



Fact sheet, Washington use of restraint & isolation

What is restraint?

Physical intervention or *force* used to control and/or restrict a student's *freedom of movement*.

What is isolation (also called seclusion)?

Restricting a student *alone* within a room or any other form of enclosure, from which *the student may not leave*.

To isolate a child, staff often first restrains them.

When are these permitted?

Only when necessary to control spontaneous behavior that poses an imminent likelihood of serious harm.

- **Imminent:** Being likely to happen at any moment.
- **Likelihood of serious harm:** substantial risk that physical harm will be inflicted by a student upon themselves or another.

Isolation is NOT use of calming spaces where a child is free to leave.

Why are there concerns?

- These practices are used when students are in distress and often highly dysregulated, already in flight or fight mode
- They do not support co-regulation, safety, trust, or positive relationship building. They send dysregulated children deeper into distress
- They trigger escalating cycles of dysregulation, traumatizing the child, staff, and students who witness removals. Using restraint and isolation triggers MORE restraint and isolation
- They indicate a pattern of failure to support the child with the skill building, environmental modifications, or communication or other support needed

- They cause the child nightmares, school refusal, suicidal thoughts, depression, and anxiety that last well into adulthood. Repeated cycles lead to complex PTSD. Restraint use has been shown to impair relationships into adulthood because of eroded trust and startle to touch.
- They injure staff and students. In 2023, restraint resulted in 420 injuries to students and 1,836 to staff; isolation resulted in 182 injuries to students and 621 to staff.
- They are expensive, resulting in higher cost for insurance premiums, workers compensation, and staff turnover

Most impacted:

- Students with disabilities (93% of incidents; 84% of distinct students)
- Young students in preschool, kindergarten, and grades 1-5
- Students who are Black, American Native or Alaskan Native, and or multi-racial
- Students in foster care
- Students experiencing homelessness

In 2023:

- Distinct restrained students 3,857; total incidents 15,214.
- Distinct isolated students 1,659; total incidents 8463

In 2024:

- 3,992 distinct students were involved in at least one restraint or isolation incident. 22,752 incidents

Recent state efforts

2015 - Instances of restraint and isolation must be documented and reported to districts, families, OSPI, and the public. Once we started gathering data, we could see who was most impacted

2023 – Efforts to phase in a ban on isolation, coupled with technical support, failed to pass the state legislature. (It passed the House; the Senate did not move it out of committee). However, the legislature funded statewide professional development and technical assistance, awarded through grants.

- Pilot sites invited to apply based on high number of incidents.

- Demonstration sites selected based on more advanced work to end the practices
- The state also funded a technical assistance manual to help reduce the use of restraint and isolation. ([Positive Behavior Support](#))

2024 – Free universal supports statewide (offered online). Targeted and intensive support to grantees, or for districts who choose to use their PD allocations, tap training via IEPs, or use ESSA funds

2025 – Demonstration sites open for tours

2026 – Support manual finalized. SHB 1795 passed.

What passed this session – [SHB 1795](#)

- Bans mechanical and chemical restraint (handcuffs, zip ties, pepper spray, misuse of medication)
- Bans physical restraint that restricts breathing or blood flow;
- Clarifies isolation can never be used as a planned behavior intervention;
- Allows restraint to be used as a planned intervention when parent requests and provides informed, voluntary consent and if a health care provider documents medical necessity in writing;
- Bans new construction of isolation rooms (note: ones in existence can still be used)
- Requires trend analysis in the state's incident report summaries;
- Clarifies all restraint and isolation policies apply to all providers of public educational services (not just school districts), except for staff in in-patient psychiatric facilities.
- Modified some definitions:
 - "Likelihood of serious harm" is modified to mean a substantial risk that harm will be inflicted by the student upon his or her own person, as evidenced by threats or attempts to commit suicide or inflict harm on oneself; or harm will be inflicted by the student upon another, as evidenced by behavior that places another person or persons in reasonable fear of sustaining such harm. Note: Does not mean harm to property

What can you do?

- Join the Coalition to End Isolation and Reduce Restraint. We are a collection of advocates working to end the practice, including community organizations, technical assistance providers, families, educators, and other allies.
 - Join: <https://reducerestraint.org/join-us/>
 - Overview of the problem: <https://reducerestraint.org/>
 - Resources: <https://reducerestraint.org/resources/>
- Learn about the state's [Reduce Restraint and Eliminate Isolation project](#)
 - Encourage your school district to visit a demonstration site, [Request a Site Visit for the 2025-26 School Year Now](#)
- Encourage your school board to change their policies to ban isolation
- Encourage school staff to take the free training available (you can find links [on this webpage](#))
- Speak up about the consequences these practices have on student health and wellbeing
 - Speak up about the costs and dangers of these practices. They are not evidence-based. They have no therapeutic value. They have been found to cause deep harm. They interfere with student learning. They deny students access to education.