

Addressing Challenging Behaviors in Head Start: A Closer Look at Program Policies and Procedures

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Abstract

In this study, Head Start policies and procedures related to child guidance and addressing challenging behaviors were examined. Data were gathered from six Head Start programs in the Midwest, through interviews and document analysis. The findings provide a glimpse into how Head Start programs support children's social and emotional competence and address young children's challenging behavior. Implications for practice and research are discussed.

Keywords

Head Start, policy issues, qualitative investigations, research methodologies, competence, social, behavior, classroom

Every day in the United States, approximately 12 million children under the age of 6 attend some form of early childhood program (Children's Defense Fund, 2005). Head Start is one of the largest early childhood programs in the nation, annually serving approximately 1 million children under the age of 6 (Administration for Children and Families, 2008). Of all the children in the United States under the age of 6, one in 10 will experience some level of emotional or behavioral disorder beyond typical developmentally appropriate expressions of frustration or unhappiness (Brimhall, 1999; President's New Freedom Commission of Mental Health, 2003). Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study reveal that 10% of kindergarteners arrive at school with challenging behavior (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). Qi and Kaiser (2003) and Webster-Stratton and Hammond (1998) found that children living in poverty appear to be especially vulnerable, exhibiting higher rates of challenging behaviors than the general population. Because of the Head Start eligibility requirements that require families to be at or below 100% of the national poverty level, many children attending Head Start are at higher risk than the general population for having challenging behaviors (Head Start Bureau, 2002).

Some children entering Head Start and other early childhood settings lack important language and/or social emotional skills (e.g., sharing, making friends, problem solving) and in the absence of these skills, they often exhibit extreme forms of challenging behaviors (e.g., prolonged tantrums, physical aggression, property destruction). In fact, teachers have reported that disruptive behavior is one of the

greatest challenges they face, and teachers have often identified challenging behavior as one of their most significant training needs (Arnold, McWilliams, & Arnold, 1998; Joseph, Strain, & Skinner 2004; Walker, Stiller, & Golly, 1999).

Unfortunately, many early childhood programs are not prepared to meet the needs of children who are emotionally delayed or have challenging behavior (Kaufmann & Wischmann, 1999). Often children with complex and intensive social emotional needs are removed or are at risk for being removed from inclusive settings as a result of their challenging behaviors (Gilliam, 2005; Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Walker et al., 1999; Webster-Stratton, 1997). In a national study, Gilliam found that on average 6.67 per 1,000 children in state-subsidized prekindergarten classrooms were expelled.

Addressing challenging behavior in early childhood settings requires strategies for promoting social emotional development as well as preventing challenging behavior. In addition, more intensive interventions are needed to support children with the most challenging behaviors, their families, and their teachers (Sandall & Schwartz, 2002). Research has shown that approaches to addressing social emotional development and challenging behavior are most effective

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when they are implemented early, are reinforced by program leadership, provide ongoing support for those working directly with children and families, provide a systematic process for addressing the needs of children with the most challenging behavior, involve collaboration between early childhood programs and mental health/behavior consultants, and demonstrate a commitment to a long-term process (Dunlap & Fox, 1999; Fox & Hemmeter, 2005; Kazdin, 1995; Strain & Timm, 2001; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001).

Given the multiple levels and complexity involved with implementing promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies related to challenging behaviors, an equally multifaceted training and support system for teachers must be used (Sandall & Schwartz, 2002). A promising approach for delivering prevention and intervention efforts within early childhood programs is through the use of a programwide system of positive behavior support ([PBS], Fox & Little, 2001; Hemmeter, Fox, Jack, & Broyles, 2007). This system includes the use of a focused, team-based, comprehensive approach to supporting all children, including those who engage in challenging behavior. Programwide PBS provides a systemic approach to the promotion of appropriate behavior for all children, prevention of challenging behavior for children who are at risk, and intervention with children who exhibit the most persistent challenging behavior. It also includes the use of data to understand issues related to challenging behavior, the adoption of evidence-based intervention practices, and a focus on teaching social skills (Fox & Little, 2001; Hemmeter et al., 2007; Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000)

Hemmeter et al. (2007) described the critical components of programwide PBS in early childhood settings as (a) parental/family involvement, (b) teaming with professionals (e.g., therapists, behavior specialists), (c) assessing current program policies and procedures related to behavior, and (d) providing training and support for staff around implementation of evidence-based practices. Mincic, Smith, and Strain (2009) added that written policies and procedures are a vital component in implementing a tiered model for supporting social and emotional competence and addressing challenging behaviors. Written policies and procedures should address teaching social emotional skills; screening, assessing, and monitoring young children's social emotional development; involving families in supporting their child's social emotional development; supporting children with persistent challenging behaviors; and providing training, technical assistance, and ongoing support to staff around addressing young children's social emotional competence and challenging behaviors (Fox & Hemmeter, 2005).

