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Reducing Restraint and Eliminating Isolation Technical Assistance Manual [Working Title].

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REDUCING RESTRAINT AND ELIMINATING ISOLATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MANUAL [WORKING TITLE]

Subheading if desired (2 lines at most)

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REDUCING RESTRAINT AND ELIMINATING ISOLATION: A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

During the 2023 legislative session, OSPI received designated state funds to begin actualizing the goals of the Legislature to help districts build systems of support that reduce restraint and eliminate isolation in schools. OSPI was directed at that time by the Legislature to begin developing a technical assistance manual to support districts in this work. Later in the year, Disability Rights Washington and the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington jointly reported findings from their investigation into the use of restraint and isolation in Washington schools. Their findings included compelling evidence that restraint and isolation are often both overused and misused in Washington schools, that they are more frequently used to control the behavior of young children, students of color, and students with disabilities, and that they are often used out of compliance with the law for minor behaviors that can be managed with less intrusive practices.[1]

To align with the Legislature's priorities, this manual supports district and school staff as they build schoolwide systems to support students in distress, prevent crisis escalation cycles that may result in restraint or isolation, and enhance the provision of schoolwide trauma-informed positive behavior and intervention supports, de-escalation, and problem-solving skills. This manual also summarizes and elevates the findings of the *Reducing Restraint and Eliminating Isolation (RREI) demonstration sites*. These schools and districts have engaged in intentional work to reduce restraint and eliminate isolation, and host visits in partnerships with the University of Washington's Haring Center for visitors to learn more about their stories of building effective supports.

This guide can be used by any district working to prevent and address student interfering behavior, including districts that rarely or never use restraint or isolation. It covers a range of evidence-based and inclusionary practices that lead to improved behavior support and better outcomes for students, families, and staff. This manual does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice. Content in this manual is presented for general information purposes only.

In developing this manual, OSPI staff have collaborated with a variety of educational and civil rights partners, community members, families, and individuals with lived experience. We are grateful for the opportunity to elevate and center their voices and input in this resource.

Restraint and Isolation Harms Students, Families, and School Staff

Research shows that students do not benefit educationally or therapeutically from restraint or isolation.[2] Furthermore, all evidence associates the use of restraint and isolation with grave

[1] Disability Rights Washington (DRW) & The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Washington (2023). *Coming into the light: An examination of restraint and isolation practices in Washington schools.*

[2] U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (2014). *Dangerous use of seclusion and restraints in schools remains widespread and difficult to remedy: A review of ten cases.*

potential for physical and psychological harm of students. Survivors repeatedly report difficulty breathing while they were restrained, and children as young as five have died of complications including asphyxiation, cardiorespiratory arrest, and suffocation.[3,4,5] Even when restraint is properly administered by an adult trained in an approved program, there are documented injuries of broken bones, bruising, damaged joints and ligaments, and loss of consciousness.[6] Students in isolation may be harmed by hitting or kicking doors in attempts to leave the enclosed space, or by engaging in self-injurious behaviors such as repeatedly hitting their heads on walls.

> *As education leaders, we have a collective responsibility to ensure that all children are educated in learning environments that are safe, supportive, and responsive to their needs. We must keep this responsibility in mind when considering the practices of restraint and [isolation] in schools. The U.S. Department of Education remains concerned that children continue to be subjected to restraint and [isolation] practices* ***even though these practices are harmful to children*** *and* ***despite the lack of evidence that these practices are effective*** *strategies to respond to a child's behavior or…reduce the occurrence of behaviors that interfere with learning.*[7]

Psychological and emotional harm associated with restraint and isolation include anxiety, fear, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); these risks are higher for youth that have previously been exposed to abuse.[8] Repeated instances of restraint and isolation can result in adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which then contribute to complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD). For students, this may manifest as avoidance of authority figures, difficulty paying attention in class, increased absences, or social withdrawal from friends and family.[9] As a result of these outcomes, family members of students who have been restrained or isolated often report significant stress and resource strain in supporting their child's continued engagement in school and mental/emotional recovery. For staff imposing the interventions, the effects are reflected in higher turnover, increased use of sick time, and lower job satisfaction;[10] further, state data indicate staff are injured in 10% of incidents in which restraint or isolation are used.

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[3] U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO; 2009). *Seclusions and restraints: Selected cases of death and abuse at public and private schools and treatment centers.*

[4] Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD; 2020). CCBD's position summary on the use of physical restraint procedures in educational settings. *Behavioral Disorders, 46*(1), 54-63.

[5] Nunno, M., McCabe, L., Izzo, C., Smith, E., Sellers, D., & Holden, M. (2022). A 26-year study of restraint fatalities among children and adolescents in the United States: A failure of organizational structures and processes. *Child Youth Care Forum, 51*, 661–680.

[6] Scheuermann, B., Peterson, R., Ryan, J., & Billingsley, G. (2016). Professional practice and ethical issues related to physical restraint and seclusion in schools. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 27*(2), 86-95.

[7] U.S. Department of Education (2025). *Secretary Cardona letter on restraints and seclusion in schools.*

[8] Mohr, W., Petti, T., & Mohr, B. (2003). Adverse effects associated with physical restraint. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 48*(5), 330-337.

[9] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR; 2016). *Dear colleague letter: Restraint and seclusion of students with disabilities.*

[10] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA; 2010). *Promising alternatives to the use of seclusion and restraint.*

Washington educators, students, and families who have shared their experience with OSPI and partner organizations have consistently described restraint and isolation use as detrimental to their physical and/or mental well-being, and have shared that its use erodes their feelings of belonging and/or safety in school settings. **Therefore, to improve healthy conditions for teaching and learning for students and school staff alike, OSPI's guidance centers the importance of reducing restraint and eliminating isolation from Washington schools.**

How to Use This Guide

This guide was designed to be comprehensive and easy to navigate. Each of the six sections in the guide describes a different aspect of reducing restraint and eliminating isolation through positive and effective practice. It is not necessary to read each section from start to finish to benefit from this guide. To assist the reader in navigating and prioritizing, each section is summarized below along with key points of focus.

RREI Demonstration Site Findings

Throughout this manual, key findings from the RREI demonstration sites (described on page 6) will be summarized to allow readers to see real-world examples of the effective practices described in this resource.

Section 1: Understanding Positive and Trauma-Informed Behavior Support

Section 1 (pp. 11-21) provides guidance on the fundamentals of student-centered behavior support practice. Content includes key principles of behavior in which effective trauma-informed behavior support is anchored, important concepts (e.g., school climate, student belonging) that influence the effectiveness of behavior support in a school or district, and basic concepts that support educators and family members to develop positive behavioral supports. The section also features specific information about approaching behavior support from a lens of equity and avoiding implicit bias.

Focus on Section 1 For…

- ☐ Content about behavior basics to understand the root causes of interfering behavior
- ☐ Building behavior support practices from a trauma-informed and educational justice lens
- ☐ Supporting school or district teams in addressing student behavior by improving school climate and student belonging

Section 2: School and District Systems That Support Social, Emotional, And Behavioral Well-Being

Section 2 (pp. 22-40) focuses on improving positive behavior support at the school and district level. It describes a variety of interconnected school and district systems and how they can fit together in a multitiered system of supports (MTSS) to support student and staff well-being. Specific school and district systems, as well as their relationship to student behavior and safety, are discussed in brief with intentional connections to further resources.

Focus on Section 2 For…

- ☐ Understanding how the *social, emotional, and behavioral health* (SEBH) framework can fit into existing district MTSS work
- ☐ Connecting school systems to student social, emotional, and behavioral needs
- ☐ Supporting staff wellness and capacity for positive behavior support
- ☐ Responding to student interfering behavior while centering equity

Section 3: Classroom Practices for Safe and Inclusive Learning

Section 3 (pp. 41-50) describes practices for improving positive behavior support at the classroom level. Content addresses how *social and emotional learning* (SEL) can fit into teaching of SEBH skills, how teachers can partner with parents to cultivate an inclusive classroom that supports all students to learn skills for success, and how to design a classroom in which most interfering behaviors are prevented by setting the stage for healthy behavior instead. Specific practices associated with effective classroom management that foster a climate of belonging and safety are included.

