

Maryland's Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Supporting the academic and social-emotional success of preschoolers

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What is Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC)?

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) is designed to improve the ability of early care and education (ECE) program staff and families to address mental health problems, particularly behavioral, in children birth-five years. **Services include:**

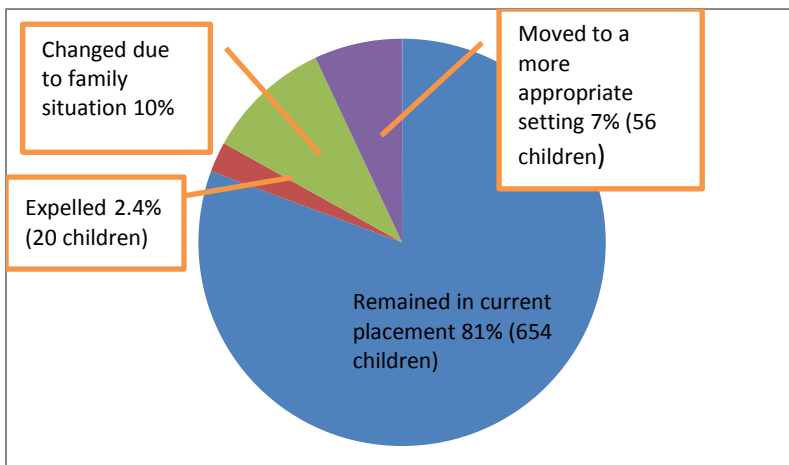
- observation and assessment of the child and the classroom environment
- referring children and families to Maryland's Infants and Toddlers program, Child Find, and other appropriate mental health services
- training and coaching of early care and education providers to meet children's social and emotional needs
- assisting children in modifying behaviors
- helping providers retain and serve children with behavioral and other mental health needs

ECMHC has two general approaches:

- 1) *child- and family-focused consultation* – targets the behavior of a specific child in an ECE setting
- 2) *classroom-focused or program consultation* – targets overall teacher-child interaction within ECE classrooms

Who is receiving consultation in Maryland?

- Maryland's ECMHC is conducted mostly in child care centers
- Children served in child-specific consultation has grown from 666 in FY09 to **810 children served in FY11**
- 15-17% of children served by ECMHC receive child care subsidies and 11-15% have an Individualized Family Services Program/Individualized Education Program
- 75% receiving ECMHC in Maryland are boys and are between the ages of three to five
- Ethnicity of children served:
 - 60% Caucasian
 - 27% African American
 - 5% Multiracial
 - 4% Hispanic
 - 4% Asian/Pacific Islander
 - <1% Alaskan/American Indian



ECMHC reduces expulsions among preschoolers.

All children who receive child-specific ECMH consultation are at risk of expulsion.

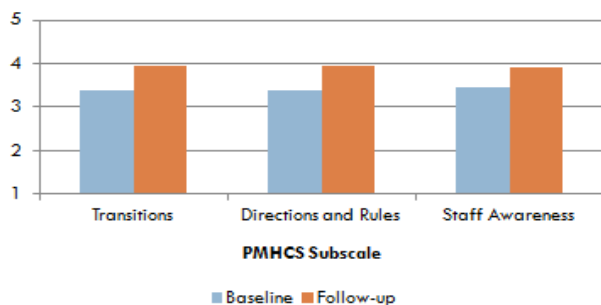
In Maryland, only 2.4% of children who received child-specific consultation (in FY11) were expelled, and 81% remained in their current early childhood program. This is down from 3% of children expelled in FY10.

Maryland's ECMHC Evaluation

The Maryland State Department of Education funded the evaluation of Maryland's ECMHC in order to better define the Maryland model of ECMHC and to understand its impact on children's behavioral and school outcomes.

The evaluation was led by researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and Georgetown University's Center for Child and Human Development, working in collaboration with community and Minority Business partners. Data was collected upon initiation of consultation services and again at 4 months or discharge from participants. Maryland's ECMHC produced several significant, positive results:

PMHCS Subscale Mean Scores: Classroom Management Domain



ECMHC improves the effectiveness of ECE providers' approaches to promoting a classroom climate conducive to positive behavior and social-emotional functioning.

○ Scores on the *Preschool Mental Health Climate Scale* showed consistent increases from baseline to follow-up, suggesting a strong impact of consultation on all aspects of classroom functioning in the domains of: *Staff Qualities, Classroom Interaction, Classroom Management, and Direct Teaching Skills.*

ECMHC interventions improve the overall level of preschoolers' social functioning and reduce the overall level of problem behaviors in the classroom.

- Analysis of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire showed an encouraging reduction in the level of child problems during the period when ECMHC was being implemented.
- Analyses showed a significant increase in the percent of children exhibiting no problems and a decrease in the percent of children showing each level of problem intensity
- Over the course of consultation, teachers reported that children displayed lower levels of problem behavior.

Children referred for child-focused ECMHC intervention show an improvement in social-emotional functioning following intervention.

- Parent and teacher ratings on the *Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA)* showed a significant increase in the *Protective Factors scale*, accompanied by a significant decrease in the *Behavioral Concerns scale*.
- Overall, children showed improvement in a range of characteristics related to resilience during the course of consultation.

Improvements in Preschoolers' Social Emotional Functioning