Given the increased prevalence of challenging behaviors in young children and growing awareness of the need for a

comprehensive system of promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies, the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which Head Start programs develop and implement program policies and procedures that promote the use of tiered models for supporting children's social emotional development and preventing and addressing challenging behavior. Specifically, we investigated how well Head Start programs (a) promote social emotional development through teaching curriculum strategies; (b) screen, assess, and provide ongoing monitoring of children's social emotional development; (c) involve families in supporting their child's social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors; (d) support children with persistent challenging behavior; and (e) provide training, technical assistance, and ongoing support to staff when promoting social emotional competence and addressing challenging behaviors.

Method

Sample and Participant Selection

Six Head Start programs in a Midwestern state were selected for participation in this study. To ensure that a variety of programs were included, Head Start experts within the state were asked to assist in the identification of participating programs. Three Head Start experts who provide training and support to Head Start programs throughout the state were recruited to assist in the selection of programs for participation. Experts were selected based on their unique knowledge of local programs throughout the state. The Head Start experts were first asked to determine the programs that they would rate highest and those that they would rate lowest in relation to the quality and implementation of each program's behavior policies and procedures. Then each expert was asked to go back to the list they identified as high and the list they identified as low and rate the programs within both lists, by giving each program a rating of 1 to 5 (with 1 being lowest and 5 being highest). The scores for each program were averaged across experts to determine the three highest rated (i.e., GEGO, $M = 4.33$; Winding Paths, $M = 4.33$; and Lawrence Morgan, $M = 4.00$) and the three lowest rated (i.e., Happy Kids, $M = 2.66$; EIEIO, $M = 2.0$; and ABC, $M = 1.33$) programs in regards to the quality and implementation of their behavior policies and procedures. These six programs were selected and those involved agreed to participate in this study. See Table 1 for a brief description of each program (pseudonyms are used).

Instruments

Rubric for reviewing Head Start policies and procedures related to child guidance and behavior (Rubric). A rubric for judging the quality of Head Start policies and procedures

Table 1. Program Demographics

Head Start programs	Setting	Children enrolled	Child demographics	Percentage of families making less than \$15,000 a year
ABC	Central; urban	378	68% African American 30% Caucasian 2% Hispanic	78%
EIEIO	Central; rural	338	91% Caucasian 5% African American 2% Hispanic 1% American Indian	78%
GEGO	Northern; rural	744	73% Caucasian 18% Hispanic 8% African American	80%
Happy Kids	Northern; rural and urban	343	54% Caucasian 31% Hispanic 14% African American 1% Asian American	94%
Lawrence Morgan	Central; rural and suburban	320	93% Caucasian 4% African American 3% Hispanic	63%
Winding Paths	Northern; suburban	871	56% Hispanic 23% African American 18% Caucasian 2% Asian American 1% American Indian	67%

related to child guidance and behavior was developed and used to organize and analyze data gathered through interviews and document analysis (Quesenberry, Hemmeter, & Ostrosky, 2005). The *Rubric* has five items: (a) Social and Emotional Teaching Curriculum Strategies; (b) Screening, Assessment, and Ongoing Monitoring of Children's Social Emotional Development; (c) Involving Families in Supporting Their Child's Social Emotional Development and Addressing Challenging Behaviors; (d) Supporting Children with Persistent Challenging Behavior; and (e) Providing Training, Technical Assistance, and Ongoing Support to Staff When Addressing Social Emotional Competence and Challenging Behaviors. These items mirror those found in a comprehensive model for programwide PBS (Fox & Little, 2001; Hemmeter & Fox, 2009; Hemmeter, Fox, & Doubet, 2006). See Table 2 for sample items from the Rubric.

