

*School is Not Supposed to Hurt: Investigative Report on  
Abusive Restraint and Seclusion in Schools*

Summary of a report by the National Disability Rights Network

Prepared by Edward T. Jennings  
Martin School of Public Policy and Administration  
University of Kentucky  
For the Kentucky Council on Developmental Disabilities

In *School is Not Supposed to Hurt: Investigative Report on Abusive Restraint and Seclusion in Schools*, the National Disability Rights Network documented the continuing use of seclusions and restraints in American schools and identified alternatives to their use. As indicated in the report, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, building on the Children's Health Act of 2002, has defined seclusions and restraints as follows:

**A restraint is--**

(A) Any manual method, physical or mechanical device, material, or equipment that immobilizes or reduces the ability of [an individual]<sup>2</sup>

(B) A drug or medication when it is used as a restriction to manage the [individual's] behavior or restrict the [individual's] freedom of movement and is not a standard treatment or dosage for the [individual's] condition.

**A seclusion is--**

The involuntary confinement of [an individual] alone in a room or area from which the [individual] is physically prevented from leaving. Seclusion may only be used for the management of violent or self-destructive behavior.

The report documents a wide variety of abusive restraints and seclusions , including:

- Strapped down to their chairs, even wheelchairs;
- Pinned on the floor by several adults (sometimes for hours at a time);
- Grabbed and dragged into rooms;
- Held in arm locks;
- Handcuffed;
- Placed in coffin-like boxes and cells;
- Locked in closets; and
- Subjected to other physically and psychologically traumatizing acts of violence by school personnel and others.

Restraint and seclusion pose a wide variety of risks to children, including serious physical injury or death, traumatization, psychological harms, and loss of dignity. One study estimated that 150 children a year die as a result of restraints and seclusion.

Children are subject to these practices at a higher rate than adults and are at higher risk of injury.

Although Congress has acted to protect children in residential and health care settings, it has not adopted laws preventing or regulating the use of seclusion and restraint in educational settings.

The report documents a wide variety of actions resulting in death, confinement and isolation, and children being tied up, pinned down, and battered in schools across the nation.

Proposed solutions to this problem include:

- Outreach and training
- Education advocacy
- Investigation and monitoring
- Legislation

The report also identifies a set of best practices in the form of positive behavioral support programs that are proactive, comprehensive, and data driven.

Finally, the report offers a set of public policy recommendations for the Obama Administration, Congress, and the states. The basic components of the public policy recommendations would:

- Ban the use of seclusion in schools
- Ban the use of prone restraints or any other restraint that can suffocate an individual
- Ban the use of other restraints except as applied by trained personnel when the immediate physical safety of the student, staff, or others is clearly required
- Require the use of evidence-based positive behavioral supports
- Require reporting of the use of restraints
- Require training and background checks

National Disability Rights Network, *School is Not Supposed to Hurt: Investigative Report on Abusive Restraint and Seclusion in Schools*, January, 2009. Washington, DC