Children with Challenging Behaviors:2012 Follow-Up Survey of Boulder County Early Care And Education Providers

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Summary of Key Findings

In 2009, Mental Health Partners Kid Connects sponsored a survey of Boulder County's early care and education providers in order to estimate the prevalence and describe the characteristics of young children in care with challenging behaviors and provider responses to those behaviors. The purpose of the present study is to repeat the 2009 study in order to identify changes in the prevalence of and provider responses to challenging behaviors in the past three years. This study is the first step in tracking long-term trends relating to Boulder County's children in care with challenging behaviors.

A mail and web-based survey was conducted between March and June 20012 of licensed early care and education providers in Boulder County. The response rate was 39.9%.

The percentage of providers having children with challenging behaviors and of children with challenging behaviors was about the same in 2012 as in 2009. The difference between the two years was in provider responses.

- Over 80% of *providers* had at least one child with challenging behavior in the previous 12 months, about the same as in 2009.
  - o Of providers with one or more children with challenging behaviors in the past year, 26.4% *considered* asking at least one child to leave the program for that reason, and 7.5% *did* ask a child to leave.
  - o Once a provider considered asking a child to leave due to challenging behaviors, the likelihood of actually expelling a child increased substantially: 28.6% of providers that considered asking a child to leave because of challenging behavior expelled a child for that reason.
  - o These percentages – considering expulsion and expulsion – were substantially higher in 2009.
- The percentage of enrolled *children*under age 6 with challenging behaviors was12.3%in 2012 and 10.9% in 2009.
  - o The percentage of children under age 6 with challenging behaviors that were expelled decreased from 4.1% in 2009 to 1.5% in 2012.
  - o Children being considered for expulsion were only half as likely to be expelled in 2012 as in 2009, decreasing from 35.1% to 18.2%.
  - o The 2012 provider expulsion rate of 1.9 per 1,000 enrolled childrenunder age 6 was less than half the rate in 2009, when it was 4.5 per 1,000 children.
  - o However, the 2012 expulsion rate of 1.9 per 1,000 was more than three times higher than the expulsion rate of 0.6 per 1,000 K-12 students in Boulder County's public schools.

Other key findings include:
- As in the 2009 study, family child care homes had the highest expulsion rate, 5.3 per 1,000 children compared to 1.5 for centers/preschools. Because of their non-expulsion policy, Head Start/Early Head Start and public school affiliated centers/preschools had no expulsions in either year.
- Males were more likely to be expelled than were females, 2.7 per 1,000 compared to 1.0.
- Children aged 3 and over were more likely to be expelled than were children younger than 3, who had no expulsions in 2012.
- There were also no expulsions among Latino children, and children who were non-white or of 2 or more races had the highest expulsion rate, 6.4 per 1,000.
- One-quarter of providers had access to mental health consultation at least once a month, representing one-fifth of children under age 6 enrolled in care. Although the percentage of *providers* with access to mental health consultation at least once a month was greater in 2012 than in 2009, the percentage of *children* with access to this arrangement was much lower than in 2009.
- Half of centers/preschools had some type of regular access to mental health consultation compared to 22.7% of family care homes.

- In contrast to the 2009 study, there was no relationship between regular access to mental health consultation and expulsion rates.
- The challenging behaviors that providers most frequently ranked in the top three having the most negative impact on their program were: hurts self or others, by 47.3% of providers, irritable, mad, or frustrated easily (24.4%), and disrespectful, defiant (23.7%).
- Of the 8 providers that had expelled a child in the last 12 months, hurts self or others and destroys or damages property were the challenging behaviors of most concern in these children.
- The most common strategies used to address the behaviors that providers ranked in the top three having the most negative impact on their program were: talking to the child, redirection, positive reinforcement, removing the child from the group or situation, and talking to parents. Time out and ignoring the behavior were used least frequently.
- The percentage of providers believing that the severity of challenging behaviors had increased in their program in the last 12 months was higher in 2012 (24.8%) than in 2009 (18.3%).
- Nearly 60% of providers believed that challenging behaviors were having a negative impact on their staff's well-being, or on them if they were a family home provider, to some extent or quite a bit.
- Training was by far the most common resource that staff (or respondents, if they were home providers) used for information or help with challenging behaviors, reported by 70.2% of providers, followed by other teachers (43.5%), and the Internet (42.0%). Mental Health Consultants and Nurse Consultants were used less frequently.
- In a list of nine topics relating to children with challenging behaviors, providers most frequently (61.1%) wanted their staff (or themselves, if they were a home provider) to learn more about problem solving strategies for children with challenging behaviors.

Study Background[1]

The percentage of young children enrolled in early care and education has increased substantially both in Boulder County and nationwide in recent decades. A 2009 Boulder County child care needs assessment found that more than three-quarters of the surveyed families with one or more children under age 6 had a child in care, including 85% of families with a child aged 3 to 5. Ten years earlier, 46% of families with a child in that age group had a child in care.[2]

For many families, work is the most important reason for having a child in care. In 2010, an estimated two-thirds of Boulder County children under age 6 lived in families in which all parents were employed or actively looking for work.[3] However, the 2009 needs assessment found that school readiness and socialization were also important reasons for having a child in care. Nationwide, nearly as many children aged 3 to 5 of women who were not employed were in care (43%) as among women who were employed (53%).[4]

With a growing number of children in care, it is increasingly important for providers to have the training, skill, and support to address the needs of children with social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Without those resources, providers may have no recourse but to expel children who display persistent and disruptive challenging behaviors. And without effective interventions, those problems may follow the child well beyond the early care and education setting.[5]

In 2009, Mental Health Partners Kid Connects sponsored a survey of Boulder County's early care and education providers in order to estimate the prevalence and describe the characteristics of young children in care with challenging behaviors and provider responses to those behaviors.[6] Some of the key findings of that study were:

- More than 80% of the 114 providers that responded to the survey experienced one or more children with challenging behaviors in the previous 12 months. Among providers with children with challenging behaviors, 37.2% *considered asking* at least one child to leave their program, and 18.1% *did ask* at least one child to leave for that reason.
- Boulder County early care/education providers had an expulsion rate of 4.5 of every 1,000 enrolled children under age 6. That rate was 4.5 times the K-12 expulsion rate in Boulder County public schools and almost twice the rate in public schools statewide.