The scoring of the Rubric follows guidelines used in tools such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale ([ECERS], Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005). Each item was rated using a 7-point scale, with 1 being the lowest score and 7 being the highest score possible. Documentation from interviews and written policies and procedures were used to score each item on the Rubric. A program scored a 1 if it received any indicator under the 1 anchor. On the other hand, to receive a 3, 5, or 7, a program had to have all of the indicators for each of those

anchors in place. However, if a program did not have all of the indicators under a given anchor (e.g., 3, 5, or 7) in place, the program received a score that was one number lower (e.g., 2, 4, or 6).

The development of the Rubric was based on the *Head Start Performance Standards* (Administration for Children, Youth and Families [ACYF], 1996), the *Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool* (Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2008), and the literature on programwide approaches to behavior support in early childhood settings (Fox & Little, 2001; Hemmeter & Fox, 2009; Hemmeter et al., 2006; Hemmeter et al., 2007). Researchers with knowledge of Head Start, early childhood policy development and implementation, and young children's social emotional development reviewed the Rubric. In addition, the first author piloted the Rubric with a Head Start program that did not participate in this study and integrated feedback from Head Start staff members and the reviewers into the final version of the Rubric that was used for this study.

Interview Protocols

To gather information used to score the Rubric, interviews were conducted with program administrators, teachers, and mental health consultants (MHCs) about each program's behavior policies and procedures. Interview questions were developed to align with items on the Rubric.

Table 2. Sample Sections From Rubric

Social emotional teaching curriculum/strategies			
1	3	5	7
<p>___ No systematic written plan is in place for teaching social emotional skills</p>	<p>___ Specific social emotional curriculum/teaching strategies have been developed or identified</p> <p>___ Some social emotional teaching strategies are used, but are not planned</p> <p>___ Written plans address teaching social emotional skills</p>	<p>___ Social emotional curriculum is being taught, but not in a planned, systematic fashion throughout the year</p> <p>Social emotional teaching curriculum/strategies:</p> <p>___ Are based on evidence-based practices in addressing young children's social emotional development</p> <p>___ Address relevant social/emotional issues (e.g., emotions, empathy, sharing, turn taking, etc.)</p>	<p>___ Social emotional curriculum is being taught in a systematic, planned fashion throughout the year</p> <p>___ Social emotional teaching curriculum/strategies are shared with families</p>
Screening, assessment, and ongoing monitoring of children's social emotional development			
1	3	5	7
<p>___ No written plan exists for screening children's social emotional development</p> <p>___ No written plan exists for the ongoing assessment of children's social emotional development</p> <p>___ No written plan exists for using assessment information to plan for individual or classroom needs in the area of social emotional development</p>	<p>___ A written plan exists for screening children's social emotional development</p> <p>___ A written plan exists for the ongoing assessment of children's social emotional development</p> <p>___ A written plan exists for using assessment information to plan for individual or classroom needs in the area of social emotional development</p>	<p>___ Children's social emotional development is screened to determine if children need further evaluation</p> <p>___ Ongoing assessments are conducted of children's social emotional development</p> <p>___ Ongoing assessment data are used to plan for individual or classroom needs in the area of social emotional development</p>	<p>___ Children's social emotional development is continually assessed throughout the year</p> <p>___ Classroom goals/plans are developed and regularly monitored in the area of social emotional development</p> <p>___ Changes to classroom goals/plans are made based on ongoing assessments of children's social emotional development</p> <p>___ Individual goals/plans are developed and are regularly monitored for children in the area of social emotional development</p>

Procedures

Data collection. Within each of the six programs, interviews were conducted with administrators, teachers, and MHCs. These data were used to score the Rubric (Quesenberry et al., 2005). Four randomly selected teachers in each program were interviewed. At least one MHC from each program, who was identified by a program administrator, was interviewed. Finally, two administrators were interviewed in each program except for the ABC and Happy Kids programs, in which one and three administrators were interviewed, respectively. Each program was asked to identify program administrators to participate in this study; therefore, the numbers of administrators varied from program to program.

In addition to conducting interviews, written documentation from each program was gathered and analyzed (e.g., behavior policies and procedures, the program information report (PIR), and parent handbooks).

