

Policy Opportunities

State-Level Policy Anchors for Supporting Social & Emotional Needs of Children, Families and the Workforce Within Early Care and Education

A primer for policy makers and advocates.

Goal of This Document

This document details recommendations and strategies, focused on Pyramid Model Practices, that policymakers, regulators, and local and state program administrators can adopt to guide decision making that would promote social and emotional needs of children, families, and workforce within early care and education. The early care and education workforce exists across a range of settings (Early Head Start and Head Start, private child care, family child care, public PreK, etc.), each with different: “overseers,” policies/procedures, and guidance they are monitored by. Thus, progress on the issue of promoting children’s social and emotional development will require the collaborative participation of a range of stakeholders. State agencies, local and state governments, private sectors, community partners, and family advocacy groups should actively partner to address the social emotional needs of young children and the needs of their caregivers. These partnerships have always been at the forefront in raising awareness of key problems and identifying solutions to address them.



Understanding the Issue – Why Social & Emotional Development and Needs Require Specific Attention within Early Care and Education Policies and Regulations.

"Social Emotional Learning is a difference maker."

-Meg Riordan, PhD

There is broad and growing agreement that the social, emotional, and relational needs of infants and young children are undeniably linked to long-term healthy development and well-being (National Scientific Council on the Developing Childhood, 2020).

The role of social emotional practices within the early childhood system cannot be understated. At the individual level, having a strong social-emotional foundation is the primary mechanism to address school readiness. Children with strong social emotional skills come to early childhood education settings ready to learn, able to develop relationships with peers and providers, and able to function well within their environment. When children enter kindergarten, they will be expected to ask for help, take turns, be kind, and interact with others in a positive way. Instruction in social-emotional skills will help children learn how to share, cooperate, and maintain positive relationships with friends; identify and regulate emotions; and deal with problematic social situations. By investing in promoting social-emotional skills in preschool, children will be better prepared for the kindergarten setting which has higher expectations and a more formal curriculum. At a classroom or child care level, children who collectively have a solid foundation of social emotional capacity lead to more harmonious environments and thus increased successful learning for all. Approaches to support addressing the social and emotional needs of children within the early care and education settings has garnered increased recognition with many states and localities focusing on this in recent years – and we believe that this approach is critical to supporting not only families and children in care, but also the early care and education workforce. *The Pyramid Model, a public health approach to promoting social emotional well-being, supporting caregivers of young children, and addressing social emotional concerns of young children, is a multi-tiered, evidence-based approach that can be applied across a variety of early learning settings.*

A note on Terminology

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH), another term for early childhood social emotional well-being, refers to a field of study that is grounded in dyadic, relationship-based work. At the heart of this work is a focus on the importance of (and protective impact of) stable, safe relationships in a child's early years.

Of equal importance, it is widely accepted that parents and caregivers are deserving of support that a) promotes positive, responsive interactions, b) is trauma-informed, and c) is delivered with humility and cultural sensitivity. These principles are central to professionals supporting both the Pyramid Model and an IECMH approach within natural and community-based settings. A unified voice is critical in order to bring attention to these essential concepts. Organizations, programs, and professionals who work with or on behalf of infants, young children, parents, and caregivers need to find a common language when communicating with policymakers, funders, the infant/young child and family workforce, and families.

This work also honors parents and professionals and acknowledges how frustrating and confusing it may be to be bombarded by competing and conflicting messages and approaches. There are benefits to finding connections and common ground for the problems we face. When integrating

A 2022 survey of 615 Midwestern K-12 teachers who left the profession cited poor student behavior as the No. 1 reason for their departure.

(<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2023/02/06/daniel-b-coupland-want-to-stem-the-tide-of-teachers-fleeing-the-classroom-empower-them-to-lead/>)

51% of the surveyed teachers listed “behavior” as the primary reason for quitting – more than progressive political activity, insufficient salary, parental concerns with their classroom, COVID-19 policies, safety concerns about school shootings, lack of materials to teach effectively, standardized testing, licensure expiration or professional development requirements combined.



diverse approaches, we increase depth and understanding of issues at hand. When we consider the early childhood workforce, we celebrate the diverse ways that they engage with and work to support young children and families. This is essential to the social and emotional development of children and the success of caregiver-child relationships. Additionally, it is vital to adults' understanding of developmental expectations on young children, the well-being of families, and the economic functioning of our communities and our society. We realize that while our work with children and families is meaningful and rewarding it is also deeply emotional, sometimes intense, complicated, and challenging. Therefore, those considering this work at the state and system level must keep the workforce at the forefront of our minds, as any cumulative data on child-based outcomes is greatly impacted by the stability of the workforce.

Our recent history of COVID has pushed to the forefront the need to acknowledge that conditions are challenging for early care and education providers working in homes and in centers in communities in every state in this country. They have been struggling for far too long without enough support, with conditions and needs exacerbated during the pandemic. They are asking for help – it is our responsibility to respond.

Concrete guidance on how to understand and address the social and emotional needs of children and families engaged in programs is needed at all levels. Our goal with this document is to detail opportunities in Maryland to implement policies to support the workforce to feel confident and competent in addressing the social and emotional needs of children in their care.

