Reduce the Use of Restraint and Isolation in Schools

**The Problem:** The misuse or abuse of restraint and isolation in schools does not accomplish educational goals and instead may lead to avoidable injuries and trauma for children and school staff. There are more effective ways to appropriately and safely address student behavior.

All students potentially face the use of restraint or isolation, and data show that students with disabilities are far more likely to face restraint and isolation in public schools.

**Guiding Principles:** Restraint and Isolation should not be used in schools except in situations where the child’s behavior poses imminent danger of serious physical harm to self or others and should be used only if other interventions are ineffective.*

Restraint and Isolation should never be used as punishment or discipline (e.g. for out of seat behavior) as a means of coercion or retaliation, or as a convenience.*

Every effort should be made to structure environments and provide supports so that restraint and seclusion are unnecessary, including: teaching Social Emotional Learning, implementing systems of positive behavior intervention and supports and training school staff to do individualized assessments and implement behavior strategies that address the underlying cause or purpose of dangerous behaviors.

**The Opportunity:** The use of restraint and isolation is largely avoidable. There is no evidence that using restraint or seclusion is effective in reducing the occurrence of problem behaviors. There is abundant evidence that reducing or eliminating the use of restraint and seclusion produces positive outcomes for students, staff, and schools. Schools and residential placements that have committed to an effort to reduce the use of restraint and isolation have seen reduced injury to staff and improved outcomes for children.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has detailed “Six Core Strategies for Reducing Seclusion and Restraint Use” that have been successful in reducing, and in some cases eliminating, the use of restraint and isolation:

- **Leadership** - to set the vision and expectation that restraint and isolation use will be reduced;
- **Use of Data** - to inform practice;
- **Workforce Development** - to develop best practices including trauma-informed care;
- **Use of Prevention Tools** - including individualized assessments and interventions;
- **Full Inclusion of Families and Advocates** - with notice and involvement in review of policies; and
- **Debriefing** - thorough analysis of every restraint and seclusion event.

* From the 15 Principles outlined by the U.S. Department of Education in its “Restraint and Seclusion: Resource Document for states to consider as a framework for regulating the use of restraint and seclusion.

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Physical Restraint: A personal restriction that immobilizes or reduces the ability of a student to move his or her torso, arms, legs, or head freely. The term physical restraint does not include a physical escort. Physical escort means a temporary touching or holding of the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, or back for the purpose of inducing a student who is acting out to walk to a safe location.

Seclusion (Isolation): The involuntary confinement of a student alone in a room or area from which the student is physically prevented from leaving. It does not include a timeout, which is a behavior management technique that is part of an approved program, involves the monitored separation of the student in a non-locked setting, and is implemented for the purpose of calming.

As defined by the US Department of Education’s Civil Rights Data Collection

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Reduce the Use of Restraint and Isolation in Schools

For more information, please contact: **Stacy Gillett**, Director, Office of the Education Ombuds—(206) 430-0753 or email stacy.gillett@gov.wa.gov
Ending Unnecessary Restraint and Seclusion

Too often, Washington schools resort to restraint and isolation as part of instructional plans for students with autism and other disabilities. Children who pose no danger to themselves or others can be forced into isolation rooms for not following instructions. Non-violent children can be physically restrained. It’s important to recognize that non-compliance often stems from fear, lack of understanding or inability to communicate. Our schools must do everything possible to preserve children’s dignity and rights.

**Why restraint and seclusion policies must end:**

- Students are getting hurt. A U.S. Senate report found that children are at significant risk of injury from restraint and seclusion. A Harvard study estimated that such policies could be responsible for up to 150 deaths per year.

- Washington schools resort to restraint and seclusion too often. Schools across the state reported using mechanical restraints 1,000 times, physical restraints 5,000 times and seclusion 7,000 times in the 2011–2012 school year. Not all restraints are reported. Many other states have stronger restrictions.

- Restraint and seclusion doesn’t work. Besides posing profound safety risks, the planned use of restraint and isolation does not teach better behavior. In contrast, positive behavior intervention and therapies like applied behavioral analysis show genuine improvement.

**Responsible reform will help teachers and students:**

- Prohibit the planned use of restraint or isolation as part of an individual student’s program. Coercion is not an effective teaching tool. It builds distrust between student and educator, undermining learning and creating an environment of fear.

- Continue to allow the use of restraint or seclusion only when necessary to guarantee safety—when there is a real risk of injury to staff, students or property. Protecting the safety of staff and students is important. If a student’s behavior poses a clear and present danger of seriously harming someone, restraint or seclusion should be allowed.

- Promote staff training and instructional methods that actually work. Multiple studies have shown that students with disabilities respond better to positive reinforcement and comprehensive therapies like ABA to promote appropriate behavior. Helping schools be more effective benefits everyone.

Please End Unnecessary Restraint and Seclusion

For more information, please contact: Arzu@WashingtonAutismAdvocacy.org or visit http://www.washingtonautismadvocacy.org/updates
Blue Ribbon Commission
To Improve Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Washington needs statewide leadership and coordination to identify best practices and scalable models that will connect education as a whole to other systems that support the welfare of children in our state and improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities. About 13% of Washington students experience a disability and require special education. Another 2-3% receives supports and services under Section 504. In 2013:

- Only 54.4% of students with disabilities graduated from high school on time;
- Only 62.4% graduated from high school within 5 years;
- Only 31.7% of students with IEPs met reading proficiency;
- Only 26.8% of students with IEPs met math proficiency;
- Students with IEPs are 2.5 times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers;
- Graduates with disabilities continue onto higher education at less than half the rate of their peers;
- The US Department of Education has determined that Washington state is in “need of assistance” to meet new federal results-driven outcome measures for students with disabilities.

The evidence is clear that disabilities do not cause disparate outcomes, but that the system itself perpetuates limitations in expectations and false belief systems about who children with disabilities can be and what they can achieve.

The State Legislature, the Governor, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction should provide leadership on creating a “Blue Ribbon Commission” that would:

- Have autonomy and research capacity to report recommendations for innovative changes across systems beginning from birth and continuing through PK-12, post-secondary education, career training and employment to improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities;
- Have statewide, regional, and local presence with subcommittees, and the support of the Education Research and Data Center and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to identify innovative practices and recommend system changes in funding, professional development, access to services;
- Consist of a 12-member Commission with 2 co-chairs who demonstrate leadership in education and child advocacy, an Executive Director and adequate administrative staffing;
- Be funded on a biennium basis, charged with a 10-year action plan, report card and “dashboard” of indicators for outcomes measures, and strategic action plans every two year.

Creating this Blue Ribbon Commission would:

- Significantly reduce the opportunity gap;
- Improve graduation rates and reduce the state’s dropout rate;
- Decrease reliance on our state public safety net;
- Improve the economic vitality of the state of Washington.

For more details about the creation of this Commission see the “Report to the Legislature, Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction on the Creation of a Statewide Special Education Task Force”: at www.governor.wa.gov/oeo/reports/SpecialEdTaskForce%20Report_Nov2014.pdf

Create a “Blue Ribbon Commission”
to improve outcomes for students with disabilities in our public schools.

For more information please contact: Stacy Gillett, Director, Office of the Education Ombuds—(206) 430-0753 or email stacy.gillett@gov.wa.gov