

AB 2698 (Rubio) Increasing Early Childhood Mental Health Services

Bill Summary

AB 2698 would enable children in the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), infants and toddlers in general child care and development programs, and children 0 to 5 years of age served in family child care home networks to benefit from early childhood mental health consultation. The bill authorizes providers to utilize existing subsidized child care funds to provide these valuable services which can improve outcomes for children and help prevent expulsions.

Existing Law

Currently, providers may not use existing funds for critical early childhood mental health consultation services.

Background

Recent data shows expulsion occurs frequently in preschool programs across the United States. Nationally, three and four year olds enrolled in Pre-K are expelled 3.2 times more frequently than K-12 students, while California's Pre-K expulsion rates are even higher than the national average.

Furthermore, Pre-K expulsion disproportionately affects children of color. Recent studies show that African American children are twice as likely to be expelled as any other group. Additionally, Latino and white children face expulsion rates of over twice the national average for K-12. In this manner, children are 'pushed out' of Pre-K at a time when their need for support is crucial. Children expelled from Pre-K are ten times more likely to be expelled from K-12.

Early childhood mental health consultation models provide important supports for effective classroom management and positive learning environments, including supportive teacher practices and strategies for supporting children with challenging behaviors and other social, emotional, and mental health concerns.

Research shows these models can play an important role in addressing challenging behaviors and can yield positive social and emotional outcomes for children, including reducing preschool expulsions.

Details of the Bill

AB 2698 builds on last year's AB 752 (Chapter 708, Rubio) which generally prohibits preschool expulsion because of a child's behavior and instead creates a process for addressing persistent and serious challenging behaviors. This bill also incentivizes providers to make critical early childhood mental health consultation services available to more children by utilizing existing contract funds.

There is a lack of resources for providers to undertake early childhood mental health consultation, and currently existing funds may not be used to reimburse mental health consultants working with CSPP programs or general child care programs with infants and toddlers.

By allowing providers to use existing state funding for early childhood mental health consultation, this bill incentivizes a proactive approach that benefits all children in the classroom, and will keep more children in preschool by reducing expulsions.

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