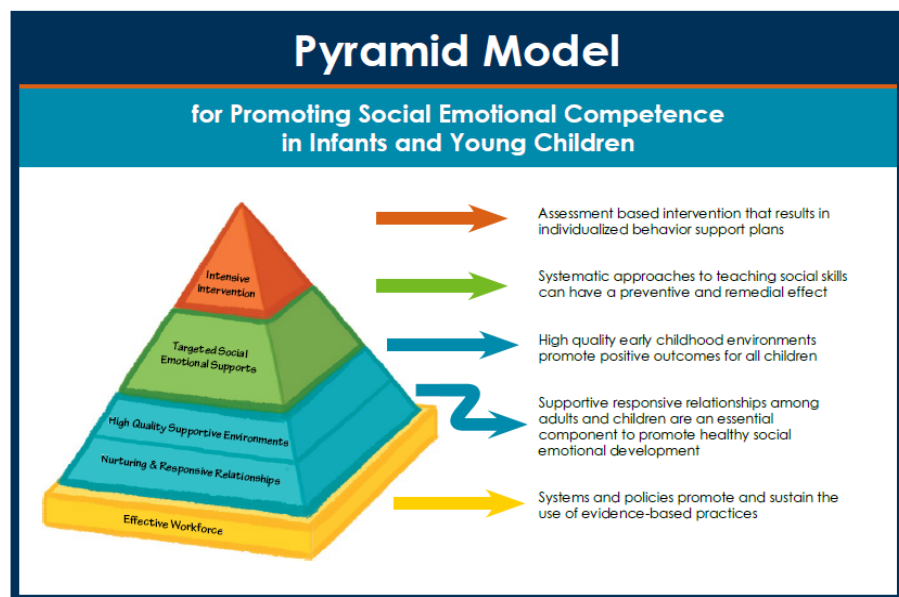
Understanding the Pyramid Model as an evidence-based framework to support this practice change for the workforce both at the direct service and system-wide levels.

The Pyramid Model for Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (PM) is an *evidence-based framework* for promoting and supporting healthy social emotional development for all children. The PM takes a *tiered public health approach* to providing *universal* supports to all children to promote wellness, *targeted* supports to those at risk and *intensive interventions* for those who need them, all supported by an *effective workforce*. *The Pyramid Model fosters growth and capacity building in adults* to support social and emotional development through nurturing and responsive relationships, creating high quality supportive environments, offering developmentally appropriate social and emotional teaching strategies, and creating individualized interventions for children if and when they are needed.

The Pyramid Model supports adults within a range of settings and a range of disciplines (including early intervention providers, early educators, families and other professionals).

The Pyramid Model was initially developed in 2001 with the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families from 2001-2011. It continued through an explicit collaboration with the Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with

Challenging Behavior funded by the Office of Special Education Programs in 2002 and then later with the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI) in 2008. Through the assistance from these federal funds, the work focused intentionally on developing a model that states could implement on a large-scale. Through the CSEFEL and TACSEI funds, work was launched initially in 15 states. Currently, this work is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and operates the



National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations | ChallengingBehavior.org

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National Center for Pyramid Model Innovation (NCPMI, <https://challengingbehavior.org/>). At this time, it has been expanded to include statewide efforts in 39 states and territories, and has been tracked in over 50 countries around the world.

- ❖ Pyramid Model offers a specific method for weaving knowledge about infant/young child development and behavior into support for parents/caregivers. Individuals within the early care and education workforce who have been trained in the Pyramid Model can become thought partners with parents/caregivers, working together to understand why an infant/young child might be behaving in a particular way. Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers have not yet fully developed the capacity to communicate verbally; they use behavior as their primary form of communication. It can be frustrating to try to “translate” the behavior. Professionals trained in the Pyramid Model approach serve as translators, working with the parent/caregiver to make sense of the puzzling behavior and consider how best to address it.
- ❖ *This kind of partnership can reduce frustration experienced by both the adults and the infant/young child. And it can reduce the sense of isolation parents/caregivers might feel when trying to figure it out on their own. Best of all, it can lead to the infant/young child feeling seen, heard, and understood.* All of which strengthens the early relational health of the child.

Suspension and expulsion exclusionary practices – the consequences of not deeply understanding early social emotional development and strategies to support young children, families, programs, and providers

Preschool suspension and expulsion practices are a national concern that has long term impact for our youngest learners and their families. Studies have found rates of suspension and

There is recent evidence suggesting that the PM can effectively reduce suspension and expulsion practices (Clayback and Hemmeter, 2021).

In a survey of 345 child care center directors, they found that use of Pyramid Model strategies was correlated to expulsion rates, with responses indicating that those centers that used PM strategies reported fewer expulsions.




expulsion as high as 10% in some areas, with rates three times those for kindergarten through high school (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Children in childcare settings are suspended or expelled at almost 15 times the K-12 rate (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Racial disparities and implicit bias in expulsion and suspension have been identified as concerns (Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Gilliam et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2023) with Black children and boys disproportionately suspended or expelled. Although Black boys represent 18% of all children in preschool they represent 43% of all suspensions and expulsions (Office of Civil Rights, 2021). Girls are suspended and expelled at lower rates, but studies have shown that rates are higher for black girls than white girls (Office of Civil Rights, 2021). Implicit bias has been demonstrated in behavioral expectations and observations with teachers more likely to assume and notice negative behaviors among black boys (Gilliam, et al, 2016). These are examples of the initial stages of what has been termed “the preschool to prison pipeline” (Aduma and Hogan, 2015; Schachner, et al., 2016) that derail the lives of children of color, beginning before kindergarten and leaving lasting effects. Furthermore, families of children experiencing suspensions and expulsions have economic impact due to job disruptions. Suspension and expulsion of young children is a decision made by adults struggling to address the needs of children with insufficient resources and supports. *The Pyramid Model is an identified behavioral support that can help to address suspension and expulsion in early care and education settings.*

Why we need policies and regulations to support practice change that includes Pyramid Model for the workforce.

Why states need to put into place policy supports that foster Pyramid Model funding and implementation for the early care and education workforce, the systems designed to train coach and support them, and the children and families they serve:

- We can articulate, study and measure the realities of workforce needs and supporting social emotional well-being of young children that we have detailed above in this document. However, in order to impact significant and lasting change we need a concrete structure of policies that touch how we credential, measure and finance the work.

