

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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*Newell Augur, Co-Chair  
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**March 1, 2016**

**Sen. Brian D. Langley  
Rep. Victoria P. Kornfield  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333**

**RE: Social Emotional Learning and Development in Young Children**

To the Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Per your request, we are pleased to provide an update on the Maine Children's Growth Council's work on this critical issue.

**Background**

In response to testimony at a public hearing on the social emotional development and learning of young children in Maine, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs (Committee) noted that there appears to be "an increase in young children's challenging behavior, which may be leading to a corresponding increase in expulsions and other requests that children leave early care and education programs without attempts to address the behavioral issues or find support for placement in another appropriate setting." The Committee further noted that "this is a national problem that has elicited a joint statement from the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services regarding expulsion in preschool programs; it is important that Maine take a closer look at the causes and possible remedies to this problem."

At the request of the Joint Committee, the Maine Children's Growth Council and the Maine Departments of Health and Human Services and Education are collaborating to examine the social emotional development and learning of Maine's young children. This includes numerous activities to gather and analyze data to inform cross-sector recommendations on promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies to more effectively promote the healthy social emotional learning and development of children from birth through second grade, as well as address the needs of children with challenging behaviors served in early care and education programs.

A kick-off meeting of the Social Emotional Learning and Development Project (SELD) was convened in August 2015 with members of the Council, other key stakeholders (e.g.

pediatricians, child therapists, Maine Resilience Building Network members, early learning program administrators, parents), and a team of national partners from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and Zero to Three. A work plan to determine the project's scope, tasks, sequencing, roles, timeline, and deliverables was discussed. This group has since been guiding the two main bodies of work: 1) a statewide survey and data analysis and 2) a state policy landscape - that will inform the final recommendations made to this Committee.

## **Data Collection – Teacher and Provider State Survey**

### ***Survey Development:***

NCCP led the design and administration of a survey of early care and education programs across the state to collect information about the exclusionary practices, prevalence of child behavior problems, and available supports such as professional development and consultation, and respondents' views about what programs need to promote children's social emotional health and address behavior problems.

Numerous Maine and national expert stakeholders consulted and provided feedback on the survey questions and target audience including: members of the Council and other participants at the August 6<sup>th</sup> kick-off meeting, project leads from the Ounce of Prevention Fund (Ounce) and the Maine Children's Alliance; Walter Gilliam<sup>1</sup> from Yale's Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy; and leaders in Maine's Head Start, Preschool, and Child Care communities. In addition, the survey was reviewed and edited by staff at Maine Department of Education (Jaci Holmes, Sue Reed, and Cindy Brown) and at Maine Department of Health & Human Services (Angie Bellefleur and Elyssa Wynne.) The survey went through several cycles of revisions from August 2015 to November 2015 and was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Columbia University on November 18, 2015.

### ***Survey Design and Structure:***

The survey consists of three main sections of questions designed for lead teachers in center-based programs and providers in family child care settings. The first section asks questions about the type of program, length of the day, and ratios of teaching staff to children; the second section asks questions about teachers'/providers' educational level, experience with young children, and professional development focused on social emotional development strategies; and the third section requests information about children's behavior and the effects of challenging behavior on the programs/home-based settings. This third section includes questions about the prevalence of challenging behavior, involuntary and voluntary dismissals from programs, reasons why children leave programs, strategies teachers use to address challenging behaviors, barriers when using different strategies, and supports teachers think would be helpful.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Walter Gilliam is considered a leading expert in the field on the topic of suspension and expulsion in the early grades, bringing the issue to the forefront from his research.



### ***Survey Administration:***

The survey was administered through Qualtrics, a secure online data collection system that ensures information is confidentially collected from Maine's early care and education teachers and providers. All lead preschool teachers of publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs, Head Start/Early Head Start, center-based child care, and family child care providers in Maine who could be reached by a working email, as described later, were invited to participate in the survey. Maine's state child care and preschool education state administrators and an association of Head Start directors assisted with the procurement and creation of the email lists.