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[2] Laura Appelbaum and Tracey O'Brien, *Early Care and Education Needs Assessment of Boulder County*, Prepared for The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County, University of Colorado at Denver Center for Education Policy Analysis, June 2009; Erin Caldwell and Stephanie Greenberg, *Boulder County Child Care Needs Assessment*, National Research Center, Inc., April 2000.

[3] U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey, Table B23008.

[4] Lynda Laughlin, "Child Care Arrangements in the 21st Century," *Census on C-Span*, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/.

[5] Walter S. Gilliam, *Implementing Policies to Reduce the Likelihood of Preschool Expulsion*, Foundation for Child Development, FCD Policy Brief: Advancing PK-3, No. 7, January 2008.

[6] Stephanie W. Greenberg, *Children with Challenging Behaviors: Survey of Boulder County Early Care and Education Providers*, Prepared for Kid Connects Boulder, The Mental Health Center Serving Boulder and Broomfield Counties, October 2009.

- The expulsion rates of home providers and providers with no regular access to mental health consultation were much higher than were the rates of centers/preschools and providers with regular access to mental health consultation. Home providers were much less likely to have regular access to mental health consultation than were centers/preschools.
- About 60% of providers believed that children's challenging behaviors were having a negative impact on the well-being of their staff (or on them, if they were home providers).

The purpose of the present study is to repeat the 2009 study in order to identify changes in the prevalence of and provider responses to challenging behaviors in the past three years. This study is the first step in tracking long-term trends relating to Boulder County's children in care with challenging behaviors.

Challenging behavior was defined in this study, as in the 2009 study, as *a repeated pattern of behavior that interferes with optimal learning and positive relationships.*

Data Collection

Survey distribution

The same data collection methods were used in the present study as in 2009.[7] A survey was conducted of licensed early care and education providers in Boulder County.[8]The City of Boulder Child Care Subsidy and Referrals (CCSR) Program generated the list of providers and their contact information. The survey was distributed by regular mail to providers with whom CCSR typically communicates in that manner and by e-mail combined with a web-based survey to providers with whom CCSR communicates electronically. The same questionnaire was used that was developed for the 2009 study.

A total of 331 questionnaires were distributed. The number according to method of distribution and provider type is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.	Survey distribution by method of distribution and provider type		
Method of distribution	Centers/preschools	Family child care homes	Total
Regular mail	0	32	32
Electronic	183	116	299
Total	183	148	331

Data collection took place between the end of March and the third week in June 2012. About one week before the survey was distributed, postcards were sent by regular mail or e-mail to all providers informing them of the study and encouraging them to participate. The mail survey was sent at the end of March.The link to the web-based survey was e-mailed about a week later, so that all providers would receive the survey on about the same date. A follow-up mailing was sent two weeks later to providers that had not yet responded. Two reminder letters were sent to non-respondents to the mail survey at about two week intervals, and reminder e-mails were sent to non-respondents to the web-based survey at about weekly intervals until that version of the survey was taken down in the third week of June. During the period of data collection, staff of the CCSR and The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County and the Kid Connects director publicized the study in communications and meetings with providers.

Response rate

Of the 331 questionnaires distributed, a total of 131 responses were received, for a response rate of 39.6%, similar to the 2009 response rate of 42.2%. Child care homes had a response rate of 37.2% and centers/preschools, 39.9%. Three respondents did not identify their type.

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[7] The only major change that was made addressed a limitation in the 2009 study. In the present study, the survey was sent to all sites of the county's two school district affiliated preschool programs. In the 2009 study, the survey was sent to the directors of the two programs because the individual sites were closed for the summer. That may have reduced the overall variation in types of challenging behaviors and responses to those behaviorssince both are large programs. At least partly as a result of this modification, the survey was distributed to a greater overall number of providers in 2012 than in 2009, with a higher percentage of centers/preschools and a lower percentage of child care homes both in the population of providers to whom the survey was distributed and among the survey respondents.

[8] Sites in the school district affiliated preschool programs that were located outside of Boulder County were included.

Comparability of survey respondents with Boulder County's population of providers and children

Survey respondents were compared to the total population of both providers and children under age 6 in Boulder County on two characteristics that previous research has found to be related to expulsion rates – provider type and children's race/ethnicity.[9]

As in the 2009 study, the distribution of survey respondents by provider type was nearly identical to the distribution of all Boulder County providers (Table 2).

Table 2. **Comparison of Boulder County's general population of early care and education providers and survey respondentsby type**

Provider type	Boulder County	Survey respondents
Family child care homes	44.7%	42.7%
Centers/preschools	55.3%	55.0%
Other	0.0%	0.8%
Unspecified	0.0%	1.5%
Total	331	131

In both 2009 and 2012, the percentage of young children cared for by survey respondents that were white non-Latino was similar to the percentage in Boulder County's general population of young children, with a somewhat higher percentage in care than in the population (Table 3). The percentage of Latino children cared for by survey respondents was substantially smaller, particularly in the 2012 survey, than in the county's total population. These differences are likely to reflect an actual higher prevalence of white non-Latino children and a lower prevalence of Latino children in care, as was found in the Boulder County early care/education needs assessment.[10]

Table 3. **Percentage of white non-Latino and Latino children in Boulder County's general population and in survey providers, 2009 and 2012**

Race/ethnicity	Boulder County*	Survey providers: children in care < age 6	
		2012	2009
White non-Latino	64.1%	73.0%	70.0%
Latino (any race)	25.5%	14.8%	20.6%

* Under age 5.
Source, General Population: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey, Tables B01001, B01001H, and B01001I.

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[9] Walter S. Gilliam, *Prekindergarteners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Systems*, Foundation for Child Development, FCD Policy Brief Series No. 3, May 2005; Walter S. Gilliam, "Preschool and Child Care Expulsion and Suspension Rates and Predictors in OneState," *Infants & Young Children*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 228-245, July-September 2006; Sarah Davidon Hoover, *Children with Challenging Behavior: A Survey of Licensed Early Care and Education Settings in Colorado*, University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center, 2006.

