

Mental Health Consultation in Early Care and Education: A Capacity Building Approach to Supporting Young Children's Social-Emotional Development

Janice O. Okeke, MPH¹; Fatima Kadik, MA¹; Shirley Berger, DrPH, MPH, MA¹
¹New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Division of Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Children, Youth, & Families

ISSUE

Social and emotional capacities developed during early childhood are the foundation for future academic success and lifelong health and mental health. **Prevention and early intervention** produce better outcomes and higher return on investment than interventions later in life. This includes helping **adults build their skills so they can support the healthy development of the young children in their care**^{1,2}.

Mental health consultation is a "problem solving and capacity building intervention implemented within a collaborative relationship between a professional consultant with mental health expertise and an early care and education provider and/or family member"³.

Research shows positive outcomes at all levels⁴:

- Child/Family Level:** Improved social-emotional competence, reduced challenging behaviors, improved parent-child relationships, fewer missed work days
- Classroom and Site Level:** Improved teacher-child relationships, decreased stress, decreased teacher turnover, improved staff interactions, and fewer suspensions/expulsions.

PROJECT

As part of **ThriveNYC** - NYC's comprehensive mental health plan - the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) funded seven mental health clinics to provide mental health consultation to center-based early care and education (ECE) sites.

The model pairs one consultant with five ECE sites/15 classrooms for a school year; consultants visit each classroom once a week during that time period.

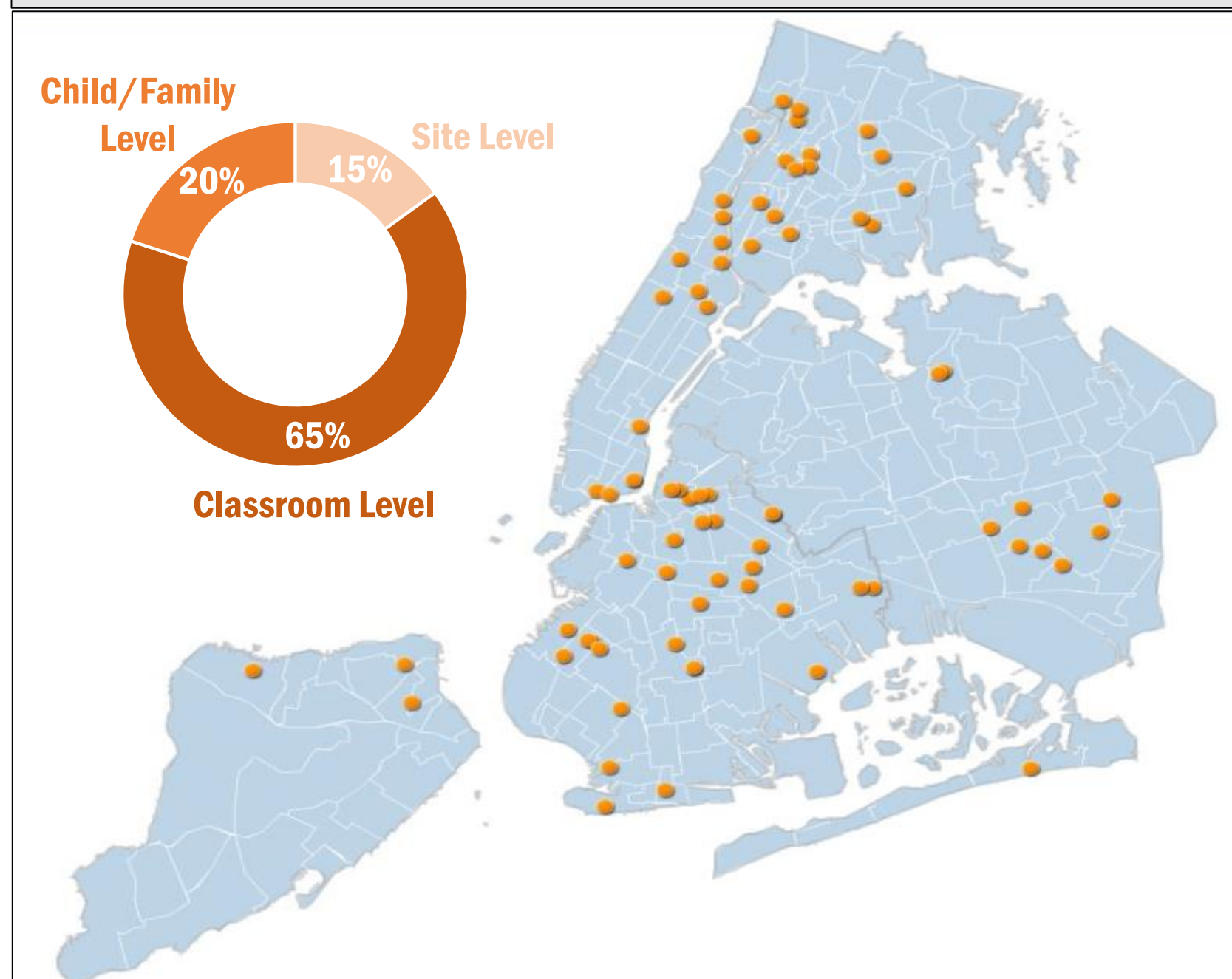
A consultant provides **three types of consultation**⁴ while at the ECE site:

- Site-Level:** Collaborate with program leadership to assess and address issues as they relate to supporting the mental health of young children and their families.
- Classroom-Level:** Work with teachers to improve their overall approach to supporting young children's social emotional development and effectively addressing children's challenging behaviors
- Child/Family-Level:** Work with teachers and parents/caregivers to address the factors that contribute to an individual child's difficulties functioning well in the early childhood setting.

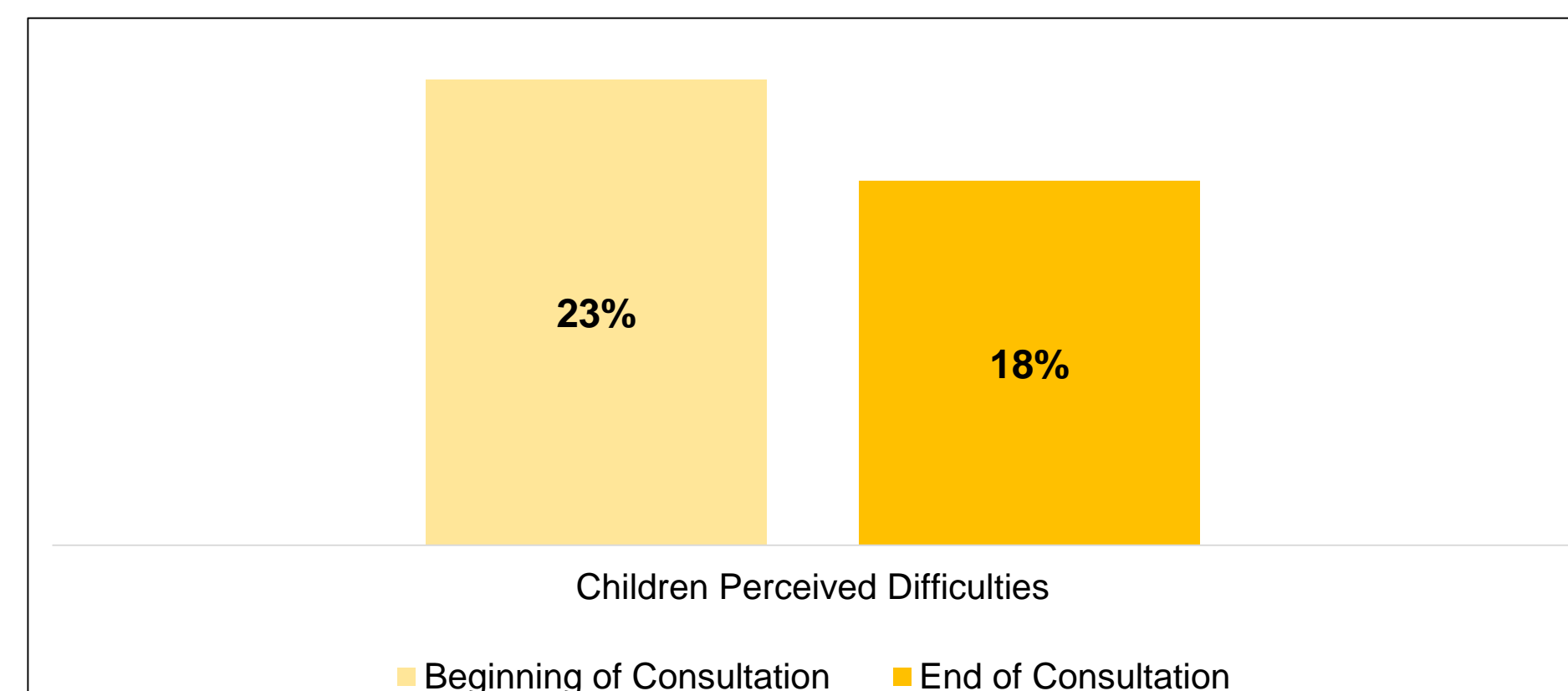
Children identified as needing mental health treatment are referred to a clinician at the specialized early childhood mental health clinic for trauma-informed family-based therapy. Data presented are from September 2017 to June 2018, but the initiative is ongoing.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Map of the 76 ECE sites that received mental health consultation from 34 mental health consultants across NYC's five boroughs, September 2017 – June 2018, and proportions of the 3 types of consultation activities.