Focus on Section 3 For…

- ☐ Identifying SEBH skills (including skills from the Washington SEL Standards and Benchmarks) to teach within the classroom for a welcoming, safe, and supportive space
- ☐ Identifying specific strategies to prevent and respond to student interfering behavior with effective classroom management rather than restraint and isolation
- ☐ Building a positive classroom climate for student and family belonging

Section 4: Effective Support for Students with Extensive Behavior Learning Needs

Section 4 (pp. 50-66) addresses individual behavior support for students who engage in significant interfering behavior, including teaming processes to engage in meaningful and student-centered data collection, problem solving, and cycles of intervention and review. Content also includes best practices and requirements for conducting a functional behavioral assessments (FBA), using the results of the FBA to develop an effective and high-quality behavioral intervention plan (BIP), and making data-based decisions to ensure the student's supports are effective.

Focus on Section 4 For…

- ☐ Improving the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of problem-solving individual interventions for a student's interfering behavior
- ☐ Developing positive and student-centered FBAs and BIPs
- ☐ Measuring progress using ongoing behavioral data collection

Section 5: Considerations for Students with Disabilities

Section 5 (pp. 67-91) describes best practices and requirements for providing behavior support, in alignment with the legal right to a free appropriate public education, to students who are eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the

Rehabilitation Act. Content includes a summary of discipline protections for students with disabilities and key takeaways from federal investigations into district misuse of restraint and isolation with students with disabilities.

Focus on Section 5 For…

- ☐ Understanding the rights of students with disabilities who engage in behavior that interferes with learning
- ☐ Developing an IEP that reflects best practices for effective and positive behavior support across each part of the IEP
- ☐ Crafting measurable behavior support IEP goals
- ☐ Guiding questions to enhance family partnership in developing individualized behaviors supports as part of the IEP or 504 Plan
- ☐ Preventing the use of restraint and isolation from violating the civil rights of students with disabilities, based on lessons learned from federal investigations

Section 6: Crisis Prevention and De-Escalation

Section 6 (pp. 91-109) focuses on balancing the importance of schools to have an effective behavioral crisis response process with the urgent need to reduce the harmful and ineffective practices of restraint and isolation. Guidance includes legal requirements and processes in restraint and isolation use, recommendations for safe de-escalation and reduction of certain preventable harms associated with restraint and isolation, and collaborative practices amongst all members of the school team and family to serve the student safely and supportively.

Focus on Section 6 For…

- ☐ Understanding the impact of restraint and isolation on students, families, and school staff
- ☐ Safely reducing or eliminating the use of restraint and isolation through more effective crisis prevention and de-escalation practices
- ☐ Ensuring that any use of these practices (should they occur) are used infrequently, as safely as possible, and under the specific conditions permitted by law (including the standard of "imminent likelihood of serious harm")
- ☐ Using trends in district, school, and individual student data to identify concerns and drive decisions for improved supports

SECTION 1: UNDERSTANDING POSITIVE AND TRAUMA-INFORMED BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

All students deserve to feel safe, supported, and valued at school. When schools ground behavior support in compassion, relationship-building, and an understanding of trauma, they create environments where students can thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. To reduce restraint and eliminate isolation, school and district[11] staff must have a solid foundation in key concepts related to positive and trauma-informed behavior support. This allows educators to build systems and practices that promote healing, connection, and positive student outcomes.

Keys to Trauma-Informed Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Learning

Trauma-informed behavior support begins with understanding that all behavior is communication shaped by a student's past experiences. When teams have the skills and knowledge to view behavior in this way, they can understand how interfering behavior communicates important information about a student's unmet needs. This allows teams to move past reactive ways of responding to student behavior, and instead foster healing, belonging, and growth for every student. The keys below can guide school staff in the mindset work needed to support student behavior learning in a trauma-informed way.

Key 1: Behavior Serves an Authentic Purpose

All learned behavior meets a valid need for the person engaging in it. A person's patterns of usual behavior develop over time based on which behaviors are most efficient at meeting their needs. In some cases, this means that a person may unconsciously learn very efficient ways of getting important needs met with behavioral patterns that are not safe or that otherwise interfere with their learning or relationships. Regardless, the first step in supporting a student to learn prosocial alternative behaviors is for school staff to learn the need met by the student's interfering behaviors.

School teams may make the mistake of describing a student's interfering behaviors as intentional, planned actions that the student is consciously using to get a desired outcome. This language should be avoided as it is not an accurate understanding of how interfering behavior is learned over time. Loaded terms like "manipulation" can create bias that hinders the student's belonging and reconnection at school. Inaccurate beliefs about behavior can prevent staff from understanding the context, individual history, and unmet needs at the heart of a student's interfering behavior.

Key 2: Behavior is Shaped by Past Events and Experiences

Because behavior serves a purpose, students who have experienced challenging or traumatic events often learn unique behaviors that help them meet their needs in those specific contexts. This might mean that, for instance, a student with a history of traumatic experiences may react more quickly or strongly to events that are linked to their past experiences in some way. For many students who have experienced trauma, these behaviors may have kept them safe in unsafe

[11] Note that the term "district" is used across this manual to be inclusive of all local education agencies (LEAs), including charter schools.

situations. School staff can support students to heal from these experiences by providing an environment that is emotionally and physically safe, stable, and affirms the student's inherent worth and belonging in the school community. This creates the conditions in which a student can feel secure to learn new and prosocial ways to navigate the healthy challenges of the school day.

Key 3: Behavior is Learned, So It Can Be Taught

As described above, each student's past experiences shape their current behaviors. Because of this, school staff should remember that the student is also capable of learning healthier alternative behaviors. This requires staff provide teaching and compassionate support for the student to learn those new behaviors. Just like with any area of learning, students may make behavioral mistakes or may have established habits that interfere with their growth. Just like with academic skills, school staff can provide high quality instruction, feedback, and support in social, emotional, and behavioral skills to support student learning.

Key 4: Punishment Does Not Teach New Behaviors

According to behavioral science, new behaviors are only learned through practice and reinforcement. It is a common misconception that a student's interfering behavior should be given punitive consequences – and, in the short term, occasional instances of interfering behavior can sometimes be temporarily halted through the use of punishment. However, punishment cannot teach new behavior and does not lead to positive long-term behavioral change. **The more a student experiences punishment at school, the more likely it is that their interfering behavior will worsen over time.** Any perceived effectiveness of punishment is temporary and does not result in learning or behavioral growth. For students to achieve lasting growth in social, emotional, and behavioral skills, those skills must be identified, taught, and positively reinforced.

Key 5: Behavior Support Requires Listening to the Whole Child

All learned behavior is communication of some kind. Since behavior serves an authentic purpose, it is possible to understand that purpose – as well as the authentic need the behavior meets – by listening to what is communicated. This requires an understanding of the student as a *whole child*.

Behavior support from a *whole child perspective* acknowledges and seeks to address unmet needs that contribute to a student's use of interfering behavior. For example:

- For a student with sensory sensitivities who engages in interfering behavior when hungry, the team can support her with options for school meals that meet her sensory needs
- For a student who avoids class due to anxiety, the team can provide tools to manage anxiety, therapeutic work around building positive coping skills, and increased connection with safe adults during the school day
- For a student who feels isolated and who has difficulty making and keeping friendships, the team could provide extra support around social interaction, self-management, and opportunities for strengths-based student leadership
- For a student who feels disconnected from school due to a series of suspensions, the team works to rebuild a sense of belonging by building relationships, connecting the student to school activities and learning opportunities aligned with their strengths and interests, and preventing further disciplinary removals by proactively supporting the student in whatever need the behaviors at issue were communicating

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Learning: Key Terms and Relevance to Trauma-Informed Support

To support all students socially, emotionally, and behaviorally in a trauma-informed way, educators should be aware of several key elements that shape these supports:

- A positive school climate promotes safety, connection, and a supportive environment
- Student belonging is essential for engagement and well-being
- Staff knowledge of behavior support principles helps build transformative, compassionate, and student-centered practice
- Avoiding assumptions and implicit bias is necessary for behavior support rooted in educational justice and equity

School Climate

School climate is a broad concept that describes the overall atmosphere experienced by members of a school community, including students, staff, and families. It is often grouped into categories or components, each of which should be considered when designing comprehensive systems of behavioral health support.[12] In a positive school climate:

(1) The community feels a sense of **safety** from both physical and emotional harm. Schools and classrooms promote well-being through clear rules that are equitably enforced, a secure environment, and preparation for various emergency situations. When students feel safe from bullying, harassment, and other factors, they are less likely to experience emotional crises, engage in risky behaviors,[13] and to misinterpret their experiences.[14]

(2) **Relationships** between members of the community are built on mutual respect, and involve supportive, caring interactions that foster positive connections. Students feel connected to peers and adults, diverse cultures and languages are represented and affirmed, and all members of the school community have ways to participate in it. When staff feel respected and supported by leadership, they are more likely to respond to a crisis effectively.[15,16] When students have trusting relationships with staff, the likelihood of behavior referrals decreases.[17]

RREI Demonstration Site Finding: *Student-Staff Connections Prevent Most Interfering Behaviors*

Demonstration site staff consistently report the value of students experiencing authentic relationships and caring from multiple school staff. Importantly, this cannot be provided by a single dedicated staff (such as an assigned paraeducator) alone. Students are most successful when they experience belonging as a member of the school and classroom community. One school leader shared, "When students trust they have a connection with staff, they feel safe enough to ask for help when they need it."