Data analysis. Data gathered through interviews and document analyses were used to score the Rubric (Quesenberry et al., 2005). Each interview was transcribed and later analyzed using content analysis procedures recommended by Johnson and LaMontagne (1993) and used by Donegan, Ostrosky, and Fowler (1996). This process included six steps: (a) preparing the data for analysis, (b) becoming familiar with the data, (c) identifying units of analysis, (d) defining tentative categories for coding the responses, (e) refining categories, and (f) establishing category integrity. When

Table 3. Program Rubric Scores

Head Start programs	Social emotional teaching curriculum strategies	Screening, assessment, and ongoing monitoring	Involving families	Supporting children with persistent challenging behaviors	Training, technical assistance and ongoing staff support	M
Lawrence Morgan	7.0	7.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.4
GEGO	7.0	7.0	7.0	1.0	6.0	5.6
Winding Paths	6.0	6.0	7.0	1.0	6.0	5.0
Happy Kids	1.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	4.0	2.2
ABC	1.0	1.0	4.0	1.0	1.0	1.6
EIEIO	1.0	1.0	3.0	1.0	1.0	1.4

analyzing written documents, a similar process was used. Initially, the first author read the interview transcripts to ensure accuracy and also read and organized each program's policies and procedures to make sure all needed documentation had been gathered. After ensuring the accuracy of each interview transcript and that all documents had been obtained, the first author read through the materials again and began to make notes about potential themes or categories. Next, the first author met with the second author to discuss emerging categories and decided to code each document and interview transcript into one of five categories that corresponded with the research questions and the items on the Rubric. When coding these data, the written documents were analyzed to determine the quantity and quality of written policies and procedures related to each item on the Rubric. The interview transcripts were analyzed to assess each program's implementation of the policies and procedures. The coded data were then used to score each of the five items on the Rubric for each program.

Fidelity and reliability measures. An independent observer (a doctoral student in early childhood special education) unfamiliar with this study was asked to observe the first author conduct interviews with nine participants (20% of all interviews). During each observation, the researcher had a copy of the interview questions and observed and made note of discrepancies between the written questions and questions asked by the researcher. The observer also noted if the researcher provided any information that could influence an interviewee's responses or if it seemed that the researcher was leading a respondent to answer in a particular fashion. This measure of fidelity resulted in 100% correct implementation of the interview questions.

To ensure category integrity, the same observer conducted reliability checks on the Rubric by analyzing written behavior policies and procedures, and interview transcripts, from each of the six programs. This reliability coder independently scored the Rubric for each program based on an analysis of the written documents and interview transcripts. After independently scoring the Rubric, the first author and the coder met to discuss each item on the Rubric for all

six programs. During this meeting, each person shared her scores and a rationale for her scores. The average agreement between the two coders was 84%; disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached.

Results

Results of the Rubric are presented in Table 3. The programs are described based on their mean score on the Rubric and are listed from highest to lowest scores. Mean scores across items on the Rubric ranged from 6.4 for the Lawrence Morgan Head Start to 1.4 for the EIEIO Head Start program. Program characteristics on each item on the Rubric are discussed in the following sections, with sample quotes from Head Start staff provided to offer insights into why these six programs received or failed to receive high scores on the Rubric.

Social and Emotional Teaching Curriculum Strategies

In the area of Social and Emotional Teaching Curriculum Strategies, scores ranged from 1 to 7. This item on the Rubric was designed to measure the quality and implementation of policies and procedures related to each program's use of specific social emotional curricula and teaching strategies. The Lawrence Morgan, GEGO, and Winding Paths programs received high scores on this item (7, 7, and 6, respectively). Lawrence Morgan Head Start used multiple social emotional curricula, including *Second Step* (Committee for Children, 1997), *I Can Problem Solve* (Shure, 2000), and *Conscious Discipline* (Bailey, n.d.) to facilitate children's social emotional development. GEGO Head Start supplemented the *Creative Curriculum* (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002) with the *Conscious Discipline* program (Bailey, n.d.). The Winding Paths program used the *Second Step Curriculum* (Committee for Children, 1997) and materials from the Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL, n.d.). All three of these programs had written policies and

procedures that addressed the implementation of each curriculum. For example, the policies and procedures at Lawrence Morgan stated:

Teaching staff use Second Step and I Can Problem Solve lessons daily in order to develop these skills in children as a proactive approach. They also use Conscious Discipline techniques and *I Love You Rituals* from Becky Bailey to develop cooperation and caring.

In addition, the administrators and teachers in the Lawrence Morgan and GEGO programs spoke about the consistent use of these curricula along with other strategies in the classroom such as modeling, using children's books and role-playing. One teacher from Lawrence Morgan Head Start described her program's use of curriculum strategies:

We use positive discipline techniques: Conscious Discipline from Becky Bailey and also, I Can Problem Solve, [and] Second Step. We plan and do the activities that they have with each of these. We regularly use the cards for Second Step, which shows the behaviors and the different ways that kids can approach problems. They also help kids talk about the way they're feeling, sharing, not getting what they want, different things like that.