- These policies can and should acknowledge needs, set expectations, and identify where to direct financial investments.
 - Building and operationalizing this vision has in many states (*detailed later in this document*) led to a conceptual framework that benefits professionals, and ultimately provides better services and supports to children and families.
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- A state-wide system approach is complicated as infants and young children, unlike their school-aged counterparts, are not all in one place (e.g., school) on any given day. They may be in family, friend and neighbor care, center-based or informal child care, Head Start, supported by Early Intervention providers, engaged in home visiting, or within a primary care clinic. All of these settings and systems provide opportunities to address and support the social and emotional infant mental health – and for practitioners and interventionists, provide the opportunity to have the skills necessary to do this. The Pyramid Model approach applies to all of these settings.
 - There are many ways to accomplish a coordinated early care and education system that elevates social and emotional development as the foundation for learning, while supporting providers and families to have the knowledge and skills necessary to create engaging and inclusive learning environments.

Acknowledging that educators don't traditionally get training in social and emotional development and strategies to promote social emotional well-being

A review of the curriculum and requirements for training, certification, and maintenance of such statuses for the varied providers within the early care and education workforce (spanning 4-year, 2-year and certificate-based accreditations for teachers and childcare providers) illustrates a clear lack of attention to one of the key topics driving the providers out of the workforce: *how to understand and address the social and emotional needs of children in care.*

It is clearly demonstrated throughout the literature, research and foundations for early childhood:



(1) the *importance of supporting social and emotional development and skills of children enrolled in care* in favor of their long-term success in their educational trajectory, and

(2) that post COVID, *children are showing up to these educational settings demonstrating higher needs related to their social and emotional skills and development*; and

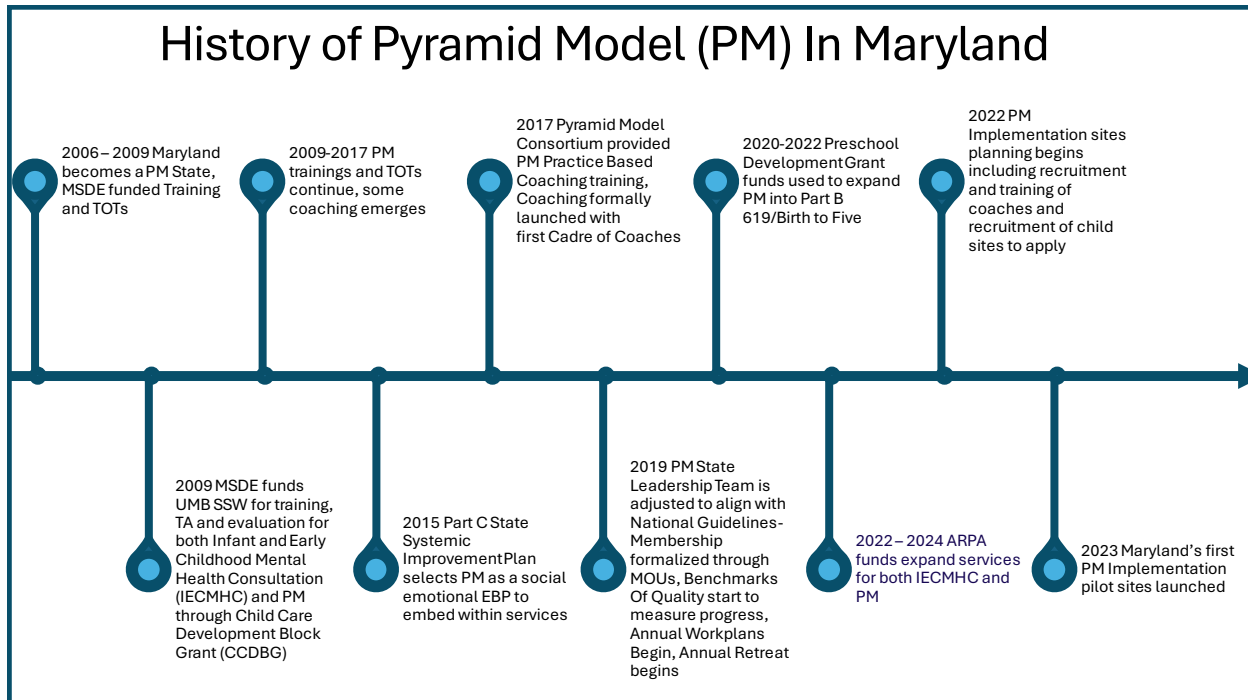
(3) the *stress that early care and education providers feel in their unsupported efforts to address these increased needs* are driving them out of the workforce.

The need and demand for social and emotional supports in the classroom is growing—and so is the science behind it. But mainstream education has yet to make it foundational to the learning and teaching process. For content on these topics to be integrated fully into teacher training, a three-pronged approach is required: (1) start with training for aspiring teachers before they enter the classroom; (2) follow up with on the job training targeted to their specific roles within this varied fields; and (3) integrate coaching and reflective supervision to support use of these strategies in the moment when children present with behaviors that feel particularly challenging and hard for them.