[12] National School Climate Center (NSCC; n.d.). *What is school climate and why is it important?*
[13] National Center for Safe Supportive Learning (NCSSLE; n.d.). *Physical safety.*
[14] NCSSLE (n.d.). *Emotional safety.*
[15] Paterson, B., Young, J., & Taylor, J. (2019). *Compassion fatigue in teachers working with children whose distress may present as behaviour that challenges.*
[16] Rozmiarek, D., & Crepeau-Hobson. F. (2022). A qualitative examination of compassion fatigue in school psychologists. *Contemporary School Psychology, 28,* 30-42.
[17] NSCC (n.d.). *What is school climate and why is it important?*

(3) Both the physical and cultural elements of the school **environment** support student learning and well-being. Students with disabilities are included as full members of the school community. Physical surroundings are clean, comfortable, and accessible. Staff, students, and families feel valued and have feelings of belonging within the school. When classroom environments represent student interests and encourage participation, they foster responsibility and reinforce positive behaviors.[18]

(4) **Teaching practices** support students' academic learning and development as community contributors. Students see themselves represented in curriculum, educators feel confident in their lesson delivery, staff are included in lesson creation, and families feel connected to their students' learning. When students feel engaged in their learning, the likelihood of interfering behaviors decreases.

School Climate Assessment Resources

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments keeps an updated list of school climate surveys in their Survey Compendium, many of which are free to use. In addition, the National Center for School Safety offers a "how to" guide on Cultivating a Supportive School Climate. This resource offers a step-by-step approach to assessing and subsequently improving school climate needs through initiatives and policies.

Student Belonging

Students feel a sense of *belonging* when they are present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, involved, supported, heard, befriended, and needed at school.[19] When students experience belonging at school, their behavior, academic achievement, motivation for learning, and long-term outcomes improve across the board.[20] While many variables contribute to a student's sense of belonging, research shows that teacher support is the largest factor.[21] This is particularly important for student populations who have experienced a history of segregation and exclusion, such as students with disabilities, Black students, and indigenous students.

Student belonging is essential to cultivate for safe and effective schools. In WestEd's resource "Reimagining School Safety: A Guide for Schools and Communities," the authors described the importance of centering relational elements, including student belonging, in school safety work:

> *"[The] tendency to shape and control is deeply embedded in the design of safety and discipline policies and practices in educational settings, resulting in the creation of exclusionary forms of discipline, the placement of physical barriers around spaces of learning, and*

[18] National Center for School Safety (2024). *Cultivating a supportive school climate: A "how to" guide.*
[19] Carter, E. W., & Biggs, E. E. (2021). *Creating communities of belonging for students with significant cognitive disabilities (Belonging Series).* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, TIES Center.
[20] Kuttner, P. J. (2023). The right to belong in school: A critical, transdisciplinary conceptualization of school belonging. *AERA Open, 9*.
[21] Allen, K., Kern, M.., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 30*, 1–34.

*the increasing use of law enforcement on campuses to discipline and punish students….Shifting the paradigm for how everyone in school communities views, defines, and achieves safety is not so much about creating something new as much as reconnecting with fundamental principles of being human. **Through this shift, the paradigm of safety is not about exclusion but about belonging—not a pushing out but a folding in.**"*[22]

ABCs of Behavior

Antecedent

A behavior's *antecedent* is a condition that usually occurs before an individual student begins engaging in a particular interfering behavior. An antecedent can involve:

- Something specific that happens to the student before the behavior (e.g., being teased by a peer, working in small groups, being startled by a loud sound), and/or
- Something specific that *does not* happen to the student before the behavior (e.g., raising their hand and not being called on, long transition times, a parent is delayed at pickup)

Behavior

Behavior can be defined as "an observable and measurable individual action." In evidence-based positive behavior support and social emotional learning practices, the behaviors of focus are often *prosocial behaviors*. These are behaviors that are used in a variety of healthy skills, including navigating relationships, engaging in learning, taking on challenges, and managing emotions.

Some school teams use the term "behavior" solely to refer to *interfering behavior*. An interfering behavior is a behavior that interferes with the student's learning, interactions with others, or other activities. As stated on page 12, when a student engages in interfering behavior, a school team can support them by teaching new alternative behaviors. However, school staff should keep in mind that behavior is influenced by factors such as culture and disability; therefore, it is important to ensure a behavior is actually interfering before seeking to change it. For instance, an autistic student may use rocking and finger twirling as *stimming* behaviors that support them in paying attention and participating during class. As this behavior does not interfere with learning, it would not be appropriate for a school team to discourage this behavior.

Effective school teams are typically more focused on teaching strategies that support students in learning skills, and less focused on reducing interfering behaviors. Skills to consider teaching include, but are not limited to, those related to social interaction, communication, self-regulation, and problem-solving. In most cases, when students are taught effective ways to get their needs met, they will no longer use interfering behavior to do so.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
Teach Student Voice and Skills, Not Compliance

[22] WestEd (2022). *Reimagining school safety: A guide for schools and communities.*

Staff at RREI demonstration sites have identified the need for school teams to move away from a traditional emphasis on student compliance to adult directives, and toward a focus on student voice. Their ongoing learnings in this area include:

- Many student interfering behaviors are prevented by enhancing communication support, and embedding communication opportunities into interactions and environments.
- School staff should be mindful that a rigid emphasis on student compliance with all adult directions can put students at greater risk of victimization by adults. This risk is greater for students with disabilities.
- All students should be taught how to communicate what they need, including ways to say "no" and ask others to leave them alone. This builds all students' skills for self-advocacy and consent communication.
- Students can still be expected to do things they don't prefer at school – however, the teaching focus should be on skills to meet those necessary demands (e.g., self-regulation, self-advocacy, choice-making, and problem-solving) rather than compliance.

For more about selecting alternative skills to teach students, refer to Section 4.

Consequence

In behavioral terms, a *consequence* is any outcome that immediately follows a given behavior. Importantly, the term "consequence" is not limited only to corrective responses or punishment given to students by adults. A consequence can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral for the person experiencing it. The following are common consequences that may naturally follow different behaviors in school settings:

- Delaying or avoiding a task
- Receiving a compliment or positive affirmation from an adult or peer
- Making others laugh
- Taking a break to do something relaxing
- Being reprimanded
- Being expected to engage in a particular activity

School teams can learn many things about a student's patterns of interfering behavior by observing the behavior's consequence(s). This can also support school teams in understanding how a student's particular interfering behavior is being inadvertently reinforced or punished. For more, refer to "Reinforcement and Punishment" below.

Reinforcement and Punishment

Most behaviors are learned unconsciously by experiencing their consequences (outcomes) repeatedly – whether those consequences are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral for the person experiencing them. Over time, each person develops a skillset of behaviors which have efficiently met that individual's needs for safety, connection with others, and access to enjoyable activities and things. Similarly, each person also develops a set of behaviors which have resulted in unpleasant outcomes and which they are unlikely to use. Once school teams understand a student's individual patterns of behavior, including their experiences of reinforcement and punishment, they are better

able to compassionately anticipate their needs and support positive behavior learning.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement has happened when two things are both true about a behavior:

1. The behavior was immediately followed by an outcome for the person, *and*
2. The behavior is increasing (or continuing at the same level) over time

When both of those things are true, the outcome in question is functioning as reinforcement for the behavior that preceded it. Teams must be able to identify whether the behavior is increasing/continuing over time. If a student repeatedly engages in a behavior that interferes with learning, the school team can conclude that the behavior is being reinforced. However, it may take careful observation to determine the reinforcer.