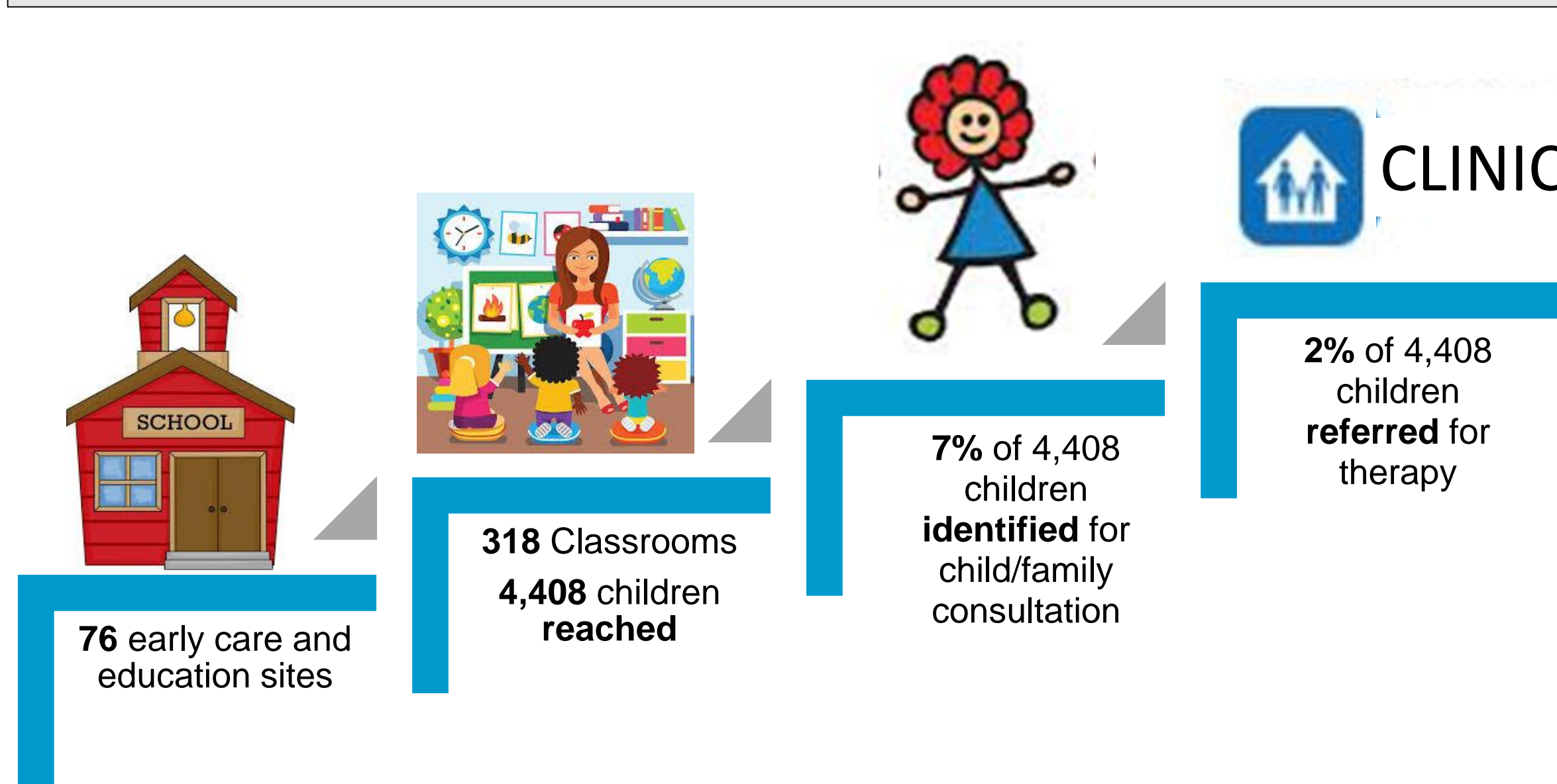


Graph 1. Mental health consultation reduced the proportion of children that teachers perceived as having definite or severe difficulties, September 2017 – June 2018

