

REDUCING RESTRAINT AND ELIMINATING ISOLATION (RREI) TIP SHEET

What is Restraint and Isolation?

Often used under the guise of safety, restraint and isolation are outdated and unlawful practices that have been used in schools to de-escalate situations and control student behavior. Current research shows these practices are not effective as educational or therapeutic interventions and can result in trauma for students, staff, and families. Washington state is focused on efforts to reduce restraint and eliminate isolation practices. Part of that work is first understanding what restraint and isolation is and is not.

THE FOLLOWING DEFINITION SUMMARIES OF THE LAW ARE PROVIDED BY OPSI

- **Restraint:** Physical intervention or force used to **control** a student (including the use of a restraint device) to restrict a student's **freedom of movement**.
- **Isolation:** Restricting the student alone within a room or any other form of enclosure, from which the student **may not leave**.
- **Likelihood of serious harm:** A substantial risk that **physical harm** will be inflicted by a person upon themselves or another.

RESTRAINT AND ISOLATION ARE PROHIBITED PRACTICES UNLESS THE STUDENT'S BEHAVIORS POSE IMMINENT LIKELIHOOD OF SERIOUS HARM TO THE STUDENT OR ANOTHER PERSON.

Below are some examples. Please note, this list is not exhaustive and while we can do our best to provide clear guidelines, the work of reducing restraint and eliminated isolation requires ongoing discussion within school/district teams and an understanding of the context and intent of the behavior(s).

Restraint IS:

- Using a strap or tie to keep a student, against their will, seated in a chair in a classroom.
- Holding a student's body to keep them in line during a transition.
- Using furniture or another item to actively restrict a student's movement within a classroom.

Isolation IS:

- Putting a student alone in an isolation room, "calm down space", or any other room that has a door which they are unable to open.
- A room clear procedure during which the student is left alone in the classroom/ educational space for any amount of time.

Restraint IS NOT:

- With consent, holding a student's hand or arm to escort the student safely and without the use of force, from one area to another.
- Physically assisting a student to complete a task if the student does not resist physical contact.
- A seatbelt or five-point harness is used for safe transport on a bus.

Isolation IS NOT:

- A student self-selecting a space to regulate, such as a "calm down corner" or "reset area."
- A room clear procedure when other students leave, while a teacher/paraeducator and student remain in classroom and the student is given space to de-escalate with support.

WHY IS DECREASING RESTRAINT AND ISOLATION IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

In Washington state, students with disabilities and students of color have been exposed to higher rates of restraint and isolation. This disproportionality points to the inequities inherent within systems that need to be addressed. Restraint and isolation practices are harmful to students, exposing them and by extension, their families, to the long-term negative impacts of trauma, and/or injury. Alternatively, when schools proactively support students to meaningfully participate in learning experiences and access high quality education, they experience positive long-term outcomes. Ongoing family communication and partnership is vital to student success. Why is decreasing Restraint and Isolation important? What are the outcomes?

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Restraint and Isolation practices are prohibited unless there is likelihood of serious harm to student or others.
- Restraint and Isolation are often school safety practices. These practices are ineffective in both the short and long term. These practices create trauma for students, staff, and families.
- It is critical that ongoing professional development and training for all staff support sustainability of RREI practices.
- Focusing on strategies that are proactive and/or reduce likelihood of further escalation can improve students' sense of belonging and well-being.
 - TIER 1 supports in place across all school settings
 - Curriculum focusing on social emotional learning
 - Restorative practices
 - Conflict de-escalation training and maintenance of skills for educators

CASE STUDY: Auburn School District

Auburn SD, like many districts, grappled over the years with knowing how to improve practices related to the use of restraint and isolation. The gaps were easily identifiable, but knowing how to address them all was a task that seemed too much for any one person to take on. There was not one simple solution but rather layers upon layers of factors that each would require individual attention. From here, questions emerged. Who gets trained in de-escalation? What training program is used? Do staff know what restraint and isolation is and what it isn't? Do they know the laws around it? Do they report when it takes place and follow the appropriate timelines? Are measures being taken to prevent student escalations? To what degree are families involved in the behavioral planning that goes into supporting their student? What levels of oversight and accountability are there in the district? Are behavior plans effectively being created and implemented for students? These are questions Auburn SD asked themselves while looking at their data. For the 2019-2020 school year, a year cut short by a pandemic, Auburn reported 435 incidents of restraint and 344 incidents of isolation. While the urgent need to change practices was evident, how that could happen was a question there was no simple answer to.