A misconception about reinforcement is that it is synonymous with the term "reward." Most forms of reinforcement occur naturally as part of instruction and/or social interactions at school. When an interfering problem behavior is increasing or continuing to occur, it is always connected to some form of reinforcement that follows it, even if that reinforcement was not planned.

Understanding Positive and Negative Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement occurs when something the student enjoys/prefers is provided after a behavior, and that behavior then increases or stays the same in the future. For example, when Gina makes a joke and her friends laugh, and over time the behavior of joking increases, the team might hypothesize that laughter from her friends is positively reinforcing that behavior.

Negative reinforcement occurs when something the student dislikes is taken away after a behavior, and that behavior then increases or stays the same in the future. For example, if Max throws school supplies at a classmate during reading and is immediately sent out into the hall, and over time Max's throwing behavior increases, the team might conclude that sending Max out into the hall (and away from reading work) negatively reinforced that behavior.

Understanding the definition of reinforcement allows teams to quickly learn about the root cause of a student's behavior. To do this, teams can use the following steps:

1. Confirm whether the behavior is increasing/maintain over time
2. If it is, observe the outcome that follows the behavior, as this is likely the reinforcer

In the example above, Max's teacher likely believed she was providing a correction for his behavior, not reinforcement. However, since Max's team has observed that his interfering behaviors are increasing, they can confidently conclude that the outcome following his behavior (being sent into the hall) is actually working as reinforcement for this behavior instead. Knowing this can help Max's team explore the underlying needs contributing to this pattern of behavior so they can provide him with the support he needs.

Punishment

Punishment has happened when two things are both true about a situation:

1. The behavior was immediately followed by an outcome for the person, *and*
2. The behavior is decreasing over time

In other words, if a student has stopped engaging in a particular behavior over time (e.g., the student has stopped attending classes), the school team can conclude that the behavior is being punished. As with reinforcement, punishment can occur inadvertently, so staff should look closely at the student's pattern of behavior over time to determine what might be acting as a punisher.

Functions of Behavior

The behavior's *function* is the type of underlying need that it meets for the individual. There are four functions (i.e., needs) of learned behavior:

- Escape: The behavior allows the person to delay or avoid doing something they find unpleasant or difficult
- Attention: The behavior gets an immediate social response from others
- Tangible: The behavior allows the person to access a specific desired item or activity
- Sensory/automatic: The behavior helps the person meet a basic physical need

All behavior serves a function, including student behavior that interferes with learning and/or interactions with others. School teams can support students to learn new behaviors that meet the same needs expressed by interfering behavior in ways that support learning and social connection.

Avoiding Assumptions and Implicit Bias When Describing Behavior

To facilitate effective and equitable behavior support, descriptions of a student's behavior (including interfering behavior) should be measurable, observable, clearly understandable to an unfamiliar person, free from bias and subjectivity, and culturally and linguistically responsive. The language school staff use about student behavior can directly shape inequitable beliefs and practices. Staff should not use criminalizing language against students, which includes referring to a student as an "offender" or "perpetrator" and describing a student's behavior support needs using terms for criminal acts (e.g., the student "assaults" others or has to be "bribed" to do things). Likewise, it is important for staff to reflect on their behavioral language to determine if and how implicit bias -- based on a student's race, ethnicity, language, gender, disability, or other individual characteristic -- is influencing their perceptions of a student's behavior or motivation.

The table below presents nonexamples of the most common practice errors school staff make in describing individual student behavior in ways that suggest bias and/or create barriers to understanding. It also presents positive examples of how staff can describe the same behaviors in ways that facilitate effective teaming and student support.

Describing Interfering Behavior: Non-Examples	Describing Interfering Behavior: Examples
"Student takes advantage of others' willingness to help and refuses to do work that should be easy for him to do."	"When asked to complete group tasks with classmates that involve reading, writing, or spelling, Student may cover his face with his hood or curl up at his table and wait for others to complete the tasks without him."
"Student enjoys intimidating others."	"Student may shout at others and/or get in their personal space when she is overwhelmed."
"Student has no ability to control his emotions and explodes at the slightest provocation."	"During social conflict, Student is learning to take time and space before responding. Currently, he sometimes reacts quickly using verbal threats and insults. These behaviors can be upsetting for others and may limit his social relationships with peers."
"Student becomes violent when they are dysregulated."	"When Student is tired, hungry, or stressed, they may engage in physically aggressive behavior towards classroom objects (e.g., ripping up paper, kicking chairs over, knocking materials off tables).
"Student is an attention seeker and will do anything for a reaction."	"Student engages in many behaviors that elicit sympathy or surprise from others, including coughing loudly, talking about sickness, or sharing anecdotes about home/family stressors that are upsetting to classmates to hear."
"Student is disruptive and defiant."	"During math, Student may engage in behaviors that avoid or delay schoolwork, such as making crude jokes, refusing to work with certain classmates, or making insulting or questioning remarks to the teacher."
"Student frequently assaults staff."	"Student may strike staff (or attempt to do so) or throw objects at/near staff. He is most likely to do this when he is already escalated and then staff repeatedly place additional demands on him."

Anchoring Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Support in Educational Justice

School climate and a sense of belonging are closely linked to academic achievement, yet many schools face gaps in both areas – particularly for students from marginalized groups.[23] To support all students effectively, efforts to address social, emotional, and behavioral needs must be grounded in educational equity, justice, and inclusionary practices. When this is not in place, students from marginalized groups may experience unnecessary barriers, leading to unmet student needs, interfering behaviors, and/or staff misinterpretation and discipline of behaviors that do not actually disrupt learning. Educators must be aware of these dynamics and proactively address them to prevent inappropriate or disproportionate referrals for behavioral services.

Example 1: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

[23] WestEd, Region IX Equity Assistance Center (2013). *The racial school-climate gap.*

Students who are culturally or linguistically diverse are disproportionately referred for behavior support by educators who do not share their cultural or linguistic background. School staff should be mindful that a student's cultural traditions and social, emotional, and behavioral norms may differ from those of the educators who shape the dominant school or classroom culture. For example, cultural norms can guide communication and body language (such as respectful types of eye contact or language when speaking to an elder or authority figure) which may create differences in how students address and interact with teachers. Cultural differences are different from interfering behavior, and students should not be referred for behavior support for behavior that is part of their cultural heritage.

Additionally, students who are English learners who are not adequately supported in their language learning may engage in interfering behavior, particularly behaviors related to difficulty understanding instructions, meeting classroom expectations, and completing schoolwork.[24] School staff should take care to ensure all students have the universal supports needed to access instruction (both academic and social/emotional/behavioral) with additional support layered in for students with additional language and communication needs.

Example 2: Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may encounter barriers in various aspects of the school environment, such as instruction, communication, or social interactions, that school staff can address to ensure the environment is universally designed for all learners. It is important for school staff to remember that barriers to learning social/emotional/behavior skills are in the environment, and are not inherent to students with disabilities. Interfering behavior often indicates that existing supports, including the universal supports that should be available to each and every learner as well as the supports included in the student's IEP, are not adequate. This is especially the case if the student has not been included or provided with the support needed to find belonging in general education settings, or if the school's MTSS system is not designed with the needs of all learners in mind.

Example 3: Students in Foster Care

Students in foster care face unique barriers to a positive educational experience. They may have an inconsistent team of people involved in helping make decisions about their education, and so may experience a sense of powerlessness, stigma, and reluctance to interact or form relationships with adults.[25] They are far more likely to change schools during their academic career,[26] are at higher risk of absence and truancy, and are more likely to experience emotional dysregulation and behavioral health concerns.[27] And because federal law requires state agencies to keep foster care students in their school of origin if in their best interest,[28] they may commute a significant distance from home each day. School and classroom environments must be safe, supportive, and sensitive to the experiences of these students. Staff can help create safe environments by maintaining confidentiality, taking time to establish trusting relationships, and ensuring that students are able to make up coursework following absences due to court dates and other appointments. Districts must also designate a Foster Care Liaison, and each K-12 public school must designate a Building

[24] U.S. Department of Education (2017). *English learner tool kit for state and local education agencies.*
[25] Treehouse (2018). *Guide to supporting students in foster care.*
[26] Education Research & Data Center (2021). *Education outcomes of Washington students in foster care.*
[27] National Health Care for the Homeless Council (2019). *Homelessness & adverse childhood experiences.*
[28] OSPI (2023). *Foster care education in Washington state.*

Point of Contact. For more information, visit OSPI's Foster Care webpage.