[10] Laura Appelbaum and Tracey O'Brien, *Early Care and Education Needs Assessment of Boulder County*, Prepared for The Early Childhood Council of Boulder County, University of Colorado at Denver Center for Education Policy Analysis, June 2009.

Study limitations

- Some directors of large centers may not have an accurate understanding of the types of challenging behaviors and the ways in which teachers respond to them in individual classrooms.
- Providers, especially large centers/preschools,that did not respond to the survey may bias the results in unknown ways. Every effort was made to maximize the response rate in order to lessen this source of potential bias.

Survey Findings

Types of early care and education providers

Fifty-five percent of responding providers were centers or preschools, accounting for 9 in 10 of the 4,324 children enrolled at those providers at the time of the survey (Table 4). Forty-two percent of providers were family child care homes, accounting for 8.7% of enrolled children. Because of a change in survey methodology, the questionnaire was distributed to individual sites of public school affiliated preschools in 2012 but not in 2009, and as a result, the percentage of responding providers that were preschools was greater in the present survey than in the previous one and the percentage that were family child homes was smaller. (See footnote 7 for an explanation.)[11]

Table 4.   Survey provider types

Provider type	% of providers	% of children
Family child care home	42.7%	8.7%
Faith-based child care center/preschool	6.9%	11.5%
For-profit child care center/preschool	16.8%	27.8%
Nonprofit child care center/preschool	14.5%	34.4%
Head Start/Early Head Start	1.5%	4.0%
Public school affiliated center/preschool	15.3%	13.0%
Other/Unspecified	2.3%	0.7%
Total	131	4,324

About one-third (32.1%) of children enrolled at responding providers were 4 years old and a quarter (25.5%) were 3 years old (Table 5). Nearly all of the remainder were evenly split between children 18 to 35 months old and those 5 years old.

Table 5.   Ages of children enrolled in survey providers

Age of children	%
0 – 17 months	5.4%
18 – 35 months	19.0%
3 years old	25.5%
4 years old	32.1%
5 years old	18.0%
Total	4,324

Eight percent of children had either an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for children ages 0 to 3 or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for children ages 3 to 6 (Table 6). That percentage was far lower than the 19.5% of children with IFSPs or IEPs in 2009.

Table 6.   Percentage of children with IFSP or IEP enrolled in survey providers, 2009 and 2012

	2012	2009
IFSP/IEP	8.1%	19.5%
Total	4,324	4,457

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[11] It should be noted that the percentage of children enrolled in responding providers that were in public school affiliated preschools was *smaller* in the present survey than in the previous one. In 2009, the directors of both public school affiliated preschools responded to the survey, while in 2012, not all individual public school affiliated preschool sites responded.

Lead teacher experience and education

Lead teachers were defined as the teachers most responsible for the day-to-day operation of the provider's classrooms, or for home providers, the provider her/himself. Of the 428 lead teachers at responding providers, a third (33.9%) had 10 or more years of experience in early care and education, slightly lower than in the 2009 study, when it was 41.9% (Table 7). Sixty-one percent had a bachelors degree or higher, the same as in the 2009 study, and a somewhat higher percentage in 2012 had an associates degree other than a CDA, 21.4% compared to 14.8%.

Table 7.   Lead teacher experience and education, 2009 and 2012

Teacher characteristics	2012	2009
Years of experience in early care/education		
Less than 1 year	5.6%	*
1 – 5	33.4%	32.4%
6 - 10	27.1%	25.7%
More than 10	33.9%	41.9%
Highest educational level		
< High school	0.2%	0.3%
High school/GED	11.7%	15.3%
CDA	5.4%	8.8%
Other Associates	21.4%	14.8%
Bachelors	41.5%	46.6%
Masters or higher	19.7%	14.2%
Total	428	413

* Not broken out as a response category.

Prevalence of children with challenging behaviors

The percentage of providers having children with challenging behaviors and of children with challenging behaviors was about the same in 2012 as in 2009. The difference between the two years was in provider responses.

Over 80% (80.9%) of providers had at least one child with challenging behavior in the previous 12 months (Table 8). That percentage was about the same as in 2009 (82.3%).Of providers with one or more children with challenging behaviors in the past year, 26.4% *considered* asking at least one child to leave the program for that reason, and 7.5% *did* ask a child to leave. Once a provider considered asking a child to leave due to challenging behaviors, the likelihood of actually expelling a child increased substantially: 28.6% of providers that considered asking a child to leave because of challenging behavior expelled a child for that reason. These percentages – considering expulsion and expulsion – were substantially higher in 2009, when 37.2% considering asking a child to leave, 18.1% did ask a child to leave, and 48.6% of providers that considered asking a child to leave expelled at least one.

Of the 4,324 children enrolled at responding providers, 12.3% had challenging behaviors. Family child care homes and public school affiliated centers/preschools had the highest prevalence of children with challenging behaviors, 25.8% and 18.2% of enrolled children, respectively.

Providers considered asking 1 in 12 (8.3%) of children with challenging behaviors to leave the program.Children at family child care homes were most likely to be considered for expulsion, 17.5% of children with challenging behaviors.

Few children with challenging behaviors, 1.5% or a total of 8 children, were asked to leave. There was little difference among provider types, with the exception of Head Start/Early Head Start and public school affiliated centers/preschools, both of which have a policy of not expelling children.However, ofthe children that providerswere*considering* expelling, 18.2% were expelled. Faith-based centers/preschools had the highest rate, 50.0%. It should be noted that these findings were based on a small number of children – a total of 44 among all respondents – that the provider was considering asking to leave. In the case of faith-based centers/preschools, 2 children were under consideration for expulsion, one of whom was expelled.