The survey was first sent out on December 3, 2015 via email, with reminder emails sent on December 15, 2015, and in January 2016. Surveys were sent to 1,755 center-based programs and family child care providers or 79 percent of a total of 2,209 programs and providers who were included on lists provided by administrators and the Head Start Association. The remainder had missing or invalid emails that are currently being checked with the goal of sending surveys to additional programs and providers. The following methods were used to reach teachers at center-based programs and family child care providers:

- **Center-Based Programs (child care, nursery school, Head Start/Early Head Start, and preschool):** To recruit lead teachers in center-based programs, emails were sent to program directors and principals asking them to forward the email with an attached information sheet and survey link to their lead teachers of children from infancy through preschool age. The email provided background information about the survey and stated that participation was voluntary.
- **Family Child Care Providers:** Family child care providers received the email with the information sheet and survey link directly since NCCP was able to obtain their emails from the state administrator.

### ***Survey Next Steps:***

- **Data Collection and Analysis:** As of February 22, 2016, NCCP has received 220 completed surveys. The Maine Children's Growth Council is continuing to work to increase the response rate. Data analysis of survey responses will begin next month. NCCP has indicated that the quality of responses provided through the surveys they have received has been exceptional.
- **Focus Groups:** To supplement the quantitative data and initial qualitative responses, the national partners are exploring the use of focus groups to collect additional information and gather perspectives from other key stakeholders in Maine such as school principals.
- **Final Report:** A report containing the results of the survey will be generated by NCCP and discussed at a Council meeting when complete. This report will also be shared with Committee members as part of the final report on the social emotional learning and development of Maine's young children.

### **State Policy Landscape**

The Maine Children's Alliance, the Ounce, and NCCP worked with the Steering Committee to prioritize topics for a policy landscape based on the scope of the request from the Committee, new state CCDF plan requirements, previous stakeholder meetings, and research on social emotional learning and development. From these discussions, the following topics were prioritized:

- professional development focused on social emotional learning and development
- early childhood consultation (including mental health)
- involuntary and voluntary dismissal
- child screening/assessment for social emotional problems and strengths
- parent education, engagement, and support
- early childhood special education (Early Intervention/Part C & Preschool Special Education/Part B)

We anticipate developing policy briefs on these six priority topics based upon the information culled from the survey, state exemplar calls, and outside research. These briefs will form the basis of the policy landscape for the final report to the Joint Education Committee and will inform discussions of options for consideration from the Council and the Departments. They also will aid in the collection of information on existing statutory language, regulations, program standards, funding sources, administrative data, and current practices in Maine directly related to the social emotional growth and behavioral needs of young children, families, and early learning program staff.

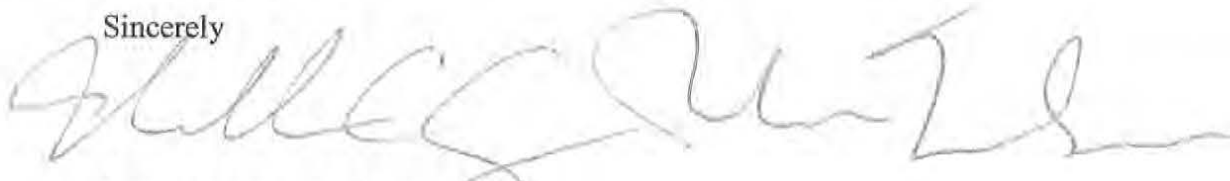
### **Continuing Progress--Next Steps**

We believe we have established an initial groundwork for developing recommendations to better support the social emotional learning and development of Maine's young children and supports to educators for addressing children's behavioral needs. The Growth Council, DOE, DHHS, along with our national partners, will continue to study the issue through 2016 and develop final recommendations to the legislative committee. Among the additional work to be considered will be examining policies in Maine and other states to highlight best practices in the priority areas. NCCP also will be reaching out to some survey respondents as to their perceptions of the prevalence of child behavior problems and available supports to promote children's social emotional health and address challenging behaviors.

A report containing the results of the statewide survey will be generated by NCCP for discussion at a future Council meeting. This report will also be shared with Committee members as part of the final report on the social emotional learning and development of Maine's young children.

We are pleased to be able to provide the Committee with this update and appreciate your support for this effort.

Sincerely



Newell Augur and Peter Lindsay  
Co Chairs  
Maine Children's Growth Council