Example 4: Students with Mental Health Support Needs

For students with support needs related to mental health, daily activities and responsibilities can sometimes feel overwhelming. The costs of health care and associated mental health services can present additional barriers for families and students in accessing treatment. When students with mental health needs do not receive the support they need, they may experience a variety of symptoms that can lead to behavioral changes. Teams that focus their efforts solely on responding to these behaviors may be overlooking more critical underlying distress. This is especially likely for students who have disabilities, as some school staff may mistakenly believe that students with disabilities may not experience the same mental health needs as students without disabilities.

Example 5: LGBTQIA+ Students

Students who are LGBTQIA+ often experience interactions and school discipline targeting their identity, contributing to a school climate in which these students may not feel safe. Nationally, 73% of LGBTQIA+ students indicated that, when they reported being harassed, intimidated, or bullied (HIB) by other students, that school staff did not respond effectively. In Washington's 2024 Healthy Youth Survey,[29] 65% of LGBTQIA+ respondents reported that school staff did not try to stop their experiences of bullying. Further, both national[30] and state data show that staff were more likely to tell the LGBTQIA+ student to change their own behavior (e.g., adopt different mannerisms or dress differently) than they were to discipline the student engaging in HIB behaviors. Many LGBTQIA+ students also report discriminatory school discipline practices, such as being disciplined for wearing clothing that aligns with the student's gender identity. When these students feel unsafe at school, they may miss more school than their peers, resulting in lost instructional time and possible disciplinary consequences. For school teams to support this population, they can examine school climate and disciplinary practices to eliminate discrimination and ensure school is a welcoming place that offers safety and belonging for these students.

[29] Washington State Healthy Youth Survey Data Dashboard.
[30] GLSEN (2022). *The 2021 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in our nation's schools.*

SECTION 2: SCHOOL AND DISTRICT SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, & BEHAVIORAL WELL-BEING

When school and district systems are designed to embrace and support all students and staff, efforts to reduce restraint and eliminate isolation are far more likely to succeed. This involves centering the belonging and well-being – socially, emotionally, and behaviorally – of all students, and providing staff with the resources and climate necessary to embrace all students while still meeting their own needs. School and district leaders play a pivotal role in shaping these environments by organizing resources, policies, and practices in ways that respond to the diverse needs of students and staff.

This section describes school and district systems that effectively support student and staff well-being, prevent most student interfering behavior, and respond when those behaviors do occur with teaching-focused and evidence-based practices.

Organizing School and District Systems with a Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS)

MTSS is a widely-adopted and evidence-based educational framework that allows school staff to efficiently provide varying levels of support to students based on their individual needs. This system ensures that students receive the appropriate level of support in both academic learning and social/emotional/behavioral health. MTSS allows school and district teams to incorporate a variety of school and district systems that support the whole student (such as those described below from pages 25-34) into a single framework that is highly responsive to student need.

A defining feature of MTSS is its three-tiered *continuum of supports*. As part of this approach, each school and district system in an MTSS framework:

- Provides *universal (Tier 1)* supports that all students access, including students with disabilities
- Can be leveraged to respond to individual student needs with *evidence-based practices* that provide the student with *targeted support (Tier 2)* or *intensive support (Tier 3)*

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
Tier 1 Supports Must Reach All Students

MTSS neither excludes nor is exclusive to students with disabilities. The tiered framework addresses all student needs across all areas (academic, social, emotional, and behavioral). Services and accommodations in a student's IEP or 504 Plan should supplement – not replace – the tiered support available to every student within an MTSS framework. A hallmark of strong implementation is that each student can access supports as soon as they are needed. Tier 1 supports should be provided to each and every student, including each student with a disability regardless of their placement. Similarly, Tier 3 supports should be available to students who need them, regardless of the student's eligibility under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504.

> Every student served by school staff should have access to Tier 1 supports. This includes students who receive any of their special education services in separate programs or classrooms. Any such spaces, and students served in those spaces, should have the same Tier 1 resources and supports as general education classrooms.

In an MTSS framework, teams share the responsibility of making decisions and implementing supports. Decisions are driven by high-quality data, collected over time, from multiple sources.

How Do Effective MTSS Teams Make Decisions Based on Data?

To respond to student needs, MTSS teams engage in *data-based decision making*. Typically, school and/or grade-level teams, including team members involved with different school and district systems, come together to review the effectiveness of their tiered supports and decide if changes need to be made. Common processes and agenda items include:

- **Ensure Effectiveness of Tier 1:** Review school-wide data (e.g., office disciplinary referrals by time of day and location) and reflect on whether Tier 1 supports in the building are adequate to support all students. If patterns in student difficulties are observed (e.g., the team finds that most discipline referrals occur at recess):
    - Adjust Tier 1 supports to address the pattern (e.g., address recess supervision, material and equipment use, and/or scheduling to prevent interfering behaviors)
    - During the next team meeting, revisit school-wide data to determine if Tier 1 adjustments had the intended effect or if further adjustments are needed
- **Tier 1 to Tier 2 Decision Making:** Identify students who are experiencing difficulty (academically, socially, emotionally, or behaviorally) and for whom Tier 1 supports do not seem to be adequate, and:
    - Ensure each student is still accessing Tier 1 supports
    - Review relevant student data in identified area(s) of need, and determine which student(s) need additional Tier 2 support from one or more school systems
    - Identify the appropriate Tier 2 intervention for the identified student(s) and implementation roles and responsibilities for staff
- **Tier 2 Progress Review:** Review progress of students receiving Tier 2 supports and make decisions about maintaining, increasing, or decreasing the intensity of support
- **Tier 2 to Tier 3 Decision Making:** Identify students who receive Tier 2 supports and continue to experience difficulty, or students who have not yet received Tier 2 supports but demonstrate significant risk, and:
    - Ensure each student is still accessing Tier 1 supports
    - Review relevant student data in identified area(s) of need
    - When appropriate based on the review of relevant student data, refer the student to the appropriate Tier 3 individualized supports
- **Tier 3 Progress Review:** Review progress of students receiving Tier 3 supports and make decisions about maintaining, increasing, or decreasing the intensity of support

Teams engage families, students, and community partners to plan, implement, and improve services. Staff and community partners provide a continuum of supports to students through a tiered delivery system, starting with strong core instruction. Staff use evidence-based practices to accelerate student learning across all tiers.

Preventing Interfering Behavior with MTSS

Districts that use MTSS to support students' social, emotional, and behavioral well-being are typically able to prevent most interfering behaviors and achieve more positive outcomes than those that do not. This requires that districts approach their MTSS work with intention to proactively support the whole child and address student needs. Effective MTSS for the prevention of interfering behavior involves two elements:

- A **Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health (SEBH)** framework
- Organization of any **additional school systems that support behavioral learning** that can be embedded into MTSS tiers

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health (SEBH) Framework

A Social, Emotional, Behavioral Health (SEBH) support framework centers the whole student through an integrated, expanded, and preventative approach to student well-being. Rather than focusing on reacting to student behavior, this framework proactively addresses students' overall social, emotional, and behavioral health while also responding to interfering behavior and other needs as they arise. SEBH work is also trauma-informed,[31] recognizing that trauma can affect any member of a school community, and supporting school and district staff to address traumatic stress by building protective factors that can promote healing and resilience.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
SEBH Supports Must Be Desiloed

Demonstration site staff and leaders have shared that SEBH supports, including PBIS, SEL, and school-based behavioral health, must be desiloed. This means they are not viewed as exclusive to any particular staff area of expertise or practice. SEBH supports, including behavior supports, should not be viewed as "special education work" or even "behavior team work" – it should be adopted as part of the collective work of all staff. To be effective, this work must be district-wide, supported by leadership, and involve intentional cultural and mindset shifts.