Table 8.   Prevalence of children with challenging behaviors by provider type

Provider Type	% of enrolled children w/challenging behaviors	% of children w/ challenging behaviors that provider considered asking to leave program	% of children w/ challenging behaviors that provider asked to leave program	% of children provider considered asking to leave program that were asked to leave
Family child care home	25.8%	17.5%	2.1%	11.8%
Faith-based child care center/preschool	6.7%	6.1%	3.0%	50.0%
For-profit child care center/preschool	8.6%	6.8%	1.9%	28.6%
Nonprofit child care center/preschool	11.6%	8.1%	1.7%	21.4%
Head Start/Early Head Start	11.6%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Public school affiliated center/preschool	18.2%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Total % of children	12.3%	8.3%	1.5%	18.2%
Total number of children	531	44	8	8
% of providers	80.9%	26.4%	7.5%	28.6%
Number of providers	106	28	8	8

The percentage of enrolled children with challenging behaviors was about the same in 2012 (12.3%) as in 2009 (10.9%) (Table 9). The difference between the two years was in provider responses. Although there was a small decrease in the percentage of children with challenging behaviors that the provider was considering expelling, from 11.8% in 2009 to 8.3% in 2012, there was a greater decrease in the percentage of children with challenging behaviors that were expelled, from 4.1% to 1.5%. Children being considered for expulsion were only half as likely to be expelled in 2012 as in 2009: the percentage of children that the provider was considering asking to leave who actually were expelled decreased from 35.1% to 18.2%. Replications of this study in future years will confirm whether these decreasesare part of a long-term trend.

Table 9.   Prevalence of children with challenging behaviors in last 12 months, 2009 and 2012

Survey year	% of enrolled children w/challenging behaviors	% of children w/ challenging behaviors that provider considered asking to leave program	% of children w/ challenging behaviors that provider asked to leave program	% of children provider considered asking to leave program that were asked to leave
2012	12.3%	8.3%	1.5%	18.2%
2009	10.9%	11.8%	4.1%	35.1%

Expulsion rates of children with challenging behaviors

Early care/education provider expulsion rates compared to public school K-12 expulsion rates

Boulder County's early care/education providers had an expulsion rate of 1.9 of every 1,000 enrolled children under age 6, 3.2 times higher than the expulsion rate of 0.6 per 1,000 K-12 students in Boulder County's public schools but lower than the statewide K-12 expulsion rate of 2.6 per 1,000 K-12 students (Table 10). The 2012 provider expulsion rate was less than half the rate in 2009, when it was 4.5 per 1,000 children.

Table 10. **Expulsion rates, children under age 6 enrolled in survey providers, Boulder County public schools K-12, and Colorado public schools K-12, 2009 and 2012**

	Expulsion rate per 1,000 children	
	2012	2009
Boulder County children < age 6 in survey providers	1.9	4.5
Boulder County public schools, K-12	0.6	1.0
Colorado public schools, K-12	2.6	2.9

Sources: 2012: Public schools, K-12: Colorado Department of Education, 2010-2011 Number of Suspensions and Expulsions Reported for All Students; 2010 Pupil Membership by District, County, and Grade. 2009: Public schools, K-12: Colorado Department of Education website, 2008-2009 Suspension and Expulsion Data Reported for All Students by District; Fall 2008 Pupil Membership by District and Grade Level.

Expulsion rates by provider type

As in the 2009 study, family child care homes had the highest expulsion rate, 5.3 per 1,000 children compared to 1.5 for centers/preschools (Table 11). However, the differences among provider types were much smaller in 2012 than in 2009 and most types had substantially lower rates in 2012 than in 2009.Because of their non-expulsion policy, Head Start/Early Head Start and public school affiliated centers/preschools had no expulsions in either year.

Table 11. **Expulsion rates in last 12 months by provider type, 2009 and 2012**

	Expulsion rate per 1,000 children	
Provider Type	2012	2009
Family child care home	5.3	15.1
Faith-based child care center/preschool	2.0	0.0
For-profit child care center/preschool	1.7	3.7
Nonprofit child care center/preschool	2.0	8.8
Head Start/Early Head Start	0.0	0.0
Public school affiliated center/preschool	0.0	0.0
Total child care centers/preschools	1.5	3.0
Total	1.9	4.5

Expulsion rates by child characteristics

Expulsion rates differed among children with different demographic characteristics, although not nearly as much as in the 2009 study (Table 12). In addition, there was a decrease in expulsion rates among most demographic categories between 2009 and 2012. As in the earlier study, males were more likely to be expelled than were females, 2.7 per 1,000 compared to 1.0. Children aged 3 and over were more likely to be expelled than were children younger than 3, who had no expulsions in 2012. There were also no expulsions among Latino children, and children who were non-white or of 2 or more races had the highest expulsion rate, 6.4 per 1,000.

Table 12.   Expulsion rates in last 12 months by child characteristics, 2009 and 2012

	Expulsion rate per 1,000 children	
Child Characteristics	2012	2009
Gender		
Male	2.7	7.3
Female	1.0	1.0
Age of Children		
0 – 17 months	0.0	4.2
18 – 35 months	0.0	4.1
3 years old	3.6	5.1
4 years old	1.4	3.1
5 years old	2.6	5.1
Race/Ethnicity		
White non-Latino	1.8	6.4
Latino (any race)	0.0	3.1
Other (non-white or 2+ races)	6.4	6.8
Total	1.9	4.5

Prevalence of expulsion by lead teacher characteristics

There was no regular pattern of differences according to years of experience among lead teachers who expelled at least one child in the last 12 months compared to years of experience among all lead teachers (Table 13). Lead teachers with masters/higher degrees were underrepresented among expelling teachers, 8.3% compared to 19.7% with that level of education among all lead teachers. There were no other substantial differences by educational level. It should be noted that these findings were based on only 12 lead teachers who had expelled at least one child in the last year.

Table 13.   Characteristics of lead teachers who expelled a child in last 12 months compared to characteristics of all lead teachers

Teacher Characteristics	Teachers expelling 1 or more children	All teachers
Years of experience in early care/education		
Less than 1 year	8.3%	5.6%
1 – 5	16.7%	33.4%
6 - 10	41.7%	27.1%
More than 10	33.3%	33.9%
Highest educational level		
< High school	0.0%	0.2%
High school/GED	16.7%	11.7%
CDA	0.0%	5.4%
Other Associates	25.0%	21.4%
Bachelors	50.0%	41.5%

Masters or higher	8.3%	19.7%
Total teachers	12	428

Expulsions and access to mental health consultation

In 2012,1 in 5 (21.3%) of children were enrolled in providers with access to mental health consultation at least once a month, an arrangement that was found among 24.3% of providers (Table 14). Although the percentage of *providers* with access to mental health consultation at least once a month was greater in 2012 than in 2009, when it was12.9%, the percentage of *children* with access to this arrangement was much lower than in 2009, when it was 54.7%. Nearly half of children (46.5%) in 2012 were enrolled in providers with no access to regular mental health consultation, compared to one-third (32.8%) of children in 2009.