The Winding Paths program scored slightly lower in this area because inconsistencies were found in reports from teachers and administrators on how social emotional skills are taught in the program. For example, the administrators reported regular uses of teaching strategies promoted by the Center on Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) and through the Second Step Curriculum. However, the teacher did not report using specific strategies but rather noted using teachable moments as the primary way to teach social emotional skills.

Conversely, three Head Start programs received a score of 1 on this item because they did not have written policies and procedures related to the use of social emotional curricula and/or teaching strategies. Teachers in all three of these programs reported using the Creative Curriculum (Dodge et al., 2002), but this was not documented in the program's policies and procedures. Although teachers and administrators in all three programs spoke about using a curriculum to promote children's social emotional development, written policies and procedures provided little information on how and when to implement the curriculum. In addition, the MHCs in these programs reported vast inconsistencies in how social emotional teaching strategies were implemented across classrooms.

Screening, Assessment, and Ongoing Monitoring

The Rubric item on *Social and Emotional Screening, Assessment, and Ongoing Monitoring* was developed to assess program policies and procedures related to how programs conduct screening and ongoing assessment in the area of social emotional development. On this item on the Rubric, the Lawrence Morgan, GEGO, and Winding Paths programs received high scores (7, 7, and 6, respectively). At both the GEGO and the Winding Paths programs, parents were asked to complete the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire—Social and Emotional* ([ASQ-SE], Squires, Bricker, & Twombly, 2002) as a part of the social emotional screening process. If there were concerns about a child's development based on parent report on the ASQ-SE, further classroom observations and documentation were gathered by each program's MHC. The Lawrence Morgan program used the *Denver II* developmental screening (Frateenburt & Bresnick, 1998) to assess children's social emotional development and determine if a child needed further evaluation. A child was given a *Connors* behavioral screening (Connors, 1995) if the child failed the social emotional portion of the Denver II or if the parent and/or teacher had concerns about a child's behaviors. In the Lawrence Morgan and GEGO programs, screening procedures in the area of social emotional development were well documented in each program's written policies and procedures and were referred to consistently by program staff, administrators, and MHCs. However, in the Winding Paths program, there were discrepancies between the tools that administrators and teachers reported using to screen children's social emotional development.

On this item, Happy Kids, EIEIO, and ABC Head Start programs were rated 3, 1, and 1, respectively. Happy Kids Head Start scored a 3 in this area because the program had written policies and procedures to address social emotional screening and assessment, but the teachers were not familiar with the processes and/or tools. The MHCs at Happy Kids reported that the observation tool they used for screening was based on the Creative Curriculum. The teachers at Happy Kids reported that the local education agency conducted screenings on the children, but most teachers were unsure of the purpose of the screenings and did not know if the screening included children's social emotional development. For example, one teacher said:

We have someone do screenings. They come in and check for like, speech, hearing, vision, developmental problems. They come in and take each child in a room, check them over and stuff. And Mental Health also, they come in the room three times a year and observe each child, but I don't really know what they

are doing. Well, for Mental Health, they give us the results and tell them to the parents. . . . But for the other screenings, they gave it to us. So I really don't know what to do with it. I'm gonna have to find that out.

Likewise, teachers in the ABC and EIEIO Head Start programs were unfamiliar with the screenings that were used and were not able to explain why the screenings were conducted or how the results were used. In these programs, the administrators and MHCs explained that screenings were conducted by teams who shared the results with the program's Mental Health Coordinator; however, neither program had written policies to document these procedures.

The three lower-scoring programs (i.e., Happy Kids, ABC, and EIEIO) reported using the Creative Curriculum's *Developmental Continuum* to track children's ongoing progress. Once again, none of the teachers in these programs were able to explain how ongoing assessment in the area of social emotional development aligned with the curriculum or how they used assessment information in lesson planning. In addition, these programs did not have written policies and procedures in place documenting the use of the Developmental Continuum.

