



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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To: Superintendents in Districts receiving UPK and/or SUFDPK Funding Prekindergarten (PreK);  
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Direct Contract Agencies receiving SUFDPK Funding; and  
Collaborating Agencies Program Contacts

From: Erik Sweet, Executive Director of the Office of Early Learning

Subject: Field Guidance for Promoting Positive Behavior and Addressing Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Prekindergarten Programs

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New York State's investment in pre-kindergarten programs is aimed at bolstering early childhood education and fostering positive development in young learners. This investment signifies a commitment to providing quality educational experiences that support children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth during their formative years.

The Office of Early Learning also recognizes the importance of addressing behavioral issues in early education settings. Efforts have been directed towards implementing strategies and interventions that promote positive behavior and minimize the need for exclusionary disciplinary practices<sup>1</sup>. Recognizing the significance of explicit instruction of behavioral expectations, this guidance and attachments aim at equipping educators with effective tools, resources, and guidance to support children's behavioral needs proactively.

Behavior refers to how an individual conducts themselves, positively or negatively, in response to a situation or environment. How one behaves is influenced by various factors, including, but not limited to, abilities, disabilities, social identities (race, ethnicity, and gender, among others), cultural and familial experiences, interests, and languages<sup>2</sup>. Young children let adults know their wants and needs through their behavior long before they have words. They provide adults "cues" to aid in understanding what they are trying to communicate. Some children need more help managing strong emotions or disruptive behaviors.

Young children thrive in well-organized learning environments with clear and simple expectations. New to the learning environment, teachers need to set children up for success. Children require explicit instruction and modeling of the expected behaviors for each environment they encounter, inside and outside (e.g., classroom, playground, library, bathroom), throughout their program day. When children understand what is

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<sup>1</sup> [New York State Office of Student Support Services, Safe Schools Task Force Report: Recommendations for Reducing Disparities in and Reforming School Discipline in New York State, Dec. 7, 2022, 1](#)