Table 14.   Access to mental health consultation, survey providers and children, 2009 and 2012

	% of Providers		% of Children	
Access Type	2012	2009	2012	2009
Consultantis on-site	6.3%	4.6%	5.0%	20.8%
Consultant makes visits at least weekly	9.9%	3.7%	10.7%	4.3%
Consultant makes visits less than weekly but at least once a month	8.1%	4.6%	5.6%	29.6%
Consultant makes visits less than once a month	1.8%	2.8%	0.2%	2.3%
Consultant isavailable on-call only	12.6%	11.9%	32.0%	10.2%
None of the above	61.3%	72.5%	46.5%	32.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

These findings suggest that the percentage of small providers, i.e., thosecaring for relatively small numbers of children, with some type of regular access to mental health consultation increased between 2009 and 2012. Table 15 shows that in 2012, 22.7% of family child care homes had access to mental health consultation at least once a month, compared to 12.5% in 2009. However, the percentage of family homes with access to at least monthly consultation was still much lower than was the case for centers/preschools, half of which had access to this arrangement in both years.

Table 15.   Access to mental health consultation by provider type, 2009 and 2012

	Family child care homes		Centers/preschools	
Access Type	2012	2009	2012	2009
Some type of regular access (on-site, regular visits, on-call only)	22.7%	12.5%	49.3%	47.7%
None of the above	77.3%	87.5%	50.7%	52.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

The correlation between regular access to mental health consultation and expulsion rates that was found in the 2009 study was not found in 2012. In 2009, the expulsion rate among providers without regular access to mental health consultation (at least once a month) was more than 8 times the rate of providers with regular access (Table 16). In 2012, the expulsion rate of providers without regular mental health access was slightly lower than the rate of those with regular access, 1.1 per 1,000 children compared to 2.8. One possible explanation for this finding is that family child care homes had the highest expulsion rate of any provider type in 2012, although it was substantially lower than in 2009. In addition, child care homes experienced an increase in regular access to mental health consultation between 2009 and 2012. The two characteristics in combination may be a factor in producing a finding that is contrary to expectation. If access to regular mental health consultation among child care homes continues to increase in future years and their expulsion rate continues to decrease, the relationship between providers' mental health access and expulsion rates may return to the pattern found in 2009.

Table 16.   Expulsion rates in last 12 months by access to mental health consultation, 2009 and 2012

|	Expulsion rate per 1,000 children	
Access Type	2012	2009
Some type of regular access (on-site, regular visits, on-call only)	2.8	1.3
None of the above	1.1	11.0
Total	1.9	4.5

Most common challenging behaviors

The most common challenging behaviors that providers experienced in the last 12 months were: irritable, mad, or frustrated easily (57.3% of providers),difficulty sitting quietly (56.5%), and hurts self or others (55.7%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1.Most common challenging behaviors in last 12 months
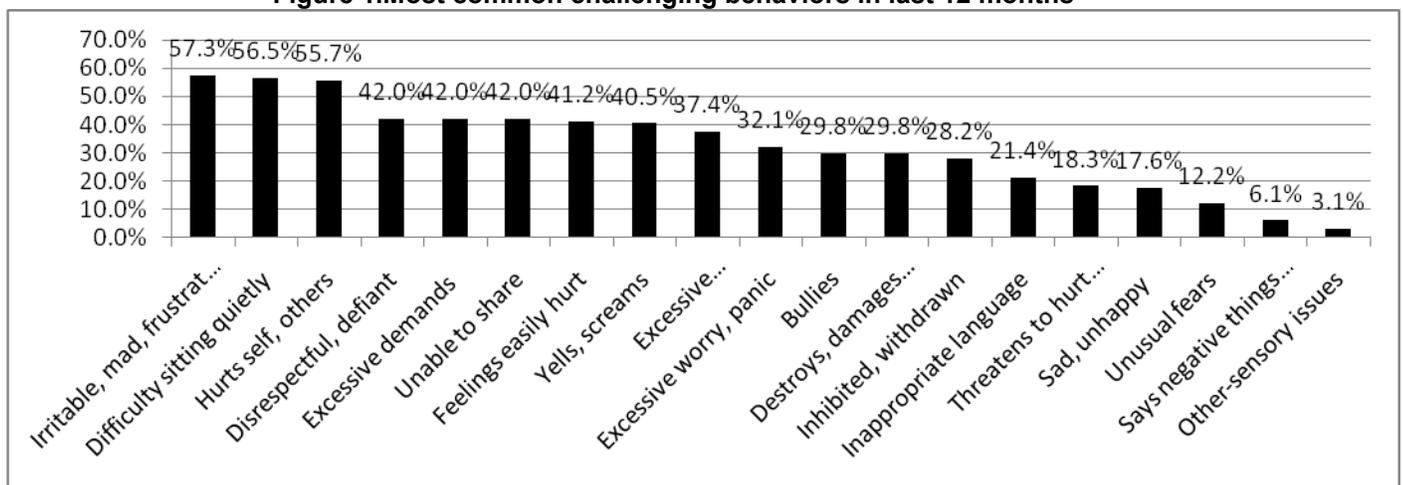
Of all challenging behaviors they experienced in the last year, providers were asked to rank the top three behaviors in terms of negative impact on their program. By far, the most frequent top-rated behavior was hurts self or others, by 47.3% of providers, followed by irritable, mad, or frustrated easily (24.4%), and disrespectful, defiant (23.7%) (Figure 2). These three were among the behaviors perceived to have the most negative impacts on programs in 2009.