A History of Maryland's Investment in the Pyramid Model

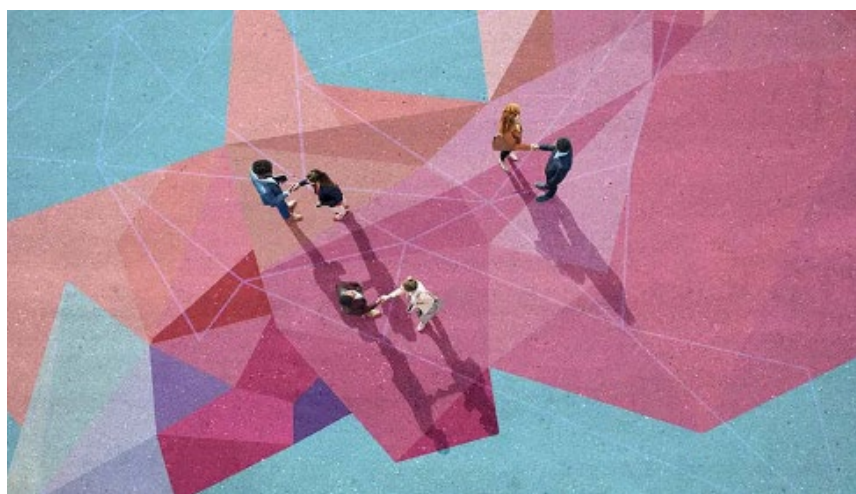
The Pyramid Model has a long history in Maryland, beginning in 2006 when Maryland was one of the nation's first three Pyramid Model States. Since then, MSDE, Division of Early Childhood (DEC) has provided funding to the University of Maryland, School of Social Work (UMB SSW), Institute for Innovation and Implementation (The Institute) to support implementation, workforce development and evaluation of Pyramid Model in the state. From 2006-2017, Maryland focused on providing workforce trainings and training of trainer (TOT) trainings. This included creating a suite of free online Pyramid Model trainings. In 2015, the MSDE Division of Early Intervention and Special Education (DEISE) funded Pyramid Model integration into the Part C Early Intervention State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). Beginning in 2017, with ongoing support from the UMB SSW Institute funded by MSDE DEC, Maryland began to focus on high fidelity implementation including bringing Practice Based Coaching to the state. In 2019, the State Leadership Team (SLT) was revitalized, according to national guidelines, adding in measurement of statewide progress via the Benchmarks of Quality, annual workplans, and annual retreats. In 2022, MSDE DEC ARPA dollars funded significant expansion of PM allowing for the state's first PM Implementation sites. Additionally, over time the Pyramid Model work provided by the UMB SSW Institute has included newsletters, social media presence, ongoing workforce development, and evaluation of efforts. See here for the website and to access newsletters, reports, and additional information <https://www.mdpyramidmodelselfel.org/>. An updated

website, funded by ARPA dollars will be released late 2024. Lastly, MSDE DEC funding has included evaluation of Pyramid Model activities, tracking activities and outcomes. In 2023, facilitated by the UMB SSW Institute team, the state invested in the national Pyramid Model Data Implementation System (PIDS) which allows for user friendly data entry and reporting across settings. The figure below shows the progression of the Pyramid Model in Maryland over time. *In addition to maintaining and expanding this work, this policy document seeks to identify additional Pyramid Model applications that would benefit Maryland's youngest children, their families, and their providers.*



State-level actions to create a systematic approach to promoting social emotional well-being of young children while explicitly addressing the use of exclusionary suspension and expulsion practices

Several states have recognized the effects of exclusionary practices in early childhood settings and enacted policies, regulations, and legislation to address the use of these practices in private child care, state-funded early education settings, and early grades (PreK -2nd) in their states.



While policies may be adopted and regulations outlined, states must also do more to: (1) build systems of support for families and staff to utilize alternate strategies, and (2) create reporting and data collection systems to track rates, identify where to target needed interventions, and demonstrate progress.

Below are some examples of state-level policies that incorporate multiple levels of the early care and education system in order to both provide a policy shift, as well as provide a structure for supporting the workforce to enact such policies.



Several innovative states have led the way through successfully embedding Pyramid Model training and practices into their early care and education system policies – we have outlined a few of those innovative approaches below.

New Hampshire

In New Hampshire, licensed childcare providers can apply for a voluntary recognition system, called Granite Steps for Quality (GSQ). Providers that are awarded steps in the GSQ are eligible to receive quarterly incentive funds that can be used for a variety of quality-related expenses, such as personnel costs, professional development and support, and mental health and wellness

for children, families, and staff. Providers can choose to participate in the GSQ by following one of two pathways:

- ***Environmental Ratings Scale (ERS) or Family Childcare Environmental Ratings Scale (FCCERS) Pathway*** – The Environment Rating Scales (ERS) are designed to assess what children directly experience in their program that has a direct effect on development. The Learning Environment includes interactions children have with other children, staff, space, materials and equipment in their environment.
- ***Pyramid Model Pathway*** – The Pyramid Model Pathway provides early educators a way to increase their quality rating while building skills for supporting nurturing and responsive caregiving, creating effective learning environments, providing instruction to help children learn targeted social-emotional skills, and supporting children with challenging behavior. Innovative within this offering in New Hampshire is the fact that the state has invested in a number of supports to significantly reduce or remove all together any cost to programs as they pursue their QRIS rating pathway.

<u>New Hampshire's Quality Ratings System- Granite Steps for Quality</u>	
Pyramid Model Pathway Activities	State-Funded Pyramid Model Supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of NH Pyramid Model Training Modules & Participation in Professional Learning Community • Participation in Pyramid Model Coaching • Forming a Program Leadership team & completion of The Pyramid Model Benchmarks of Quality • Implementation of <i>Prevent Teach Reinforce for Young Children (PTR-YC)</i> & evidence of program-wide processes to support Tier 3 • Program-Wide Pyramid Model Fidelity as shown by TPOT & TPITOS data 	<p><i>Program Materials and Supplies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pyramid Model Tools <p><i>Access to Support Services:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation • Practice-Based Coaching • Targeted Technical Assistance <p><i>Professional Development Opportunities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pyramid Model Trainings

Colorado

Colorado has a robust system of integrated Pyramid Model supports for early care and education providers and the children they serve. The state has integrated The Pyramid Model into their Quality ratings system for early care programs through a focus on professional development

opportunities available to providers, coaches, and Pyramid Model facilitators, all of which are publicly funded.