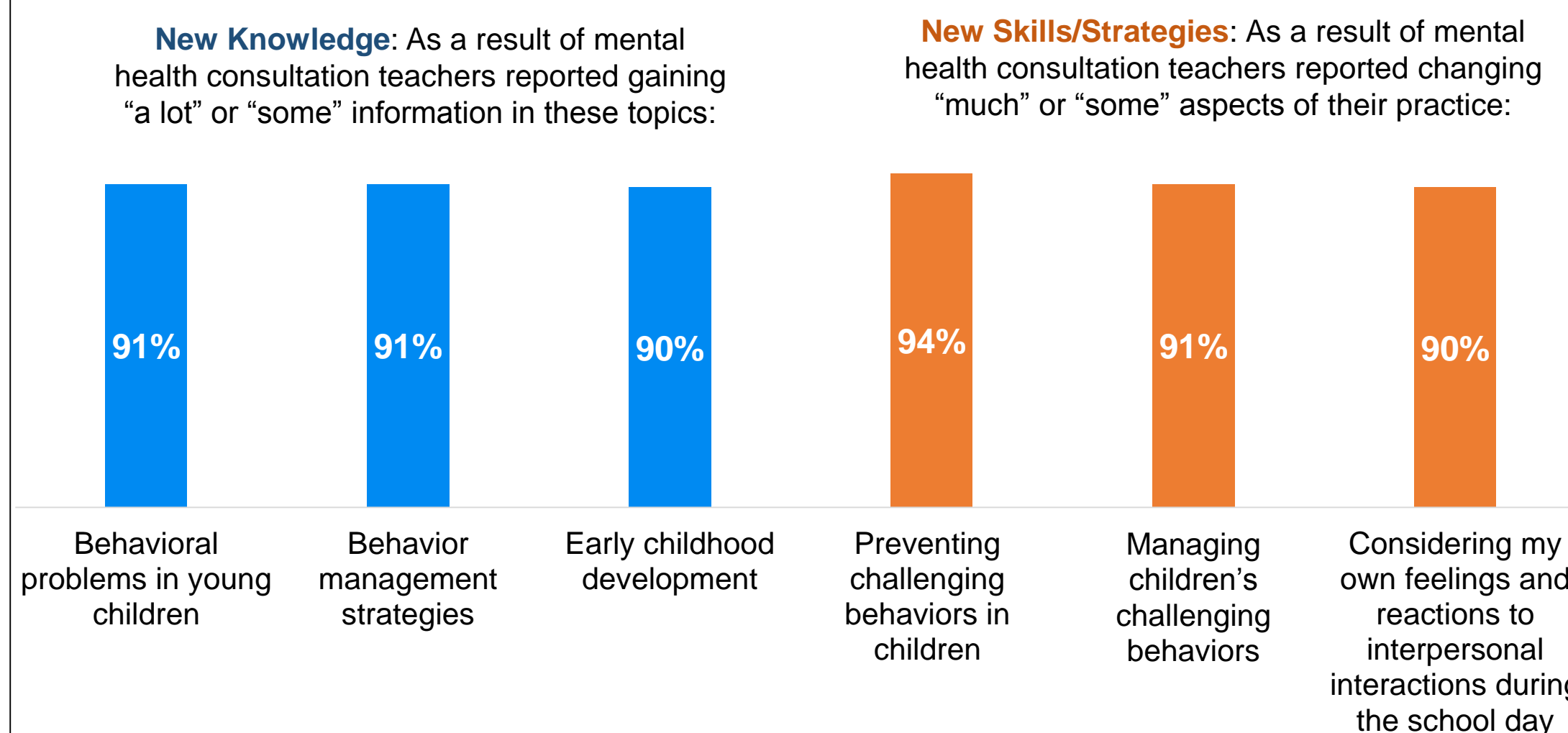


Assessment tool: Classroom Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Hunter, A., Davis, A., Perry, D.F., Jones, W. (2016) *The Georgetown Model of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: For School-Based Settings*. NOTE: Results presented for students (pre=2973, post=3151) who were rated by the lead teacher in September 2017 and June 2018.

Figure 2. Consultation services were provided to over 2,200 early care and education staff and parents/caregivers at 76 early care and education sites and 318 classrooms, reaching over 4,400 children, September 2017 – June 2018



Graph 2. Teacher feedback survey results, September 2017 – June 2018



Survey tool: ECMHC Impact Teacher Survey. Davis, A.E., and Perry, D.F. (2016) *Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Final Evaluation Report for Fight for Children*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. NOTE: Results presented for 279 teachers who were served from Sep 2017 to June 2018 and completed the survey in Jun 2018.

REFERENCES: 1. National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). Children's Emotional Development Is Built into the Architecture of Their Brains: Working Paper No. 2. <http://www.developingchild.net/>; 2. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>; 3. Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, August 2009, adapted from Cohen & Kaufmann, 2005; 4. Hunter, A., Davis, A., Perry, D.F., Jones, W. (2016) *The Georgetown Model of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: For School-Based Settings*. https://www.ecmhc.org/documents/FCC_SB%20ECMHC%20Manual.pdf

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: New York City Administration for Children's Services
CONTACT INFORMATION: Janice Okeke, MPH Evaluation and Quality Improvement Specialist; New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bureau of Children, Youth, and Families; Email: jokeke@health.nyc.gov