Figure 2.Behaviors ranked as top 3 in negative impact on program, among most common challenging behaviors in last 12 months
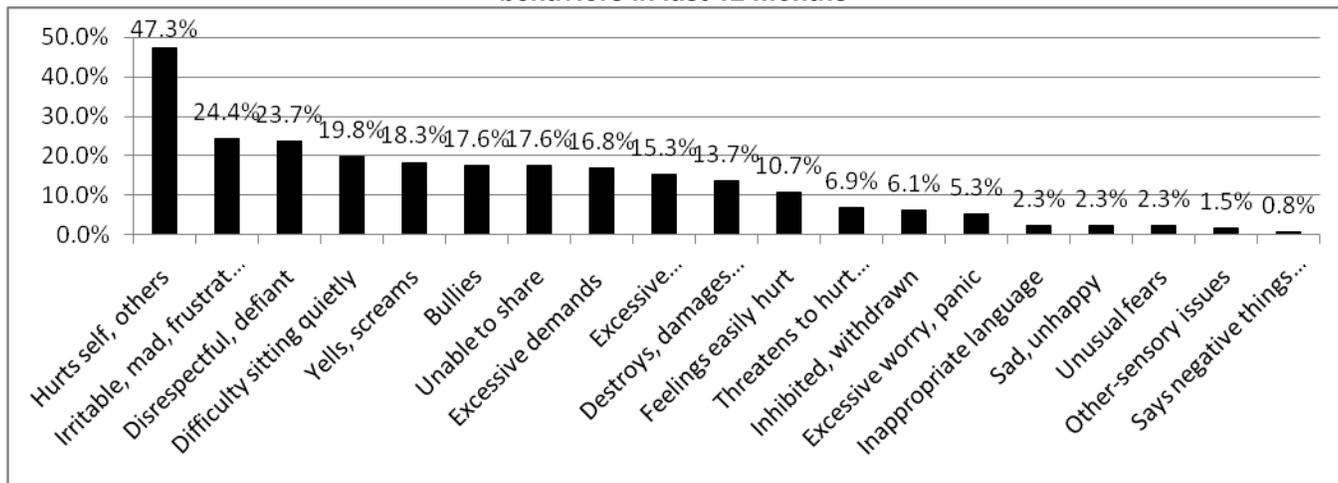
Challenging behaviors providers were most concerned about in expelled children

The most frequently mentioned challenging behaviors of most concern in expelled children, amongthe 8 providers that had expelled a child in the last 12 months, were: hurts self or others (all 8 providers) and destroys or damages property (7 of the 8). These behaviors were also reported in the 2009 study. Hurts self or others was one of the most common challenging behaviors that providers experienced and was also most likely to receive a high ranking for having a negative impact on the program.

Figure 3. Challenging behaviors providers were most concerned about in expelled children, among providers that expelled a child in last 12 months
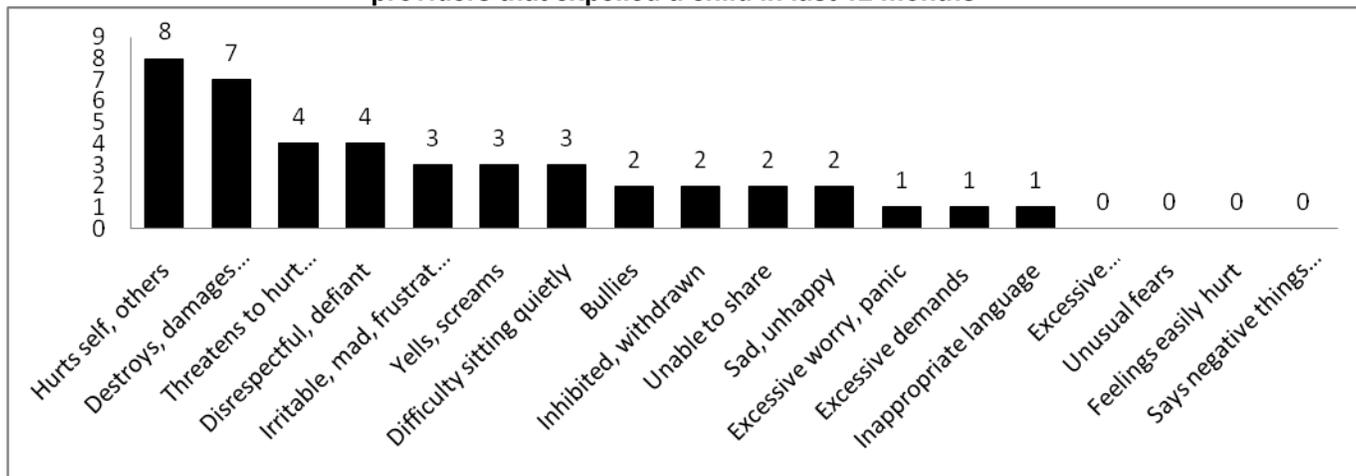
Strategies providers used most often to address challenging behaviors

Respondents were asked to indicate how their staff (or they, if they were a home provider) most often addressed each of the three behaviors that they ranked as having the most negative impact on their program. The most common strategies were: talking to the child (80.2% of providers), redirection (74.8%), positive reinforcement (68.7%), removing the child from the group or situation (61.1%), and talking to parents (60.3%) (Figure 4). Time out and ignoring the behavior were used much less frequently to address challenging behaviors. These findings are similar to findings in the 2009 study.

Figure 4. Strategies used most often to address challenging behaviors
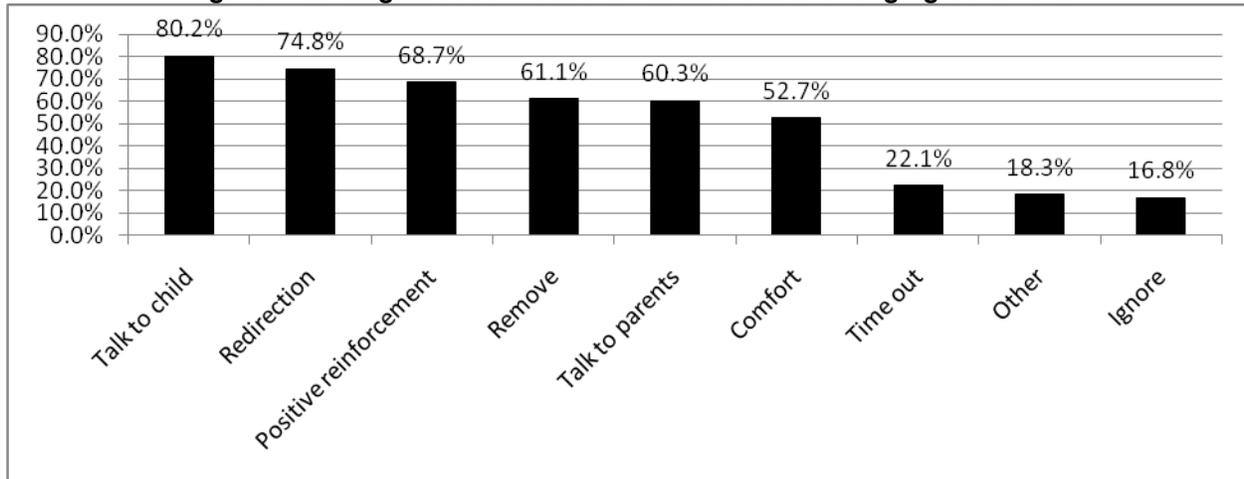

