

Pre-School Expulsions: Black Boys Ousted Most

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Pre-kindergarten students are getting kicked out of school at a rate more than three times that of children in grades K-12, and a large percent of those expelled are black boys, according to a recent study by Yale University researchers.

The study by Walter Gilliam of the Yale University Child Study Center showed that blacks attending state-funded pre-kindergartens were twice as likely to be expelled as Latino and Caucasian children and over five times as likely to be expelled as Asian-American children.

The study also said that when child care providers had resources available to help manage behavior intervention, the number of expulsions for all preschoolers was cut in half.

"When a child is an African-American and a boy, it was a double whammy," Gilliam told BlackAmericaWeb.com.

According to responses from 4,815 preschool classrooms, there were 1.82 expulsions for 1,000 Asian-Americans, 4.42 per 1,000 Latinos, 5.77 per 1,000 white, and 10.04 per 1,000 blacks. Among the blacks expelled, 91 percent were boys.

"It's like kicking the sick out of the hospital," Gilliam said. "Those who need preschool preparation the most are excluded from the system."

"Although a pattern of particular risk for expulsion with African-American students has been demonstrated during kindergarten through grade 12, the pattern of disparity appears to begin much earlier," the report stated.

Gilliam says he doesn't go beyond assessing the actual data in hand to answer other questions about preschool expulsions. "I can't say that profiling is happening in preschool. At the same time, I can not say that it does not happen."

Gilliam said he would like to see another study that shows whether students of different races that have similar behaviors are handled the same way.

Dr. Samella Abdullah, a child psychologist in Tallahassee, Florida, said that too often, children are rushed into schools where teachers do not understand black culture.

"Our children are taught to ask questions and speak up, but in some settings that may be viewed as a problem," Abdullah told BlackAmericaWeb.com. "Little black boys are considered to be acting out of control if they don't act like little white girls."

Abdullah suggests that teachers redirect the energy of little black children into positive activities instead of expelling them from preschool.

She also stresses that teachers show love and develop a positive relationship in working with children. "When children feel that they are loved, they will do almost anything for you," she said.

But then there are times when children come to school after leaving an environment where they are not happy, and that will impact their day in school, even at an early age, Abdullah said.

"If parents are having difficulty with money, jobs and the house, the child may not be happy. He may not want to go to school," she said.

Gaynell Hendricks, who owns a chain of private daycare centers in Birmingham, Alabama, and manages publicly-funded child care centers in public housing communities, has had to make decisions on expelling students.

At her Wee Care Academy and Wee Manage Inc. centers, children are taught at an early age to love themselves and to respect others. They also learn about positive self esteem and how it relates to black culture.

Although it is rare, Hendricks said, there are few children who have had to go.

"It's something I never thought I would have to do," Hendricks, who has been in the daycare business about 17 years with her husband Elias, told BlackAmericaWeb.com. "We have resources to assist in intervention. We provide workshops to train our teachers on different techniques for behavior management in the classroom. Usually, if parents will work with us, we can handle any behavior problem."

Just recently, said Hendricks, a little boy with a history of behavior problems kicked a veteran teacher in the stomach and had been fighting other children regularly. "We had to make a decision to let him go because he was dangerous for our teachers and the other children." she said.

Children now have more issues at home that affect them in preschool, said.

"We are now seeing more crack babies with parents who are not cooperative," she said. "If a parent will not work with you, what do you do? That's when we reach a point where we have to make a decision."

Lynson M. Beaulieu of the Washington, D.C.-based National Black Child Development Institute, said parents sometimes don't respond when they are told of problems with their children's behavior because of how it reflects on them.

"They feel threatened by bad news about their children because it speaks directly to their skills as parents," she told BlackAmericaWeb.com.

"Some of our young children are not receiving the best parenting," she said, adding that more resources are needed for intervention and to make home visits to connect with families.

"I don't want to put the onus solely on the parents," said Beaulieu. "The community has the responsibility to support children and parents who are struggling."

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