In 2021, new regulations for Colorado's updated licensing standards went into effect which require programs to have written policies and procedures outlining the steps taken before a child may be suspended or expelled from the program. These regulations require child care administrators to have training in working with mental health consultants, and for programs to consult with a mental health consultant prior to removing a child from the program for behavior concerns.

Colorado Quality Ratings System - Colorado Shines	
Activities to Increase Quality Rating	State-Funded Pyramid Model Supports
Staff qualifications & professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education credit & paid tuition offered to early childhood educators completing Colorado's 45-hour Pyramid Plus training. • Early Childhood Professional Credentialing system is based on points for completion of education requirements and/or continuing education. Pyramid Model training is included in the allowable continuing education, as well as TPOT certification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Includes a 'Coaching Credential' which prepares individuals to provide coaching in order to build capacity for continuous improvement
Participation in coaching or consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohorts of Certified Pyramid Model Facilitators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pyramid Model Certification to deliver Pyramid Model trainings, become reliable in observation tools (TPOT & TPITOS), & implement coaching in child care programs ○ Is a pathway to a coaching credential in the state's professional development credentialing system.
Implementing reliable classroom assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pyramid Model Facilitators are trained to be reliable in classroom observation tools

Oregon

HB 2166 established the [Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion Prevention Program](#) (ECSEPP) which requires the state to provide technical assistance to early care and education programs and providers to work toward reducing suspension or expulsion in programs serving children from birth through age five and address disparities in the rates of suspension and expulsion (ORS 329A.600).

Some of the coordinated supports outlined in this program include:

- ◆ *intentional expansion of professional development focused on:*
 - *The Pyramid Model,*
 - *implicit bias,*
 - *trauma-informed care,*
 - *and inclusion;*
- ◆ *an increase in access to mental health consultation services; and a state-wide assistance network that can be requested by any early educator when in need of support.*

In addition to the above established program, Oregon also passed SB 236 which prohibits any early care and education program that is licensed or receiving public funds from suspending or expelling any child as of July 1, 2026 (ORS 329A.625), allowing time to build integrated and systematic supports for families and providers. According to the 2024 report to the Oregon state legislature which was authored by the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care, although there is a coordinated effort to build support for enacting this comprehensive legislation there is still not enough authority granted to the existing enforcing body (Department of Early Learning and Care) to investigate and enforce the new ban. This report details the gaps still present in Oregon’s legislation and gives other states a clearer path to follow when introducing their own legislation.

Illinois

[Public Act 100-0105](#) was passed in 2018 which outlines a law prohibiting suspension and expulsion in all licensed birth-five child care programs in the state. This law also mandates data collection and outlines the resources (PM training/IECMH consultation) and documentation that must be utilized by programs to support retaining children in their early care setting while providing necessary supports to providers and families.



A compliment to the 2018 Public Act is the [Illinois 2021 Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Act](#) in which the General Assembly identifies the need for further support in implementing the previous ban on suspension and expulsion. This new Act called for increased statewide funding and implementation of IECMHC and “systems of tiered support, such as the Pyramid Model” to increase provider understanding of exclusionary practices and improve use of the

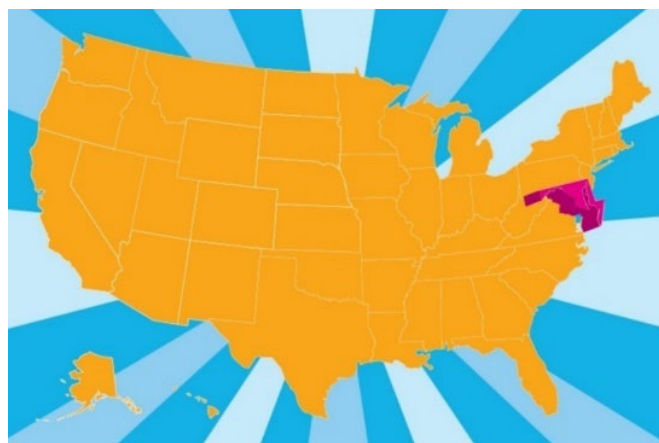
available systems of support for children, families, providers and early care and education programs.

Washington

Washington state regulation [WAC 110-300-0340](#) went into effect in 2018. This regulation outlines the requirements for child care programs to develop a suspension and expulsion policy as well as how this policy must be enacted. The regulation requires programs to provide parents with detailed documentation of each incident which led to exclusion from the program, and what steps were taken to avoid expulsion. These requirements give programs a procedure to follow to ensure policies are adhered to and families are aware of them. Included in the required documentation are details of every incident which led to expulsion including date, time, and staff involved. Child care programs are also required to report the following information to the state: every incident of expulsion, the reason for expulsion, the demographics of each child expelled, and what resources were provided to the family.

Policy Considerations and Recommendations for Maryland

Acknowledging the mixed delivery system for early care and education in Maryland, there are multiple avenues for embedding the Pyramid Model within existing state standards and policies, using the states referenced above as models. In the following section, there are a series of recommendations for policy additions and adjustments to embed Pyramid Model supports within the varied content areas that wrap around the early care and education workforce in the state, including:



- 1) *Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Programs,*
- 2) *Maryland EXCELS,*
- 3) *the Maryland Child Care Credential Program,*
- 4) *and the Early Learning Standards*
- 5) *as well as considerations for curriculum and professional development needs of those in the workforce.*

Embedding Social & Emotional Metrics into Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Programs in Maryland

Accreditation in Maryland is available for licensed child care centers and public pre-k programs to show their commitment to offering high-quality learning opportunities for children. Programs that become accredited receive benefits such as eligibility for a Maryland EXCELS Quality Rating of 5; higher Maryland EXCELS payments; and access to Accreditation Support Funds to purchase instructional materials.