Table 17 shows the strategies used to address each of the three behaviors that providers most commonly ranked as having a negative effect on their program -- hurts self/others, irritable/mad/easily frustrated, and disrespectful/defiant. Regardless of the behavior, the most common strategies were: talking to the child and redirection, which were almost always used for these three behaviors, removing the child from the group or situation, talking to parents, and positive reinforcement. Comforting the child was also a frequently used strategy for irritable/mad/easily frustrated behavior.

Table 17.   Strategies used to address behaviors providers most frequently ranked as having a negative impact on their program

Strategies most often used to address behaviors	Hurts self, others	Irritable, mad, easily frustrated	Disrespectful, defiant
Talk to child	93.5%	93.8%	96.8%
Redirection	90.3%	90.6%	90.3%
Time out	33.9%	28.1%	25.8%
Comfort child	62.9%	75.0%	48.4%
Remove from group or situation	80.6%	84.4%	67.7%
Talk to parents	75.8%	71.9%	74.2%
Positive reinforcement	80.6%	68.8%	74.2%
Ignore	16.1%	18.8%	25.8%
Other	14.5%	6.3%	19.4%
Total providers ranking behavior	62	32	31

Providers' beliefs about challenging behavior

Nearly 60% (59.0%) of providers believed that the *percentage* of children with challenging behaviors had stayed about the same in the last 12 months, 23.1% that it had decreased, and 17.9% that it increased (Table 18). These findings are similar to the 2009 study. In contrast, fewer than half (44.4%) believed that the *severity* of challenging behaviors had stayed the same, 30.8% believed that it had decreased, and 24.8%, that it had increased. The percentage believing that the severity had increased was higher in 2012 than in 2009, when it was 18.3%.

Table 18.   **Providers' beliefs about trends in last 12 months in children with challenging behaviors in their program**

	Percentage of children < age 6 with challenging behavior has …	Severity of children < age 6 with challenging behavior has …
Stayed about the same	59.0%	44.4%
Decreased	23.1%	30.8%
Increased	17.9%	24.8%

Nearly 60% (59.2%) of providers believed that challenging behaviors were having a negative impact on their staff's well-being, or on them if they were a family home provider, to some extent or quite a bit, similar to the 2009 findings (Table 19).

Table 19.   **Providers' beliefs about negative impact of challenging behaviors on staff well-being**

Extent of negative impact of challenging behaviors on staff well-being	%
Very little/none	40.8%
Some	46.7%
Quite a bit	12.5%

Resources to address challenging behaviors

Training was by far the most common resource that staff (or respondents, if they were home providers) used for information or help with challenging behaviors, reported by 70.2% of providers, followed by other teachers (43.5%), and the Internet (42.0%) (Figure 5).Mental Health Consultants and Nurse Consultants were used less frequently, by 23.7% and 22.1%, respectively.

**Figure 5. Sources of information or help with challenging behaviors**
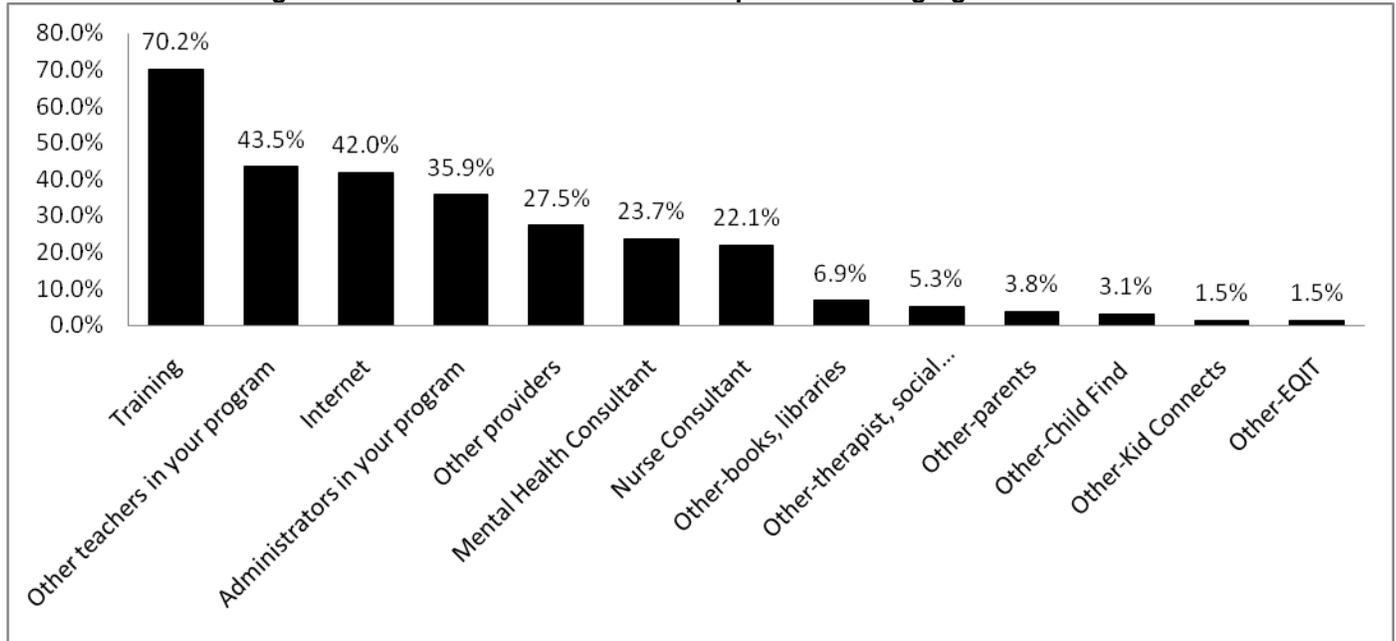
In a list of nine topics relating to children with challenging behaviors, providers most frequently wanted their staff (or themselves if they were a home provider) to learn more about (Figure 6):

- Problem solving strategies for children with challenging behaviors, 61.1%
- Understanding child development and appropriate behavior and expectations for children under age 6, 40.5%
- Mentoring on building the social/emotional skills of children, 37.4%
- Assessing and making changes to the classroom/group environment to promote positive interactions and experiences, 36.6%

These findings are similar to those in 2009.

