

North Carolina Coalition for Inclusion, Not Expulsions

Strategic Action Plan: 2024-2034

Updated June 2024



North Carolina Coalition For
**Inclusion,
Not Expulsions**

Building a Movement That Transforms Early Care and Education

North Carolina Coalition for Inclusion, Not Expulsions Strategic Action Plan: 2024-2034

All Children Deserve A Strong Start

All young children, regardless of their background, deserve the strongest possible start. That start includes access to high-quality early care and education. For young children, ages two to five, early care and educational experiences create a promising early foundation for success in school, career and life.

Yet, year after year, data shows that **Black preschoolers are significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled than White preschoolers**. This means **Black children are far too likely to miss out on early childhood experiences that help unlock their fullest potential by supporting healthy brain development** during their critical early years.

The disparity is stark: The most recent available data shows that Black preschool students represent about 18 percent of total preschoolers, but make up more than 40 percent of suspended preschoolers.

The impact of early care and education suspensions also extend well beyond preschool doors. Pushing young children out of early care and education settings has **broad and long-term consequences for children, families and our economy**.

- Families deserve to know that their children are safe, welcomed and cared for in early care and education settings while they work.
- Data consistently shows that these unfair disciplinary practices put young children on a track toward more suspensions, lower overall academic achievement and higher dropout rates that even lead to higher rates of incarceration.
- When young children get removed from care, parents and caregivers are forced to take time off of work or get pushed out of the workforce entirely. This hurts caregivers' abilities to support their families and creates instability in businesses across the state.

- And, without better preparation and resources like mental health consultation support, the early childhood workforce lacks access to critical tools needed to provide positive environments for all young learners to grow and develop.

About the North Carolina Coalition for Inclusion, Not Expulsions

The North Carolina Coalition for Inclusion, Not Expulsions is a collaborative group of dedicated partners **building a movement toward eliminating suspensions, expulsions and exclusionary practices in early care and education settings.**

Our Coalition includes researchers, care providers, families and advocates with distinct expertise in and experiences across the early childhood field.

Together, we are collectively working to create a North Carolina where our youngest Black children – ages two to five – and their families have **fair and equitable opportunities to fully participate in all early care and education settings.**

We are on a bold mission to build a movement that transforms early care and education to:

- better meet the needs of North Carolina’s diverse children and families,
- strengthen our state’s essential early childhood workforce, and
- create a model for other states.

Our Vision

We envision a North Carolina early care and education system where **Black children and families have equitable opportunity** to participate in early care and education settings.

Our Strategic Action Plan

In Fall 2022, the Coalition devised an initial logic model. The logic model identified resources, activities and interventions, as well as processes to measure and short- and long-term outcomes aimed at:

- eliminating racial inequities in early care and education suspensions, expulsions and exclusionary practices;
- dramatically reducing the overall number of suspensions and expulsions; and

- providing alternative tools for early care and educational professionals and for families to offer positive responses to children's behaviors.

The logic model was informed by a statewide and national research scan and lived experience and expertise from Coalition members.

In 2023, the Coalition used its logic model as a basis to determine its 10-year goals and initial action steps. In addition to the research and feedback used to inform the logic model, the Coalition's Strategic Action Plan is guided by:

- ongoing feedback and insight from Coalition members, including:
 - an initial strategy session in June 2023;
 - a feedback session at the December 2023 full Coalition meeting;
 - feedback sessions at Coalition Task Force meetings;
 - a feedback session and the March 2024 full Coalition meeting;
 - and a strategy session in June 2024.
- insight from dozens of experts across North Carolina and the country, including:
 - Walter Gilliam (Buffett Early Childhood Institute);
 - Kate Zinsler (University of Illinois);
 - Shantel E. Meek (Children's Equity Project and Arizona State University);
 - members of the Preschool Exclusionary Discipline Community Research Advisory Board in North Carolina;
 - Tiffany Ferrette, Alyssa Fortner and Alycia Hardy of the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP);
 - Rev. Paul Ford of Action4Equity; and
 - Veronica McLaurin-Brown and Peter Rawitsch of Love Our Children in New Hanover County.
- a series of community listening sessions with early care and education professionals and parents, caregivers and families conducted across eight North Carolina in 2023.
- a state and national research analysis.

As with any action plan, this is a living document that will evolve over time. But the Coalition will remain focused on its overarching vision: to ensure Black children and families have equitable opportunity to participate in early care and education in North Carolina.

Our Goals

To realize our vision, the Coalition is pursuing bold policy and practice solutions that will lead to the following outcomes.