The *Standards for Implementing Quality Early Childhood Programs* is the standards document identifying the requirements to become accredited. As illustrated below, there are several indicators that align with Pyramid Model practices and could be strengthened by intentionally anchoring the indicator in the Pyramid Model.

<i>Maryland's Existing Indicator</i>	<i>Suggestion to Anchor the Indicator in the Pyramid Model</i>
2.2.2 Children and youth are provided opportunities to engage in play to support social foundations skills.	Children and youth are provided opportunities to engage in play to support social foundations skills. <i>Teachers intentionally use these play opportunities to reinforce Pyramid Model Tier 2 skills, including teaching: emotion identification; emotion regulation; social problem solving; and friendship skills.</i>
2.3.5(b) Instruction incorporates management strategies which facilitate and promote positive behavior.	Instruction incorporates management strategies which facilitate and promote positive behavior. <i>In alignment with the Pyramid Model Benchmarks of Quality (BOQ), classrooms include 3-5 positively stated behavior expectations and teachers consistently teach positive behavior expectations throughout the day.</i>

In addition to bolstering existing indicators that attend to social emotional development by anchoring them in the Pyramid Model, there are also multiple indicators that could be strengthened by incorporating attention to social emotional development through the Pyramid Model. Two examples of this are provided below.

<i>Maryland's Existing Indicator</i>	<i>Suggestion to Anchor the Indicator in the Pyramid Model</i>
1.1.1 The program has a written philosophy and mission statement, which reflect effective early childhood practices; best practices for staff; and an appreciation for diversity and welcoming individuals of all abilities.	The program has a written philosophy and mission statement, which reflect effective early childhood practices; best practices for staff; and an appreciation for diversity and welcoming individuals of all abilities. <i>The philosophy/ mission statement emphasizes social emotional development as foundational for other domains of development and identifies the Pyramid Model as the framework for supporting children's social emotional development within the program.</i>

1.1.2 The program establishes and implements a process for ongoing program evaluation. Annually, the program conducts a self-evaluation of the program policies, procedures, and practices. The results of the program evaluation are shared with staff, families, and other stakeholders.	The program establishes and implements a process for ongoing program evaluation. Annually, the program conducts a self-evaluation of the program policies, procedures, and practices. <i>Included in this process is evaluation of program-wide social emotional practices, using the Pyramid Model Benchmarks of Quality (BOQ).</i> The results of the program evaluation are shared with staff, families, and other stakeholders.
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Embedding Social & Emotional Metrics into Maryland EXCELS



Maryland EXCELS is the state's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS), which "uses nationally recognized quality standards and best practices to promote quality program improvement"

(<https://marylandexcels.org/commitment-to-quality/participate/>). Child Care Centers, School-Age Child Care Programs, Family Child Care Homes, Public Pre-K and Head Start programs are eligible to apply for *Maryland EXCELS*. Programs that participate in Maryland EXCELS receive incentives/ additional supports such as increased child care scholarship reimbursements, professional development, and free training, in addition to a monetary bonus for publishing a quality rating for the first time or re-publishing a quality rating of 4 or 5.

As illustrated below, there are several standards within *Maryland EXCELS* that align with Pyramid Model practices and could be strengthened by intentionally anchoring the standard in the Pyramid Model.

<i>Maryland's Existing Standard</i>	<i>Suggestion to Anchor the Standard in the Pyramid Model</i>
DAP 3.1 Staff uses positive behavioral supports and strategies with children that include providing choices and using redirection.	Staff uses positive behavioral supports and strategies with children that include providing choices and using redirection. <i>The program's written discipline policy is aligned with the Pyramid Model by including the promotion of social and emotional skills, using positive guidance and prevention approaches, and eliminating suspension and expulsion.</i>
ADM 1.1 Information provided to families includes policies and	Information provided to families includes policies and practices for: health and safety; tuition/ enrollment; and inclusion of children with disabilities or special health care

practices for: health and safety; tuition/ enrollment; and inclusion of children with disabilities or special health care needs.	needs. <i>Families are informed that the Pyramid Model provides the framework for supporting children's social emotional development and positive behavior within the program.</i>
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In addition to reinforcing currently existing standards that attend to social emotional development by anchoring them in the Pyramid Model, there are also multiple standards that could be strengthened by incorporating attention to social emotional development through the Pyramid Model. Two examples of this are provided below.

<i>Maryland's Existing Standard</i>	<i>Suggestion to Anchor the Standard in the Pyramid Model</i>
STF 1.2 The Director and at least 50% of lead staff hold: a current Maryland Child Care Staff Credential at Level 2 or higher; an Administrator Credential at Level 1 or higher; or the equivalent credential training for that level.	The Director and at least 50% of lead staff hold: a current Maryland Child Care Staff Credential at Level 2 or higher; an Administrator Credential at Level 1 or higher; or the equivalent credential training for that level. <i>The Director and at least 50% of lead staff have participated in Pyramid Model training in Tier 1.</i>
ADM 5.3 Families provided with at least three different types of opportunities to be engaged in the program.	Families provided with at least three different types of opportunities to be engaged in the program. <i>Positive Solutions for Families (PSF), which is a group curriculum that teaches caregivers how to use Pyramid Model practices in the home, is one of the options offered for family engagement.</i>

Include Social & Emotional Content into Maryland's Child Care Credential Program

The *Maryland Child Care Credential Program* is unique from accreditation and the *Maryland EXCELS* program because it is focused on individual child care providers, as opposed to a program or center. The Program “recognizes individual child care providers who increase their qualifications beyond the requirements of state licensing and registration regulations”



(<https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/child-care-providers/office-child-care/credentialing-branch/child-care-credential-program>). Registered family child care providers and child care center staff are able to participate. The primary methods for advancing to higher levels of credentialing are through training and participating in Professional Activity Units. Participants in this program receive financial compensation for receiving the credential, as well as for when they move up in credential levels. Of note, this program will not be funded for fiscal year 2025. **It is important to recognize that programs like this support a strong workforce, and our recommendation is for this program to be reinstated for fiscal year 2026.** See example below of how Pyramid Model training could be included in the *Maryland Child Care Credential Program*.