Figure 6. Topics providers would like staff to learn more about
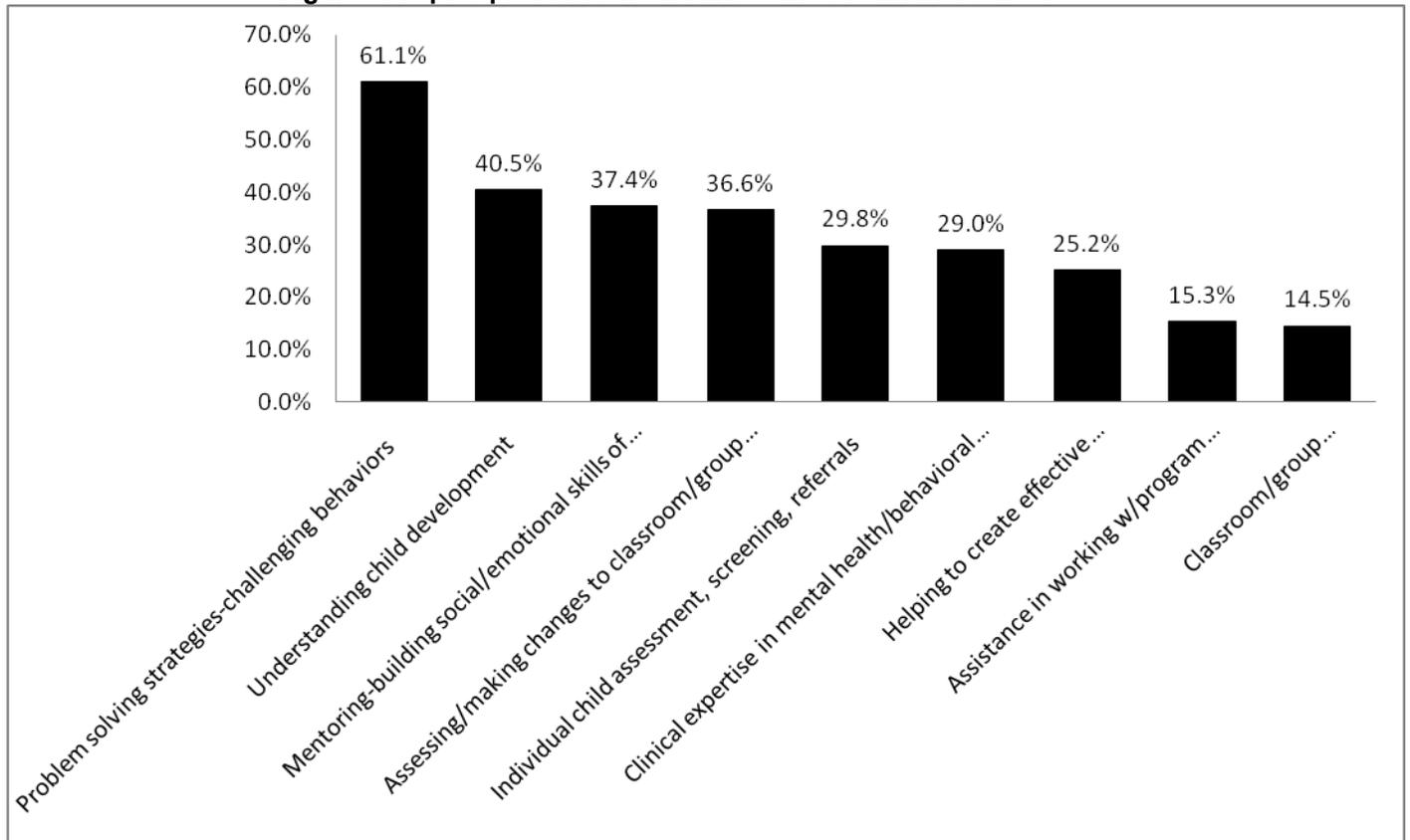
Discussion and Future Directions

The rate of expulsions decreased from 2009 to the present study year 2012. It is not yet known if this decline is an actual trend or a difference in findings between the two years the study was conducted. Of note during that time period was the increase in community resources in Boulder County. The Expanding Quality for Infants and Toddlers (EQIT) training and coaching program reached 95 providers in 2011-12, up from 20 in 2009. EQIT Course is a 48 hour training program in which early care and education providers learn about the importance of brain development in the first 3 years of life, social/emotional, cognitive, and physical development, and working with families as well as effective strategies for curriculum and discipline. Additionally, the Kid Connects Warm Line went into service in 2010, the year following the first study. The Warm Line is a community call line where parents,

providers and community partners can request brief early childhood mental health consultation from a trained mental health practitioner regarding challenging or concerning behavior of children birth – 5 years of age. Over 100 calls have been received by the Warm Line since inception to the time of the 2012 study. These two additions, (along with new educational requirements for early care and education providers) to the early childhood system of support in Boulder County may be associated with the decline in rates of expulsions but we will need to consider findings from a later study year to know if a correlation can be made.

Future efforts should focus on developing a competent, qualified workforce that understands and can respond to children's overall developmental needs and has adequate training and support to address challenges. Community programs can partner with early care and education staff in an effort to ensure that fewer children are at risk of expulsion and fewer providers feel they have no other option but to consider expelling a child. Future studies will add to our body of knowledge about what supports and services impact declining expulsion rates.