Involving Families

Ratings in the area of *Involving Families* in supporting their children's social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors varied across the six programs (see Table 3). On this item, we examined the quality and implementation of policies and procedures related to how parents were included in education, information sharing, and ongoing support for addressing the children's social emotional skills and challenging behaviors. In the GEGO and Winding Paths programs (scores = 7), there was consistency between data gathered from written documents and interviews regarding the involvement of families in supporting children's social emotional development. Both programs had written policies that described how they encouraged family involvement around children's social emotional development. The following is an example from the GEGO Parent Handbook:

All children benefit from an environment which accepts them as individuals, appreciates their capabilities and fosters growth in many areas. . . . GEGO Head Start takes a "prevention" rather than "treatment" approach. The program is designed to help children feel good about themselves, learn to get along with others and to solve conflicts by problem solving. Activities are planned to support the child's self-esteem and set the stage for a feeling of success.

Although Lawrence Morgan Head Start had policies and procedures in place related to how the program involved families in addressing challenging behaviors, inconsistencies were found in interview data from administrators and teachers. Specifically, administrators reported that parents were involved at all levels of planning for a child with significant challenging behaviors. However, teachers did not report specific strategies for involving parents when addressing the needs of a child with significant challenging behaviors. Therefore, this program scored a 6 on this item on the Rubric.

In the ABC, EIEIO, and Happy Kids programs, the administrators, teachers, and MHCs agreed that attempts were made to work with families when addressing children's challenging behaviors, but there was no evidence that program staff worked with parents to develop and implement strategies to promote children's social emotional development. In other words, communication with parents in these programs was related primarily to children's challenging behaviors rather than to prevention and promotion strategies. In addition, at the Happy Kids program, the teachers only spoke about communicating with parents when a child had a problem with behavior. Consequently, these programs received lower scores in the area of family involvement.

Supporting Children with Persistent Challenging Behavior

On the fourth item on the Rubric, programs were examined to determine how they supported children with persistent challenging behaviors. Although all programs used a variety of strategies to address children's challenging behavior, five of the programs received a score of 1 on this item. A program received a score of 1 if they asked children to leave the program because they were unable to support the child's behavioral needs or if the program had no written policies to address the needs of children with persistent challenging behaviors. The only program that did not get a score of 1, Lawrence Morgan, had extensive written policies and procedures that were consistent with staff interviews about how the program supports children with challenging behaviors. This was the only program that had a written policy stating that they would not, under any circumstance, expel a child because of behavioral issues. They received a score of 6 because they do not use a functional assessment process to develop behavior support plans.

Although five of the programs reported expelling children with intensive behavioral concerns, the level of intervention and supports provided to the family and child prior to expulsion varied across these five programs (see Table 4 for a summary of the levels of support programs reported providing before expelling a child for

Table 4. Levels of Support Provided by Programs When Children Have Persistent Challenging Behaviors

Head Start programs	Supporting children with persistent challenging behaviors
Lawrence Morgan GEGO	Program did not, under any circumstances, dismiss children with challenging behaviors (Rubric score 6). In extreme cases, program dismissed children with challenging behaviors, but had in-depth procedures that were followed before this determination was made (Rubric score: 1).
Winding Paths	In extreme cases, program dismissed children with challenging behaviors, but had in-depth procedures that were followed before this determination was made (Rubric score: 1).
Happy Kids	Program did not have specific written policies and procedures in place for addressing the needs of children with persistent challenging behavior, but reportedly did not dismiss children with challenging behaviors (Rubric score: 1).
ABC	Program dismissed children with challenging behaviors without following any set procedures or guidelines before doing so (Rubric score: 1).
EIEIO	Program dismissed children with challenging behaviors without following any set procedures or guidelines before doing so (Rubric score: 1).

challenging behaviors). GEGO and Winding Paths had extensive written policies related to supporting children with persistent challenging behaviors. GEGO's policies and procedures outlined multiple levels of guidance and intervention procedures to address children's challenging behaviors including building relationships, implementing consistent and predictable routines, using natural and logical consequences, developing an individualized behavior support plan, and involving families at all levels. The Winding Paths program had similar policies and procedures, which included the following statement:

It is critical that all efforts to work with the child and family are documented. Each step taken in the behavior guidance process must also be implemented over a reasonable period of time. The process cannot be sped up to attain a desired expectation. Changes in behavior often take time and every effort should be made to have the patience required to effect the desired change.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the EIEIO and ABC programs dismissed children without first requiring program staff to implement specific procedures. These programs described a reactive approach to addressing children's challenging behaviors. For example, in the EIEIO program, children who engaged in disruptive behaviors were often removed from the classroom temporarily or sent home for the day. If they engaged in more severe behaviors, they were not allowed back in the program for 1 to 2 weeks. If behaviors persisted, they were expelled from the program. Few preventive measures were described; rather, these programs generally reported removing children from the classroom or program when they exhibited significant challenging behaviors. This was highlighted by an administrator from the EIEIO program who stated,

If the behavior is harmful to themselves or others, we definitely try to send 'em home. You know, sometimes for the day. And sometimes if it's bad enough that it comes screeching to the point that [we tell parents], "Okay, he doesn't come back until you come in and we have a meeting and we talk about it." And if it doesn't get any better we actually end up changing the child to kind of like a home-based thing or we ask the parents to find another program that better fits the child's needs.