<i>Maryland's Current Requirements for Staff Credential Level 2</i>	<i>Suggestion to Incorporate Pyramid Model Training into Staff Credential Level 2</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45 clock hours Core of Knowledge training that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A minimum of 20 clock hours in child development • 1 PAU 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45 clock hours Core of Knowledge training that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A minimum of 20 clock hours in child development ○ <i>A minimum of 6 clock hours in Pyramid Model practices</i> • 1 PAU

Policy Opportunities Within Maryland's Early Learning Standards



Maryland recently re-issued their Early Learning Standards this year (2024), contracted through WestEd via the Division of Early Childhood to craft a

document that illustrates alignment with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future legislation. These updated standards represent a milestone in the state's ongoing efforts to provide exemplary early learning experiences. The approach was grounded in aligning the legislative mandates and informed by a comprehensive benchmarking analysis. This document also leverages and engages

independent experts in the field to conduct an external quality review of the standards. As a result, WestEd created what they presented as best-in-class standards tailored specifically for Maryland that meet the diverse needs of all children and prioritize equity.

The published Early Learning Standards for Maryland for ages 0 – 48 months details Social and Emotional Development *as the first consideration under “Early Learning Standards”*, acknowledging the foundational component that this developmental domain serves throughout these initial years of life for educational outcomes for all students and families.

Aligned with Pyramid Model Practices, the updated Maryland Early Learning Standards now articulate that relationships with adults, relationships with children, emotional functioning, self-regulation and sense of identity and belonging are all key components that lay the foundation for meeting milestones in the Social and Emotional Development domain.

Policies to strengthen and support these efforts would fall within three key areas:

1. Articulating practices for providers (early care educators, child care providers, teachers, etc.) to support each domain and including technical assistance and coaching to all providers to ensure a deep understanding of the Early Learning Standards and aligned practices.
2. Further guidance/articulation from MSDE on how early care and educators get guidance on how to *first* assess the needs of children/families in care and *second* provide guidance on how to straddle the range of capacity and need in any early care and educational setting, considering that S&E development is often an illustration both of developmental need and environmental opportunity. Without recommendations for developmentally anchored curriculum for the early years in Maryland, educators need guidance on how screening and assessment work together with the Early Learning Standards to create a roadmap for individualization of learning needs in their programs.
3. Supports for early care and education providers for their own regulation and well-being to support all of these above articulated activities within the classroom or



learning environment. Nationally there is a lack of volume in the literature addressing this crucial topic, yet the implication of provider burnout and stress levels on the opportunities to foster and support children exhibiting behavioral needs or concerns is anecdotally acknowledged. Policies to support providers awareness of and strategies to address and manage their own regulation should be fostered, as well as research on the topic.

Supporting Educators with Curriculum that Prioritizes Social & Emotional Practice is Key

The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance's Institute of Education Sciences has distributed guidance on what is needed for a solid foundation for early care and education nationally across the broad service array of early care and education. They state, wisely, that jurisdictions should determine whether the existing curriculum or curriculum supplement covers social-emotional learning systematically. The curriculum should have a scope and sequence and address instruction in social emotional skills in an incremental manner.

If the curriculum in place is theme-based and does not sequentially build social-emotional skills, then consider supplementing that curriculum with an evidence-based program that systematically teaches these skills.



Within Maryland there is a locally developed exemplar model of curriculum for the Pre-Kindergarten (PreK3 & PreK4) workforce:

<https://education.umd.edu/cdw>
Children Discovering Their World (CDW). This model offers an age-anchored series of early childhood curricula developed by the Center for Early Childhood Education and Intervention (CECEI) at the

University of Maryland led by Dr. Christy Tirrell-Corbin, Executive Director of the CECEI. Across the state, this curriculum supports early care and education providers in both private and public educational settings to support.

This CDW curriculum model accomplishes what many other early education curricula do not by offering opportunities for educators to engage children in natural and frequent opportunities to support learning and reinforcement of social and emotional skills and strategies woven seamlessly throughout their regular learning opportunities and structure. This acknowledges

both the importance of the teaching of these skills for students as well as the guidance needed for educators.

CDW's use of project-based learning helps children develop healthy social connections and a strong sense of self as they investigate real-world topics. Teachers are given opportunities to explore diverse ideas and perspectives that help children identify and express their strengths and emotions, and practice essential skills that promote positive, meaningful interactions with peers and adults.

Additionally, an exemplary key component of the CDW curriculum that aligns with national guidelines is the concept that educators are not expected to perfectly employ the curriculum on their own within their classrooms after receiving training. We know through established data that ongoing, relationship-based coaching is a pivotal component when offered consistently and regularly to support application of any well-designed model for early care and education providers. *Coaching is professional development that emphasizes the application of knowledge to practice – and it's emerging as a critical factor in overall quality improvement in early childhood settings.*

- ❖ While we are on the topic of coaching, and training/technical assistance supports both for the pre-service teacher as well as the established-and-re-certifying member of the workforce, there is an important policy adjustment that we articulate below:
 - ❖ *Maryland would benefit from adding pathways to provide credits for coaching following training on curriculum like CDW as well as for coaching around the Pyramid Model itself* – both of which satisfy the need of supporting provider confidence and competence in understanding and supporting the social and emotional needs of children in their care.

