

# Pennsylvania Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Project



## EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT

**PREPARED BY:**

Anna E. Davis, M.A.  
Deborah F. Perry, Ph.D.

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GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY  
**Center for Child and  
Human Development**

3300 Whitehaven St. NW, Suite 3300  
Washington DC 20007

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provides statewide access to Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultation through the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). ECMH Consultation is an evidence-informed program in which mental health consultants partner with teachers and others who care for young children to build their capacity to promote healthy social-emotional development and prevent or address challenging behaviors (Cohen & Kaufmann, 2000; rev. 2005; SAMHSA, 2014). Program evaluations consistently find that ECMHC positively impacts classroom climate, teachers' skills, and children's social-emotional behavior, and reduces expulsions from child care (Hepburn, Perry, Shivers & Gilliam, 2013). Pennsylvania has implemented statewide, on-call ECMH Consultation in which any early care and education setting participating in the Keystone STARS program can have access to a consultant in their facility as needed.

Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning contracted with Dr. Deborah Perry, Ph.D. and Ms. Anna Davis, M.A. at Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development to conduct an external review of ECMH Consultation in Pennsylvania. The purpose of the external review was to analyze the ECMH Consultation implementation in PA to identify its strengths and potential areas of growth. Topics include: the geographic distribution of services; the selection of centers for consultation services; the selection of students for child-specific consultation; the strategies/approaches used in consultation; the qualifications of the mental health consultants; and any gaps in service access and delivery.

To answer these questions, two main sources of data were used. The Georgetown team had access to two years of administrative data, collected by the consultants and stored in a database managed by the technology team at the Center for Schools and Communities, funded through the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit. These data are extensive, and include structured measures collected during consultation, background information on participants, and consultants' contact logs. This information was supplemented by survey data from the consultants. The Georgetown team created and distributed a web-based survey to the consultants, gathering information about consultants' training, tasks, supervision, and populations served.

In addition to the external review, the Georgetown team replicated a set of outcome analyses that had been conducted for several prior fiscal years. These outcome summaries are reported for fiscal year 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 to ensure consistency with previous reports on the ECMH Consultation implementation. They appear in the Appendix of this report and each year's summary is intended as a stand alone document.

## Outcomes Evaluation

Key findings across the two fiscal years:

- Consistent with past findings, ECMH Consultation has statistically significant positive impacts on young children and their teachers.
  - Teacher-reported child behavior significantly improved.
  - Teacher implementation of strategies that support young children’s social-emotional development significantly increased.
  - Teacher stress significantly decreased.
  - 63% of closed cases had a positive outcome, defined as meeting goals set for consultation or receiving an appropriate referral for more intensive services. For the remainder of the cases, the vast majority of outcomes were neutral (32%) as opposed to negative (5%).
- Expulsions from ECE facilities were prevented.
  - 244 children were considered “at risk for expulsion” at the time of the request for ECMH Consultation. Only 29 children involved in consultation were ultimately expelled without transition support.
- Many young children were served, and for each case multiple individuals were impacted.
  - 680 young children were served. For each child, consultants worked with at least one teacher, often two, and also typically collaborated with the child’s parents and the facility’s director.
  - Consultants served 428 different ECE facilities.

## External Review

The external review combined insights gained through the outcomes evaluation as well as data collected through the web-based survey of all current consultants. A number of areas of strength were identified including:

- Wide reach of services, with many young children, teachers, and facilities across the state impacted.
- Effective tailoring of consultant time management to meet the needs of young children and their teachers despite wide variability in the travel time required.
- Adherence to a common model of ECMH Consultation across Regional Keys in which services balance fidelity to the model with case-by-case individualization.
- A highly-skilled workforce of consultants that have diverse educational and professional backgrounds.
- Strong positive outcomes for children and teachers, and high satisfaction with services.
- Sophisticated data collection and management procedures that facilitate continuous quality improvement.

Targeted Recommendations:

1. To better address service areas with high need, the program should mobilize the strong outcomes data to advocate for hiring more consultants.
2. To align with best practices nationally, consider hiring a reflective supervisor and implement a feasible schedule whereby consultants have access to regularly-scheduled, individual supervision.
3. To support continued professional development, reinforce consultants’ education, training, and skills with in-service training in topics that they indicate as relative weaknesses. Support consultants to take on major issues for the field, including stigma for mental health, under-identification of internalizing disorders, and expulsions from early childcare.
4. To build upon the strong foundation of ongoing data collection, add data on children’s race/ethnicity and gender, as well as unique identifiers for teachers, and a more sophisticated measure of expulsion risk.