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Setting Young Children Up for Success: Mental Health and Social-Emotional Development Proposed Policy and Legislative Solutions to Suspension and Expulsion of Very Young Children

Important Forum at Legislative Office Building, Feb 13, 2018 from 10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Room 1D, 300 Capitol Avenue, Hartford

HARTFORD – Keeping our youngest learners in school should be one of the highest priorities of school districts. Increased mental health awareness, assessment and access to services are fundamental to children's success.

The Commission on Women, Children and Seniors, the Center for Children's Advocacy, and the Office of the Child Advocate jointly host a discussion on the critical importance of setting young children up for success at school. Presentations include innovative programs that address children's mental health and social-emotional development, and proposed policy and legislative solutions to help reduce the exclusion of young students from school.

Legislation in 2015 prohibited out-of-school suspension and expulsion of young children, but there are exceptions in the law and children continue to be excluded from school at an alarming rate.

"Fostering the development of emotional skills should be one of the highest priorities of school districts. When we neglect to invest in this, we lose a critical window of development. We also may end up with less academically accessible and more emotionally dysregulated students. This contributes to the alarming rate of suspension and expulsion among small children, says Attorney Kathryn Meyer of the Center for Children's Advocacy.

Heather Petit, Children's Policy Analyst with the CT Commission on Women, Children and Seniors, adds, "Social and emotional development is critical to success in school, starting with our youngest learners. Skills building teaches children to recognize and understand emotions, feel empathy, make decisions, and build and maintain relationships. School programming that incorporates these skills has shown to improve mental health, social skills, and academic achievement."

Agenda and Information

Welcome and Introductions: Steven Hernández, Esq, Executive Director, Commission on Women, Children and Seniors

Keynote Speaker

Walter S. Gilliam, PhD

Director, Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy; and Associate Professor, Child Psychiatry and Psychology, Child Study Center, Yale School of Medicine

A Social and Emotional Approach to Building a School System

Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

Innovations

Panel Moderator: Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer, Esq, Director of the Speak Up Project, Center for Children's Advocacy
Jeana Bracey, PhD, Director of School and Community Initiatives, Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut
Tirzah Kemp, Program Manager of Community and Family Engagement, Clifford Beers Clinic
Kelly Grant, Director of Pupil Services, New Britain Consolidated School District
Caroline Finley, Program Manager, Early Childhood Consultation Partnership

Next Steps

Panel Moderator: Heather Petit, Children's Policy Analyst, Commission on Women, Children and Seniors
Michelle Levy, PhD, Education Consultant, Office of Early Childhood
Andrea (Penny) Spencer, PhD, Director of Off-Campus Programs, University of Saint Joseph
Representative from the Connecticut State Department of Education

Closing Comments

Sarah Eagan, Esq, Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate

Questions and Discussion