The SEBH framework embeds support across all MTSS tiers, organizing the school or district's work in three critical areas:

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Instruction for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
- School-Based Behavioral Health

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

PBIS promotes proactive, school-wide tiered strategies for fostering prosocial student behavior, enhancing well-being, and preventing exclusionary discipline practices. When implemented as part of the SEBH framework, PBIS connects students with the level of social, emotional, and behavioral support they need to succeed. PBIS is trauma-informed and can promote the development of several important protective factors for students, including supporting students in developing social connections, adopting a strengths-based approach that facilitates student resilience, and teaching key behaviors related to cognitive, social, and emotional learning.

Behavior support in PBIS is provided across three tiers of intensity and individualization. Decision

[31] NCSSLE (n.d.). *Trauma-sensitive schools training package.*

making typically parallels the process outlined in the box on page 24 above. All tiers must be designed in such a way that allows all students to be included.

- **Tier 1 (Universal Supports)** includes preventive schoolwide teaching and reinforcement of behavioral expectations, provided equitably to all students. A robust Tier 1, implemented consistently, is an efficient use of school resources. Most students' needs will be met by Tier 1 practices. However, when Tier 1 is insufficient or inconsistent, more students may have unmet needs and require the resources and support of a higher PBIS tier.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
Address Patterns of Behavior with Tier 1

When multiple students are engaging in interfering behavior at certain times of day, in certain locations, or during certain activities, teams should address these needs by revisiting Tier 1 supports and determining if they are adequate. Regularly reviewing schoolwide behavior data (e.g., behavior reports, office disciplinary referrals, or other Tier 1 data collected by school staff) can support these decisions through the process described on page 24.

- **Tier 2 (Targeted Supports)** typically involves rapid, efficient, and minimally individualized behavior support provided to students who regularly engage in interfering behavior and who don't respond to consistent implementation of Tier 1 supports. Students supported in Tier 2 must still participate in Tier 1 to the same extent as all other students.

- **Tier 3 (Intensive Supports)** are specialized behavior supports designed for an individual student whose needs were not fully met with Tier 2 intervention.[32] Typically, this tier includes completing a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and using the results to develop a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) for the student. For guidance on these processes, refer to Section 4. Each student receiving Tier 3 support must still participate in Tier 1 to the same extent as all other students.

Use of PBIS benefits both students and staff. In schools where PBIS is implemented consistently and correctly, students are excluded from the classroom less frequently,[33] achieve better outcomes in terms of academics and behavior,[34] and are less likely to engage in substance use.[35] Teachers in schools that implement PBIS effectively are significantly more likely to feel effective and prepared to meet their students' needs, and less likely to report feelings of burnout.[36,37]

[32] A student may also receive Tier 3 support immediately if determined necessary for safety or other factors.
[33] Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Examining the effects of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports on student outcomes: Results from a randomized controlled effectiveness trial in elementary schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 12*, 133-148.
[34] Luiselli, J. K, Putnam, R. F, Handler, M. W, & Feinberg, A. B. (2005). Whole-school positive behaviour support: Effects on student discipline problems and academic performance. *Educational Psychology, 25*(2-3), 183-198.
[35] Center on PBIS (2015). *Do high schools implementing SWPBIS have lower rates of illegal drug and alcohol use?*
[36] Kelm, J. L., & McIntosh, K. (2012). Effects of school-wide positive behavior support on teacher self-efficacy. *Psychology in the Schools,* 49(2), 137-147.
[37] Ross, S. W., Romer, N., & Horner, R. H. (2012). Teacher well-being and the implementation of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions,* 14(2), 118–128.

Instruction for Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)[38] defines SEL as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions."

In January 2020, the SEL Advisory Committee developed and adopted Washington State's SEL Standards, Benchmarks, and Indicators to provide a framework for identifying and encouraging growth in the following skill areas:

- **Standard 1: Self-Awareness**—Individual can identify their emotions, personal assets, areas for growth, and potential external resources and supports.
- **Standard 2: Self-Management**—Individual can regulate emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.
- **Standard 3: Self-Efficacy**—Individual can motivate themselves, persevere, and see themselves as capable
- **Standard 4: Social Awareness**—Individual can take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
- **Standard 5: Social Management**—Individual can make safe and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions.
- **Standard 6: Social Engagement**—Individual can consider others and show a desire to contribute to the well-being of school and community.

Evidence strongly suggests that widespread integration of SEL strategies promotes healthier peer relationships, improved student well-being, and safer learning environments[39]. When SEL is embedded across content areas, it provides students an opportunity to continuously learn about, practice, and grow in essential violence-prevention skills such as self-regulation and productive problem solving.

For further information on social emotional learning, please refer to:

- OSPI - Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
- OSPI - SEL Implementation Guide
- OSPI - SEL Standards, Benchmarks and Indicators
- OSPI - Trauma-Informed SEL Practices
- Center on PBIS - Teaching Social-Emotional Competencies within a PBIS Framework

School-Based Behavioral Health

Behavioral health encompasses mental health as well as psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing.[40] School-based behavioral health includes interventions that students receive to enhance social, emotional, and/or behavioral well-being. These services range from school-wide prevention efforts, curriculum and trainings, to individualized services. They include those provided on site, in a school-based health center, and/or in partnership with community based

[38] Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. (n.d.). *Fundamentals of SEL.*
[39] Committee for Children (2020). *SEL, school safety, and school climate.*
[40] SAMHSA (n.d.). *Behavioral health integration.*

organizations. For children and youth, mental and behavioral health are directly related to to academic outcomes and physical health.

School-based behavioral health involves early identification of mental health issues, access to counseling and psychological services, and fostering a school environment that supports mental health awareness. Student behavioral health is a growing and underserved area of need, and difficulties in this area can lead to interfering behavior.[41] Services can be efficiently incorporated into MTSS tiers as part of the SEBH framework. The Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) can support schools and districts in this area to provide tiered supports:

- Tier 1: Universal prevention, incorporating universal behavioral health screenings and support for school/home partnerships, trauma-informed training for school staff, other prevention activities, and integration with PBIS and SEL as part of overall SEBH support
- Tier 2: Targeted interventions, such as one-to-one or small-group interventions
- Tier 3: Supports for students in need of wraparound services

Additionally, school staff well-being is linked to student behavioral health and well-being. Districts and schools prioritizing SEBH should also take steps to ensure the well-being of their staff is actively considered and supported. For more, refer to "Supporting Educator Health and Wellbeing" on pages 35-36 below.

For further information and resources on school-based behavioral health, see the following:

- OSPI Mental, Social, & Behavioral Health Resources
- Youth Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention
- Interconnected Systems Framework
- Center on PBIS: Mental Health/Social-Emotional Well-Being

Implementation Resources

- [WISSP team to add content here]

Additional School and District Systems that Support Behavioral Learning

Schools and districts that use some or all of the SEBH framework in their MTSS work may also have additional systems that can be leveraged to support positive behavioral growth. The school and district systems below can be organized within MTSS work, support student SEBH well-being and prevention of interfering behavior, and can lead to a healthier school climate for students, families, and staff.

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices

Culturally responsive and sustaining practices promote student equity by ensuring the school environment affirms, rather than disconnects, students of all races, ethnicities, languages, and cultures. It is asset based and aims to weave in the cultural practices, identities, and linguistic backgrounds of each student in a given classroom, building, school, or district. Culturally sustaining

[41] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS; 2021). *Supporting child and student social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs.*

practices embrace and reflect the lived experiences of each student, and are a critical element of high-quality instruction in a safe and inclusive classroom environment. They also create a more welcoming environment for parents and other family members to participate as members of the school community.

Culturally responsive and sustaining practices are directly related to equitable and student-centered behavior support. These practices allow classrooms and schools to authentically reflect students' identities, strengths, and needs, which can result in less interfering behavior as students feel more connected, seen, and supported. In addition, these practices lead to more engaging core instruction as there are multiple entry points for students to engage in learning that taps into their lived experience. School and district staff must also be supported in their awareness and understanding of their own cultural and linguistic heritage, and how those experiences may unconsciously create expectations related to behavioral norms and values.

For examples and nonexamples of culturally responsive and sustaining practices related to positive behavior support, refer to the PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide from the Center on PBIS.