Auburn just needed a spark, a guide, a little inspiration. In October of 2020 at a virtual special education conference put on by OSPI/WASA, a presentation was provided that shared some leadership steps that could be taken to reduce restraint and eliminate isolation. That presentation inspired conversation in Auburn, and those conversations led to the formation of a Restraint and Isolation Steering Committee. This group of administrative, certificated, and classified staff met monthly for a year and half (Fall 2021-Spring 2023). This group looked into the gaps within the district and using their district data, made recommendations for the district to carry out. These recommendations led to action plans with concrete actional items. Those detailed action plans led to changes in practices, which has resulted in a decrease in the use of both restraint and isolation. The 5 recommendations from the committee were as follows:

1. **Accurately communicate to all needed parties the definitions, laws, processes, and ethical implications related to restraint and isolation.** This led to many short training courses provided to principals, teachers, paraeducators, behavior specialists, etc. on this topic. A greater common awareness amongst those who work in schools has led to a higher level of accountability.
2. **Adopt Safety-Care as Auburn's de-escalation program and ensure those who need to take it, do.** Safety-Care was identified as being a higher caliber de-escalation program than what was previously used. When messaging out about recommendation #1, it was also shared who was required to participate in Safety-Care. All staff who respond to and support the de-escalation of student behaviors in buildings must be trained in Safety-Care. This includes but is not limited to responding to property destruction, elopement, verbal or physical aggression, room clears, and fights. Setting this as the standard and sharing how this connects to the WAC, caused many staff to become trained who previously were not. Because this is considered a requirement of the job for some staff, staff are compensated for taking Safety-Care course. Compensation is a significant financial burden for a school district to take on, however a necessary one. To this day over 300 staff have been certified in Safety-Care.

3. **Create de-escalation training that is accessible for all staff.** If all staff are to be equipped to support all students, then all staff need at least some training in de-escalation. Our director of special education, in collaboration with another BCBA created a 3.5-hour asynchronous training called «Foundations in De-escalation. Over 500 staff have taken this course, and it has equipped those who typically would not get training in de-escalation, such as bus drivers, custodial staff, librarians, general education teachers, office staff, and kitchen staff to name a few.
4. **Improve the reporting system.** Auburn's previous method for reporting restraint and isolation was labor intensive and not easily managed. A small group came together to recreate the data-reporting system, and today it functions as a Google Sheet that staff have a link to. When an incident of Restraint or Isolation takes place, the sheet is easily filled out. When it is submitted all required parties are instantly informed of the incident and a form letter is created to be sent home. An easily managed master sheet is overseen by the central office and can provide immediate feedback and support to schools if needed.
5. **Improve the behavior plan process.** The best way to address behavior is to prevent it before it takes place. The planning around behavior prevention in Auburn needed some changes. The form and process were cumbersome and despite training, staff were not successful in developing effective plans. A subcommittee has come together and is still working through this recommendation.

The ripple effects of this work have been great. Auburn has more accurate restraint and isolation reporting. A culture of reducing the use of restraint and isolation is being established. Staff feel more equipped to support students who are prone to escalate and overall, more staff have been trained. This has impacted the number of students who require a self-contained behavior program. For a district of over 17,000 students, Auburn has less than 30 students receiving extensive instruction in segregated settings, with these numbers decreasing.

Moving forward, the district hopes to provide even greater support and feedback to staff after each incident of restraint or isolation. Tiered systems of support across all schools for all students are needed next steps. Auburn will continue to grow in how to more flexibly and inclusively meet the needs of its diverse population. There are still many more steps to take, but Auburn is no longer at the beginning, and if sharing its story provides a spark for another district, then all the better. The work certainly has not become easier since we have begun to make intentional moves to change practices. At the end of the day no one ever promised that the work would be easy, but in Auburn we just say that the kids are worth it.

RESOURCES

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