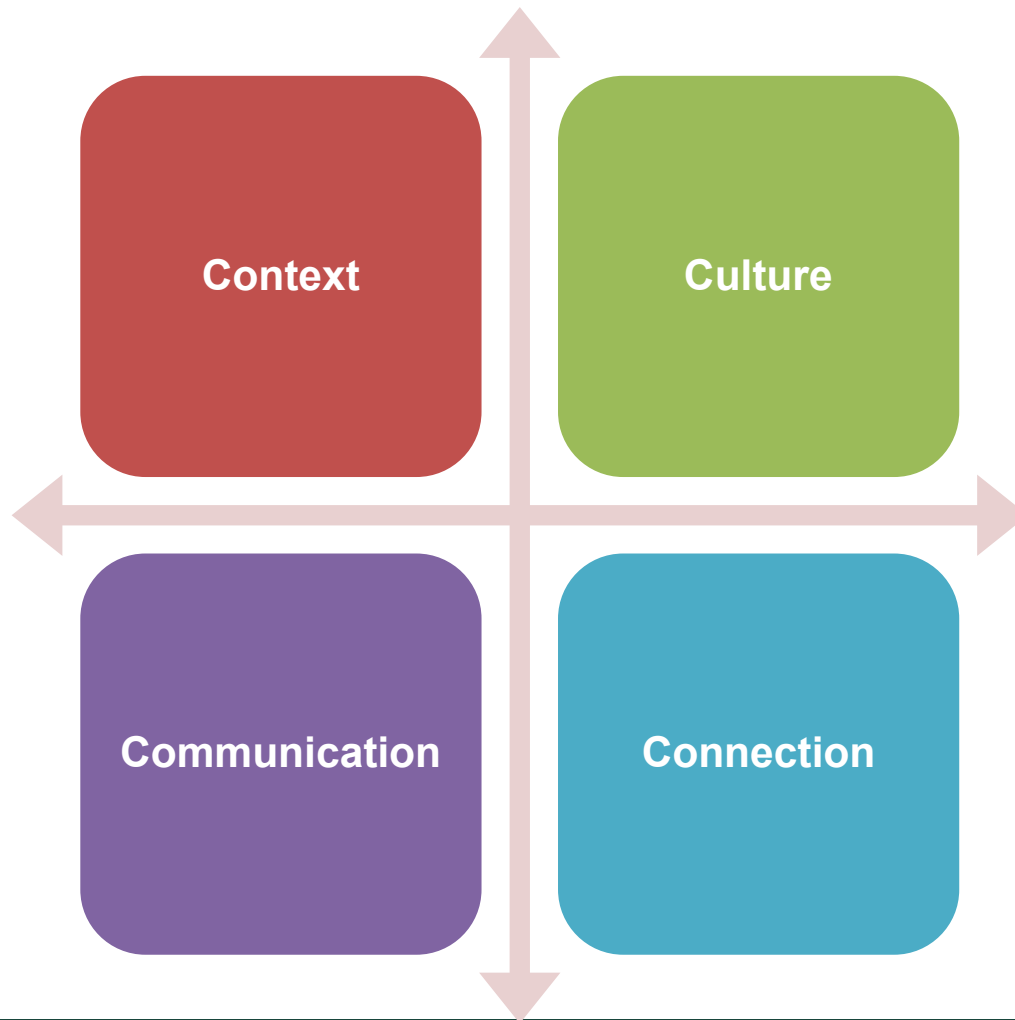
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*Limitations:* not a diverse sample, Zoom interactions minimized flow, "Mini" focus groups





# ***C<sup>4</sup> Framework: Supports for Children, Families, and Teachers***





# Questions and Comments

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