Reducing Preschool Suspension & Expulsion Through Policy

Maryland was celebrated in 2017 as an early state to adopt and pass legislation that enacted policies to prohibit suspension and expulsion in grades PreK to 2nd grade within public school systems (COMAR, 2017). Additionally, they issued a policy guidance statement articulating a preference against suspension and expulsion in child care (Maryland State Department of



Education, 2017). However, both of these policies come without an oversight component (*to either reward programs and providers who comply or address programs that act out of alignment with this policy guidance, and maintain outdated practices to suspend or expel students in care due to challenges addressing their needs*). Moreover, there is little to no tracking of the practices related to suspension or expulsion in childcare, which is largely unregulated beyond enrollment numbers due to the non-public funded nature of the workforce. The reality of this is that these practices are happening in the dark. The legislation for public school as well as the guidance for child care in Maryland did not come with accompanying supports to early care and education teachers to support children and engage in practices that help avoid suspensions and expulsions for young children.

Learning from Oregon's Model

Of note: though it might feel overwhelming – this is possible. In an exemplar move for their own providers as well as for the nation – Oregon passed State Bill 236 which lays the foundation to prohibit any child care program licensed or

receiving public funds from suspending or expelling any child as of July 1, 2026 (ORS 329A.625). In order to provide support for the early education workforce to meet the prohibition of suspension and expulsion by 2026, Oregon House Bill 2166 established the Early Childhood Suspension and Expulsion Prevention Program. This program requires the state to provide technical assistance to early care and education programs and providers to work toward reducing suspension or expulsion in programs serving children from birth through age five and address disparities in the rates of suspension and expulsion (ORS 329A.600).

Oregon has utilized the Pyramid Model as a framework to support programs as they work toward reducing exclusionary practices. Through coordinated efforts with the state department of education, institutions of higher education and child care resource and referral networks (CCR&R), the state has supported a cohort of trainers who are able to train child care providers in Pyramid Model practices and are leveraging the existing technical assistance providers through statewide CCR&R's to provide coaching in universal and secondary Pyramid Model practices.

Maryland would similarly benefit from much stronger legislation requiring engagement of support services as an alternative to suspension and expulsion for young children, and most importantly mechanisms to report and track rates of these practices.

Summary of Policy Recommendations for Maryland



In conclusion, we offer the following recommendations for advocates and policy makers in the state of Maryland to continue their commitment and dedication to the social & emotional needs of their youngest learners and strengthen practices and mechanisms to engage and support the early care and education workforce and families of children served. *They fall into two broad categories:*

Category One:

Maintain funding and infrastructure for current Pyramid Model Activities including:

- a. Ongoing training, coaching, and workforce development efforts hubbed at the state-level
- b. Maryland's recently launched pilot of Pyramid Model Implementation Sites
- c. Pyramid Model activities within the Part C Early Intervention System (*via SSIP efforts*)
- d. Participation in the national Pyramid Model Implementation Data System (PIDS) for ongoing evaluation and tracking support
- e.

Category Two:

Expand Policies Related to Pyramid Model Practices in Maryland to Increase Sustainable Infrastructure Support in the Following Ways:

- a. Write Pyramid Model practices into the state's child care QRIS system, credentialing, and early childhood standards;
- b. Support Pyramid Model training and coaching for the early childhood workforce with state dollars in current and expanded settings;
- c. Enact firmer legislation around suspension/ expulsion that includes mechanisms to enforce not using this practice, mechanisms for tracking disciplinary practices, and support for programs, including Pyramid Model, so programs have alternatives to suspension and expulsion;
- d. Recommend an early childhood classroom curriculum for classrooms serving children birth – 5 years old that explicitly attends to children's social emotional development in an individualized manner and provide support to the workforce in implementing this curriculum.



Our team is deeply involved in the promotion, implementation, and evaluation of community-driven, evidence-based practices that have demonstrated success in impacting the social and emotional health of infants, young children, their families and the workforce supporting them.

What can that look like?

We provide high quality, relevant, and translational training and coaching, technical assistance, facilitation, consulting, implementation support, and research and evaluation to support workforce development. We also provide policy analysis, systems design and financing, data-driven strategic planning, and quality improvement for systems and programs serving young children and their families. **Our work is grounded in equity-anchored, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed practices; ensuring that the stressors that impact the mental health of families including racism, and poverty are carefully considered in our work.**

Our team has an extensive profile of projects that focus on improving the number and quality of infant and mental health services across a variety of settings including childcare, pediatrics, among incarcerated parent populations, with substance use and mental health centers, and with agencies serving homeless and housing unstable youth. We have experience working within systems of care on efforts to develop robust service arrays that are informed by the needs of infants, toddlers and families, as well as the elevation of family voice.

PYRAMID MODEL EXPERIENCE:

Our team has a dedicated focus in supporting the Pyramid Model in a range of settings. During our time in Maryland, we led the State Leadership Team from 2016 - 2023, including supporting the state's trainers and coaches. During that time we aligned the work with NCPMI and PMC, launched the first implementation sites and embedded PM Practices within Part C Early Intervention. We also increased alignment of PM Coaching and IECMH Consultation. Members of our team have been using the model in their own professional work since 2009.

This summer, we have a Pyramid Model Practice Guide and PSF Facilitator Family Guide set for dissemination to support the workforce in adapting and deepening these practices that we are excited to share with you.

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