

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of House Bill 17-1210. My name is Dr. Phillip S. Strain. I am a Professor of Educational Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Colorado Denver and Director of the Positive Early Learning Experiences Center. I have worked in the area of young children's social emotional development and prevention of challenging behavior since 1970. I am the author of over 300 scientific papers, and I have been a science advisor on issues specific to this proposed legislation for the U.S. Department of Education, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the National Academies of Science. The focus of my oral testimony today is the negative consequences to children, when issues around young children's problem behavior are not addressed in a timely, scientifically valid manner. My written testimony also addresses the negative consequences to teachers and adult family members.

One could argue that the most widely replicated finding in all of the behavioral sciences is the predictable negative consequences of not addressing young children's social emotional delays and associated challenging behaviors in a timely, scientifically valid fashion. Importantly, suspending and expelling children is not an evidence-based tactic, in fact, these practices directly exacerbate the behavioral problems they are intended to reduce. There is no scientific evidence to the contrary. For the past 40 years researchers in epidemiology, psychology, psychiatry, education, and criminal justice have all reached the same conclusion: untreated or poorly treated social and emotional skill deficits get worse over time while the costs of later intervention rises dramatically while at the same time the probability of successful behavioral improvement plummets.

What are the school-age negative consequences for these children?

1. Rejection and isolation from peers, teachers, and care providers

2. Engagement in fewer teaching opportunities of any kind
3. Poor academic outcomes
4. High incidence of further suspension and expulsion
5. School dropout
6. High incidence of gang membership, drug use, and contact with the juvenile justice system

What are the adult negative consequences for these individuals?

1. Loneliness and few stable relationships
2. High incidence of diagnosed mental disorders
3. High incidence of early accidental death
4. Chronic unemployment and underemployment
5. High incidence of incarceration and recidivism

Considering these outcomes it should surprise no one that when economists have calculated the cost benefit ratio of timely evidence-based intervention we see that these efforts save 7 dollars for every 1 dollar spent.

The negative consequences do not stop there however. They also impact care providers and adult family members as well. For families we see the following:

1. High incidence of coercive, punitive and inconsistent parenting
2. Isolation of adults from friends, other family members and community supports
3. High incidence of reported stress

For practitioners who are ill-prepared to address child social-emotional challenges we see the following:

1. High staff turnover

2. High levels of job dissatisfaction
3. Spiraling levels of self-confidence
4. Increasing incidence of adult mental disorders

While I have purposely and justifiably painted a very negative picture to reflect the reality associated with intervention that is too little too late, let me end with this thought. Perhaps there is no group of children for whom actually providing timely, evidence-based intervention is more effective. Here is just one example.

My colleague Matthew Timm and I published a 25-year follow-up study (Strain & Timm, 2001) to see how a group of 40 children fared throughout school and into adulthood when they received early skill training based upon the best scientific evidence at the time. As preschoolers these children had, on average, been asked to leave 3 early care settings prior to their enrollment in our program. They hit, bit, kicked, screamed, broke stuff, cursed and created chaos pretty much 24/7.

As a result of their receiving the best, scientifically valid skill training, in K-12 they were indistinguishable from class peers who had no such history, they all graduated from high school and many enrolled in college. Their contacts with the juvenile justice system were proportionately fewer than for the general population. As adults they were gainfully employed and showed no increased incidence of mental disorders or criminality.

These outcomes are not accidental or coincidental. They are the direct result of being exposed to a workforce equipped with the skills needed to succeed. Importantly, in Colorado we have evidence-based support for practitioners, dwindling as these resources may be, in the form of Pyramid Plus, The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion. The Pyramid Model has been proven effective in two large, scientific Gold Standard randomized

trials and it is mentioned in the Joint U.S. Department of Education/Health and Human Services Policy Statement on Suspension and Expulsion as one of the only two evidence-based practices at the early childhood level. This bill takes an important step toward having a competent workforce in Colorado and I respectfully urge its passage.