SETTING

76 early care and education (ECE) centers in New York City, NY received mental health consultation services from September 2017 to June 2018 through 34 masters level mental health professionals

The majority of the children in the ECE sites were of preschool age (36 -71 months). Of the 4,400 children in the classrooms served, 40% were reported by the teacher to be Latino, 35% black, 12% Asian, 3% white and 10% 'other' race/ethnicity.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mental health consultation was a well received adult capacity building service that allowed for preventative behavior management and social-emotional skill building in children.

Children identified as needing higher level mental health supports were given a "warm handoff" to care at a specialized early childhood mental health clinic.

Teachers reported that strategies provided by mental health consultants were useful in increasing knowledge and enhancing practice.

The proportion of children that teachers perceived as having definite or severe difficulties reduced from 23% to 18%.

BARRIERS

- ECE staff turnover in sites
- Recruitment and retention of trained consultants
- Establishing the mental health consultant's role across the ECE site
- Challenging data collection process
- Lack of reliable funding after grant ends

LESSONS LEARNED

Mental health consultation allows for population-level impact on the social-emotional development of children by increasing ECE staff's capacity to support young children and identify and address their emotional and behavioral concerns preventatively.

INFORMATION FOR REPLICATION

- Close collaboration between mental health and ECE systems
- A dedicated source of funds to provide mental health consultation services
- Readiness of ECE programs to receive mental health consultation services
- Trained workforce of mental health consultants
- Data systems to track progress and inform program planning and policy.