Finally, staff at the Happy Kids spoke about the process they go through in addressing children's challenging behaviors, but no written policies and/or procedures were shared that documented these intervention strategies.

Training, Technical Assistance, and Ongoing Staff Support

The final item on the Rubric addressed policies and procedures related to staff training, technical assistance, and ongoing support in the area of promoting children's social emotional development and preventing and addressing children's challenging behaviors. The Lawrence Morgan, GEGO, and Winding Paths programs each received a score of 6 on this item. All three programs had written policies and procedures that reflected program efforts to provide training and ongoing support to staff when addressing children's social emotional development and challenging behaviors. Administrators and teachers confirmed this in their interviews. In addition to formal training, the teachers in these programs reported having supports within and outside of the program. For example, teachers reported attempting to address behavior issues first with their teaching assistant in the classroom, and if they needed additional support they would contact their immediate supervisor and/or the Mental Health Coordinator. In cases of persistent

behavior issues, program staff reported contacting their MHC or an outside mental health agency for assistance. These three programs received a score of 6 (rather than a 7) on the Rubric because there was no evidence found that ongoing training and technical assistance was provided on how program staff members should document behavior incidences and/or create a behavior plan based on this documentation.

The Happy Kids Head Start program received a 4 on this item because the written policies and procedures addressed training for staff, but not specifically in the area of social emotional development. Both the ABC and EIEIO programs received low scores on this item because they had no written policies or procedures in this area and there were inconsistencies in the information obtained in the interviews. One teacher at EIEIO reported that she felt that she was “left high and dry out here” when addressing children’s challenging behaviors. A teacher at the ABC program reported that “it takes a long time to get that support from our mental health consultant [MHC].” An MHC in the same program alluded to this when he said, “There are a lot of hoops teachers have to jump through before really getting any help.”

Discussion

Findings from this study highlight the diversity of Head Start policies and procedures related to challenging behaviors across programs. Programs that were rated high in one area tended to be rated high in all other areas, whereas programs rated low in one area tended to receive low ratings in other areas (see Table 3). For example, in programs where strong policies and procedures were in place to support children’s social emotional development, teachers were more likely to report that they embedded social emotional learning opportunities across the day, staff members were more likely to use ongoing assessment to monitor student progress in the area of social emotional development, and staff were more likely to report that they received ongoing training and support to include children with challenging behaviors in the program.

Because programs were evaluated based on elements found in a comprehensive model for programwide PBS in early childhood settings (Fox & Little, 2001; Hemmeter & Fox, 2009; Hemmeter et al., 2006), those programs that were rated higher had more of these elements in place compared to programs that were rated lower. This finding confirms the need for comprehensive and coordinated systems (including policies and procedures) in early childhood settings to support children’s social emotional development and to support teachers as they implement strategies within the classroom (Mincic et al., 2009). Future research might consider if such patterns are observed in larger samples of

Head Start programs and/or in a variety of other types of early care and education programs.

The highest scores across all programs on the Rubric were for Involving Families. Head Start has a history of family involvement in all aspects of program planning, development, implementation, and monitoring (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). Although not all of the programs in this study had well-documented systems for involving families, each program made attempts to include family members across various aspects of the program, including attempts to partner with parents when addressing children’s social emotional development and challenging behaviors. This finding is encouraging, given the importance placed on family involvement in recent policy briefs (e.g., Mincic et al., 2009). An item on the Rubric where programs consistently received low scores was supporting children with persistent challenging behaviors. Data from the current study provide evidence of the lack of clarity in policies and procedures related to expulsion for children with challenging behaviors, data that are consistent with findings described by Gilliam (2005). Although the scores were based on document review and interviews with Head Start Staff, no data were collected on parent perceptions of the programs’ support around children’s challenging behavior.