For further information and resources on culturally responsive and sustaining practices, visit:

- Center on PBIS - Equitable Supports
- Center on PBIS - Video: Culturally Responsive Systems
- New York University, Metropolitan Center for Urban Education - Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Strategies
- Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) - Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CCDEI) Standards

Engaging and Effective Instruction

Washington State identified eight criteria areas for professional performance capabilities and development of certificated classroom teachers. Each of these areas provides guidance for how teachers can take a holistic approach for delivering engaging and effective instruction:

1. Expectations: Centering instruction on high expectations for student achievement
2. Instruction: Demonstrating effective teaching practices
3. Differentiation: Recognizing individual student learning needs and developing strategies to address those needs
4. Content Knowledge: Providing clear and intentional focus on subject matter content and curriculum
5. Learning Environment: Fostering and managing a safe, positive learning environment.
6. Assessment: Using multiple student data elements to modify instruction and improve student learning
7. Families and Community: Communicating and collaborating with families and school community
8. Professional Practice: Exhibiting collaborative and collegial practices focused on improving instructional practice and student learning

Engaging and effective instruction is commonly considered the foundation for effective classroom

management.[42] Recommended practices include providing accessible ways for students to learn and show their understanding, teaching important concepts in multiple ways, ensuring instructional pacing and opportunities to respond are well-timed for students, using a variety of student groupings and response strategies, and guiding instructional practices and supports with formative assessment. Practices should be grounded in strengths-based and culturally sustaining pedagogy, provide flexibility to anticipate and respond to student needs, and ensure multilingual learners and students with disabilities can access rigorous and grade-level content. For specific instructional and classroom management practices, see Section 3 of this manual.

For further information and resources on effective and engaging instructional practices, visit:

- OSPI - Menus of Best Practices & Strategies
- IRIS Center - Online Learning Modules and Case Studies
- Center on PBIS - Examples of Engaging Instruction to Increase Equity in Education

Family Engagement

Family engagement is defined in the Family Engagement Framework as "a full and equitable partnership among families, educators, providers, and communities to support learners' development from birth through college and career. It is a collective responsibility that means doing with—not doing for—families." In this framework, principles of effective family engagement include:

- Recognizing the inherent strengths and belonging of each and every family and student
- Valuing families as experts in their children's education
- Affirming the diversity of family types, including using a multi-generational lens and building cultural and linguistic competency
- Establishing strong and trusting relationships and two-way communication between families and school staff
- Sharing power and responsibility with families to co-design instruction and student support

Family engagement improves individual student outcomes in behavior, academics, school attendance, and participation in healthy activities.[43] For students with social, emotional, and/or behavioral needs, family engagement can enhance students' sense of belonging at school and can ensure productive and trusting collaboration so each student receives the support they need.

For further information and resources on family engagement, visit:

- OSPI - Family Engagement Guidance and Toolkit
- OSPI - Family Engagement Framework Workgroup
- OSPI - Parent and Family Engagement Guides and Resources (Title I, Part A)
- OSPI - School Leader Toolkit: Authentic Family and Community Engagement to Support Continuous Improvement

Inclusionary Practices and Outcomes

Decades of research show that inclusion of students with disabilities (including those with extensive support needs) confers many academic, social, emotional, and behavioral benefits to all students,

[42] Sabornie, E.J., & Espelage, D.L. (Eds.). (2022) *Handbook of classroom management.* Routledge.
[43] Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (n.d.). *Impact of family engagement.*

with and without disabilities.[44,45] Inclusive education for students who receive special education services involves both access and learning in general education and the inclusive Individualized Education Program (IEP). All members of a student's educational team, including the student and family, have a role to play in effective instruction and support in inclusive settings.

Inclusionary practices require a team vision and expectation that each student can actively participate, belong, contribute, and learn in the school and larger community. This involves meaningful collaboration between special education teachers, general education teachers (including multilingual teachers), related service providers, families, and students. The result is a diverse, vibrant, and caring learning environment that embraces and celebrates the contributions of each to the whole. This benefits all students, including those without disabilities.

As school teams work to ensure that special education services in their schools and districts are inclusive, they should reflect on the following guiding questions:

1. Does each student with an IEP experience belonging as a member in their school and general education classroom(s)?
2. Does each student with an IEP actively participate at school across the school day?
3. Is each student with an IEP learning the grade-level general education curriculum?

It is important for all students, including students with disabilities, to experience supportive and positive relationships with general education staff and feel belonging in their general education classroom communities. For the student with a disability who engages in interfering behaviors, that network of relationships can ensure the student feels safe and supported enough to try new behaviors, ask for help, and engage in learning.

Student interfering behaviors can occur as a result of unaddressed barriers the student experiences in their learning environment, instruction, access to communication, social opportunities, or other school activities. Students eligible for special education services should also be included in school and district MTSS and SEBH support work, which means they must have access to the Tier 1 supports that all students receive, and should also receive Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 supports if determined necessary by the MTSS team. For a student eligible for special education services who engages in interfering behavior, school teams should always consider whether the IEP is adequate and a good fit to ensure the student's behavioral needs and other support needs are met. For more, refer to Section 5.

For further information and resources on inclusionary practices and outcomes, visit:

- OSPI - Comprehensive Inclusive Education
- OSPI - Extended Myths & Facts About Inclusionary Practices in Washington
- Inclusionary Practices Technical Assistance Network (IPTN)
- TIES Center - Positive Behavior Supports Overview

[44] Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Borquaye, Y., & Burke, S. (2016). *A summary of the evidence on inclusive education.* Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates.
[45] OSPI (2024). *Extended myths & facts about inclusionary practices in Washington.*

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices are commonly defined as a continuum of proactive and responsive strategies embedded within policies and processes that focus on preventing conflict through building and maintaining relationships and resolving conflict through repairing harm and restoring the impacted community. Deeply rooted in indigenous cultural practices, these approaches focus on developing respect, empathy, and accountability with the intention to change behavior, repair harm, and cultivate a culture of belonging.[46]

Preventative measures include ongoing culturally- and trauma-informed staff trainings on understanding underlying causes of student behavior, consistent integration of classroom-based procedures and routines that build community and establish a safe and supportive learning environment, and embedded opportunities for students to develop and practice SEL and problem-solving skills. Universal implementation of these preventative measures is essential for the success of conflict resolution strategies. Without these foundational relationships, practices, and shared-understandings, restorative circles, conversations, and conferences are less likely to be effective and can sometimes cause additional harm to relationships and communities.

Research shows that a reliance on punitive disciplinary practices not only increases misbehavior but is disproportionately used to punish students with disabilities and students of color. By implementing classroom and building-wide restorative practices focused on a culture of community, proactively working to meet student needs, and training both students and staff in conflict resolution skills, schools have reported a decrease in referrals and disproportionate discipline data, and an improvement in overall student behavior and school climate.[47]

For further information and resources on restorative practices, visit:

- International Institute for Restorative Practices
- OSPI - Behavior Menu of Best Practices and Strategies (pages 71-82)
- WestEd - The Toolkit Before the Toolkit: Centering Adaptive and Relational Elements of Restorative Practices for Implementation Success
- CASEL - Restorative Practices and SEL Alignment
- Rutgers University - 12 Indicators of Restorative Practices Implementation: Checklists for Administrators

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Recognizing the diversity of learners within each classroom, the research-based[48] UDL framework provides a guide for how educators can design flexible learning environments and curricula within any content area to ensure all students can equitably and inclusively engage in challenging and meaningful learning. Neurodivergence[49] and other differences in student learning should not be viewed as deficits or exceptions to the "norm," but rather as natural and expected human variations from one individual to another. School staff who use a UDL lens to embrace instead of stigmatize learner variability can engage in more productive and student-centered support, including positive

[46] Mirsky, L. (2004, May 26). *Restorative justice practices of Native American, First Nation and other Indigenous People of North America: Part two.* International Institute of Restorative Practices.
[47] Learning Policy Institute. (2023, October 18). *Improving student outcomes through restorative practices.*
[48] CAST. (2024). *Research evidence.*
[49] Johns Hopkins University (2022). *Neurodivergence at a glance.*

behavior support when needed.

The UDL Guidelines[50] provide suggestions for how educators can intentionally consider student access, support, and executive functioning by designing multiple means of:

- Engagement – with options for welcoming interests & identities, sustaining effort & persistence, and emotional capacity;
- Representation – with options for supporting perception, language & symbols, and building knowledge; and
- Action & Expression – with options for interaction, expression & communication, and strategy development.

