



Guidelines for the Use, Prevention and Reduction of Restraint And Seclusion in the Public School System

The Council supports a policy where physical restraint and monitored seclusion in the school system should be used only when there is a demonstrable and imminent physical danger to the student or others, and implemented by trained staff.

The Council supports prohibiting restraint or seclusion as planned interventions in education plans for students with disabilities. These plans include a student's Individual Educational Plan (IEP), because restraint and seclusion should only be used in cases of imminent danger and as part of a crisis plan.

The use of restraint and seclusion can cause significant harm and is not to be taken lightly. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, over the past two decades, there have been hundreds of reports of injury, and even death, caused by the use of restraints and seclusion in schools nationwide. Data from the U.S. Department of Education shows a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities. In addition, restraint and seclusion can re-traumatize children who have had prior abuses in their lives.

Reports indicate that some public schools are using takedowns, isolation rooms, restraining chairs with straps, and worse, for minor incidents or behaviors. The requirement of using restraint and seclusion in situations of imminent danger and not as an educational tool sends clear direction to students, parents, teachers and school administrators.

In 2010, Florida first addressed this issue by enacting a statute regarding restraint and seclusion incidents in the public school system, requiring parental notification provisions, reporting requirements and data collecting. In 2011, the law was further refined to require improved reporting of the use of restraint and seclusion by adding requirements for establishing standards for documentation, most notably a description of the type of restraint used. School districts are also now required to develop a plan for reducing the use of restraint and seclusion, particularly in settings in which it occurs frequently (or with students who are restrained repeatedly), and for reducing the use of prone restraint and mechanical restraint.

The Council believes that more change is necessary as there are less dangerous ways to address issues short of the risks created by restraint and seclusion. First, restraint and seclusion can be reduced and often prevented by establishing minimum safety standards in schools, similar to protections already in place in hospitals and non-medical, community-based facilities. Florida's students and teachers would benefit from initiatives to implement behavior management training which emphasizes positive behavior supports and includes crisis reduction and de-escalation techniques.