- > **By 2027, we will identify and share innovative, actionable, replicable solutions** and tools to eliminate racial inequities in preschool suspensions, expulsions and exclusionary practices.
- > **By 2029, North Carolina has taken steps to eliminate early care and education suspensions, expulsions and exclusionary practices** across the state.
- > **By 2034, North Carolina has equitable opportunities for Black children to participate** in early care and education settings.

How We'll Get There

We know that when children, families and early childhood professionals have the **support and resources** they truly need, suspensions, expulsions and exclusionary practices decrease. We also know eliminating suspensions and expulsions in early care and education settings means changing multiple systems, which will take time and involves collaborating with, supporting and amplifying existing efforts. **Nonprofit organizations, state agencies, legislators, early care and education professionals and families across North Carolina must and do play a role in ensuring Black children across North Carolina have equitable access to early care and education settings.**

We have identified four action steps where we as a Coalition will take a leadership role to accomplish our shared goals. We will:

1. **Directly name and address bias and racism** within the early care and education system.

2. **Ensure early care and education professionals and communities across North Carolina have the resources and tools they need** to build positive relationships between education professionals and parents.
3. **Create a matrix of best practices** based on what we learn from promising direct service model programs and practices in North Carolina and across the country.
4. **Create and share a set of alternative tools and resources** for early education professionals and families to encourage positive responses to children's behaviors.

We will also support and amplify others' efforts to ensure:

1. **North Carolina has a statewide data collection system** that includes race and tracks suspensions and expulsions across all early care and education programs.
2. Educators and families have more **access to affordable mental health resources**.
3. The early care and education **workforce is paid adequately and has access to benefits** such as health insurance and paid time off.

Our Task Forces

To identify the most promising solutions, the North Carolina Coalition for Inclusion, Not Expulsions includes five Task Forces with specific focus areas. These Task Forces focus on research and data, public policy and systems infrastructure; program and practice evaluation; supporting existing promising models; and communications.

Communications Task Force

The Communications Task Force provides feedback, communications, community engagement expertise and support for efforts to build public awareness of this issue.

Program and Practice Evaluation Task Force

To build evidence-based, impactful recommendations for North Carolina, the Coalition seeks to understand successful programs and strategies that have come before us. That's why the Program and Practice Evaluation Task Force learns alongside five Promising Models that have specific innovative approaches for safe, culturally sensitive and relevant early care and education settings. The Task Force is gathering and sharing these learnings about promising direct service model programs and practices in North Carolina and across the country.

Public Policy and Systems Infrastructure Task Force

Core to our mission is transformative public policy that leads to change that North Carolina communities can feel. The Public Policy and Systems Infrastructure Task Force is

exploring and recommending the most effective policy solutions that will end the practice of removing children from early care and education settings.

Research and Data Task Force

Data is critical for driving systems-level change, allowing us to understand the scope and impact of this issue and the shared benefits of solving it. The Research and Data Task Force assesses available North Carolina and national research and data, identifies any important gaps in data and best practices for capturing and reporting that data. Additionally, this Task Force led the creation of a Coalition logic model that serves as a basis for the strategic direction of the Coalition.

Resources and Support Task Force

This Task Force provides guidance and mentorship to five North Carolina early care and education sites across the state serving as models to create, test and/or evaluate promising practices for addressing suspension, expulsion and exclusionary practices.

Our First Action Steps

We know that creating **equitable opportunities for Black children to participate in early care and education settings** will take time, collaboration and thoughtful, strategic action. Our full action plan will evolve over time as new Coalition members and partners join our work. To get started, we have identified **four key action steps we will take by the end of 2025**.

1. We will release a report detailing policy recommendations for tangible change.

This year, we will release a report detailing **specific policy recommendations** focused primarily on the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS), based on all of our research, community engagement, collaboration and expertise.

2. We will share resources for innovative approaches to eliminate suspensions and expulsions.

To develop these evidence-based recommendations and tools, the Coalition **seeks to understand successful strategies that have come before us**. We are currently learning alongside five Promising Models in North Carolina that have specific innovative approaches for safe, culturally sensitive and relevant early care and education settings. We plan to **gather learnings** from these Models and study best practices from other



innovative models across North Carolina and the country **and share these learnings with the field.**

3. We will increase awareness of harsh disciplinary practices in early care and education settings in NC.

The Coalition will support and amplify efforts to **increase awareness of the prevalence of suspensions, expulsions and exclusionary practices** in early care and education settings and how those practices **disproportionately affect Black children and families.**

4. We will seek new partners and Coalition members as our work evolves.

We know we can't realize our vision alone. In addition to supporting others' efforts, we will **seek out new individuals and organizations** to join the Coalition or become partners in our work.