Limitations

Although the present study contributes to the early childhood literature on promoting young children’s social emotional competence and addressing challenging behaviors, the findings should be interpreted with caution. First, data were gathered from a sample of six Head Start programs that were purposively selected. This clearly is not a representative sample of Head Start programs or early childhood programs. Second, data included document analysis of written program behavior policies and procedures and interviews with program staff; however, other data sources (e.g., interviews with family members and teacher assistants, as well as observational data) were not used in this study. Finally, because our study focused on the quality and implementation of policies and procedures, the importance of written policies and procedures was heavily weighted on the Rubric. Thus, programs could report using effective practices but receive a low score if there was no written documentation about these practices. It is not clear if written policies and procedures increase the likelihood of implementation of practices.

Implications for Research and Practice

Although the data gathered in this study provide a rich description of six programs related to child guidance policies and procedures, observational data are needed to

understand the relationship between written policies and procedures and what actually occurs within programs. In the current study, implementation data were gathered through interviews with staff members. This provided a one-dimensional view of how the policies and procedures were implemented. By conducting observations in classrooms, on home visits, and during meetings with family members, researchers could gather data on how child guidance policies and procedures are actually implemented within a program. In addition to observational data, information also should be gathered from family members (i.e., interviews, focus groups, surveys) to better understand how they are affected by program policies and procedures. Finally, interviews with additional staff members might provide a more comprehensive view of policies and procedures especially in programs where there were inconsistencies in what staff members reported.

Because of the holistic approach required in Head Start programs (e.g., parental involvement and education, focus on children's physical, oral, and mental health and education), findings from this study may not generalize to other early care and education settings. Each Head Start program is required to follow federal Performance Standards (ACYF, 1996), when developing policies and procedures, but each program is allowed to design policies and procedures that reflect the needs of its community. Thus, in other programs, such as child care, the absence of these program standards means there are likely vast differences in the presence and quality of program policies and procedures (Capizzano & Adams, 2000), and more variation would be expected in the implementation of those policies and procedures.

The findings from this study can be used to inform approaches to training, technical assistance, and ongoing staff support when addressing children's social emotional development and challenging behaviors. Given that teachers frequently report addressing children's challenging behaviors as one of their most significant training needs (Joseph et al., 2004; Walker et al., 1999), it is critical that teachers are provided with comprehensive training and support for promoting children's social emotional development and addressing behavioral concerns. Research is needed to examine effective approaches to training teachers to use practices associated with tiered models of prevention, promotion, and intervention.

Although programs reported using some strategies to address children's social emotional development and challenging behavior, in most programs, teachers and administrators still reported that persistent challenging behavior was an ongoing concern. Even when teachers reported having some supports in place, they still expressed a need for better supports when working with children with challenging behaviors. These findings provide further evidence, as suggested by Gilliam (2005), that enhanced

training and support is needed for early care and education providers in the area of child guidance and behavior management. Further research is needed to investigate specific details about staff training and support that result in teachers' feeling more confident and competent in addressing young children's challenging behaviors.

These issues, along with other problems that early care and education programs often face (e.g., staff turnover, lack of resources), can affect a program's ability to provide quality services and support staff. When children are expelled from programs, this causes a disruption in services for both children and families. As a result, families may have to place their children in poorer quality or emergency child care or may be forced to quit their jobs to care for their children. When children are expelled from programs, increases in parental stress can occur and disruptions in parent-child relationships can result (Doubet, Ostrosky, & Hemmeter, 2009). Programs should review their policies and procedures for supporting children with challenging behaviors to ensure that systems are in place that are (a) understood by everyone in the program, (b) implemented consistently, (c) supported by strong leadership, and (d) able to provide ongoing support for those working directly with children and families (Dunlap & Fox, 1999; Fox & Hemmeter, 2005; Kazdin, 1995; Strain & Timm, 2001; Webster-Stratton et al., 2001).

The Rubric could be used by programs to increase staff understanding of the importance of a comprehensive approach to addressing young children's social emotional competence and challenging behaviors. Program staff could use the tool to assess the quality and implementation of behavior policies and procedures within their programs. Data from the Rubric could then be used to set program goals and monitor progress toward more comprehensive approaches.

This study provided an in-depth look at the quality and implementation of behavior policies and procedures in six Head Start programs. Interview data indicated that without clear policies, program staff are less likely to implement consistent procedures to support young children's social emotional development and address challenging behavior. Findings support the need for comprehensive policies and procedures, yet additional research is needed to investigate the match between written policies and actual implementation.

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