UDL emphasizes that, by setting up the learning environment to anticipate learning style variabilities and proactively providing accommodations for identified needs and abilities, educators can more effectively remove common barriers for how their students access, process, and engage in learning. These practices align with and provide a helpful foundation for implementing other systems within this section such as inclusionary practices, SEL, and restorative practices. Preventative strategies that recognize and mitigate common instructional and learning-based stressors or activators enable more students to stay engaged, feel valued, and achieve UDL's goal of developing learner agency.

Providing all students with multiple ways of communicating learning, emotions, preferences, needs, and distress is an important part of UDL. Since student interfering behavior is often a way to communicate a need, embedding universal communication supports[51] across school environments and activities is often effective at preventing interfering behavior. In addition, when adults provide all students with multiple ways to communicate and understand each other, they are more likely to be safe in the event of a crisis, medical emergency, or other unforeseen event.

Finally, increased educator awareness of neurodiversity can support building teams in universally designing school and classroom environments to be comfortable and accessible for all students. This can result in students having more pathways to access the tools and resources they need to learn, and advocate for themselves when they need extra help – resulting in less interfering behavior in classrooms. Examples include:

- School and classroom expectations are designed intentionally to be anti-ableist
- Spaces are organized without unnecessary clutter and distractions
- Inviting and comfortable break spaces are provided in common areas and learning spaces
- Flexible seating and standing options are available in classrooms
- Students have regular opportunities for movement, attention breaks, and quiet time
- Healthy self-regulation behaviors (e.g., stimming, doodling, using fidget toys) are normalized and understood by school staff to enhance learning, attention, and/or comfort for some students
- Students are supported to learn organization skills using tools (e.g., checklists, homework folder, graphic organizer) modeled and taught by staff
- Students are able to exercise and express choices and preferences about how they learn

[50] CAST. (2024). Universal Design for Learning guidelines version 3.0 [graphic organizer]. *Lynnfield, MA: Author.*
[51] Ruby Bridges Elementary School (2021). *Building an inclusive mission and vision: You are a learner; you are a leader; you belong here.* (slides 31-34)

and show what they know
- A variety of strategies to communicate requests, needs, and feelings are taught and made available to all students

For further information and resources on UDL, visit:
- CAST - The UDL Guidelines
- TIES Center - Design for Each and Every Learner: Universal Design for Learning Modules
- IRIS Center - Universal Design for Learning: Designing Learning Experiences That Engage and Challenge All Students

Supporting Staff Capacity and Well-Being

To support students socially, emotionally, and behaviorally, staff in schools and districts must also be supported. Particularly when serving students who engage in interfering behavior, staff stress and burnout can present significant barriers to wellness and the joy of teaching. Effective school and district leaders recognize the interconnected nature of student and staff well-being, and understand that all staff must be equipped to prevent and respond to student interfering behavior using trauma-informed and equitable practices.

Professional Development Implementation Planning

Organizing student supports within an MTSS framework requires team-driven shared leadership to build staff capacity and make district and building implementation plans sustainable. To ensure the systems and resources outlined throughout this manual are consistently put into practice within buildings and classrooms, they must be accompanied by supporting leadership practices such as sustained professional development opportunities at all levels. This will help establish the infrastructure necessary to build relevant knowledge and skills and to help staff be successful in consistently supporting student needs.

Principals are required to confer with certificated employees to establish criteria for determining when certificated employees must complete classes to improve classroom management skills.[52] Nondisciplinary evidence-based interventions and systems of support include:
- Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CCDEI) standards for educators,[53]
- Teacher knowledge, skill, and performance standards including social-emotional learning[54]
- Teacher and Principal Evaluation and Growth Program (TPEP) criteria, including instructional skill, classroom management, handling of student discipline, and fostering a safe and positive learning environment[55]

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
Mindset Work is Non-Negotiable

[52] RCW 28A.400.110.
[53] RCW 28A.410.260.
[54] RCW 28A.410.270(1)(c).
[55] RCW 28A.405.100.

Each and every demonstration site has reported the critical importance of providing staff with professional development (aligned with transformational leadership) that affirms the belonging of students with interfering behaviors in all schools and classrooms. **Specifically, demonstration sites have identified the importance of what is broadly referred to as "mindset work"** to ensure all staff feel empowered with the tools to positively support students who engage in interfering behavior and see these students as "our students" rather than "someone else's students." To do this, sites have shared that the following areas of professional development have been instrumental:

- Understanding interfering behavior as communication of a need
- Shifting from a focus on student compliance (which centers the adult voice as what must be honored) to actively supporting students to build skills to resolve problems and conflict (which centers the student's voice as they learn problem-solving skills)
- Trauma-informed practices, social-emotional learning, inclusion and belonging, and strategies to build rapport and relationship with students addressed in professional development with all staff
- Incorporating social-emotional instruction and strategies into universal practices for all staff, with the understanding that students equipped with these skills will be more engaged in learning
- Strategies for maintaining connection during behavioral escalations, such as co-regulation, problem-solving conversations, or offering break spaces within each classroom
- Understanding implicit and explicit bias
- Reviewing school and/or district data patterns of disproportionality in use of discipline, restraint, and isolation, and engaging in reflective conversations about root causes and needed changes to ensure more equitable student support

Supporting Educator Well-Being

For educators and other school staff, the important work of supporting students who have experienced trauma can carry a risk of *secondary traumatic stress* (STS). STS, also called *compassion fatigue*, is "the emotional distress that arises when someone vicariously experiences the traumatic experiences of another individual."[56] Individuals in helping professions, including education, are more likely to experience STS than those in other professions.

When staff experience STS, both staff and students can be negatively impacted. Indicators of STS in school staff may include increased anxiety about safety, feelings of detachment from students, feelings of hopelessness about students and work, and difficulty with decision-making. Experiencing STS can cause staff to feel increased hypervigilance, cynicism, difficulty extending empathy, and an internal sense of professional inadequacy. It can also lead staff to rely more heavily on punitive and/or exclusionary discipline with students. [57]

Substitute House Bill 1363 (2021–22)[58] addressed STS in public education settings. It established minimum requirements for districts to establish policy and procedures related to workplace mental health, stress management, and mitigating STS. District staff can refer to the Workforce Secondary

[56] OSPI (n.d.). *Workforce secondary traumatic stress.*
[57] National Center for Safe Supportive Learning (2018). *Building trauma-sensitive schools handout packet.*
[58] Washington State Legislature - HB 1363 - 2021-22

Traumatic Stress Compliance Checklist on OSPI's Workforce Secondary Traumatic Stress webpage for more on these requirements.

What Are the Indicators of Secondary Traumatic Stress in a School or District?

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE) provides guidance on warning signs that a school system is impacted by trauma.[59] The following school and district indicators were adapted from this guidance:

- School environment has a negative atmosphere
- School environment often feels chaotic, disorganized, and unpredictable
- People at the school feel a lack of emotional and/or physical safety
- School staff collectively tend to be cynical, negative, and/or sarcastic about students
- Frequent use of harsh and punitive discipline practices by school staff to regain control
- School staff have less energy or motivation to provide students with additional support
- Lack of communication and/or frequent miscommunication among school staff
- Increasing interpersonal conflicts between school staff in different roles or departments
- School staff are often fearful of their own safety
- High rate of staff absenteeism and/or problems with work completion/quality
- High rate of staff turnover
- Student and family complaints about the school have increased

When school and district leaders believe STS is a concern at the classroom, school, or district level, they should take steps to address it. NCSSLE recommends this process involves seeking feedback, providing opportunities for shared decision-making that includes staff and families, and building strong staff connections that include both supervision and peer support. If student behavior is identified as a concern, leaders may also wish to evaluate their tiered school and district systems to ensure that students who have more complex social, emotional, and behavioral needs are equitably supported by robust and well-prepared teams (rather than one or two individual staff). See Section 2 for more information on specific improvements districts can consider.

Resources for Supporting Educator Health and Well-Being

- OSPI - Workforce Secondary Traumatic Stress
  - Reducing Secondary Traumatic Stress in the K-12 Workforce | Alliance for a Healthier Generation
  - OSPI Workforce Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) Compliance Checklist
- National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments - Building Trauma-Sensitive Schools

[59] NCSSLE (2018). *Building trauma-sensitive schools handout packet.*

Considerations for School Discipline

Districts have a duty to ensure school is safe for all students. School leaders have a variety of responses available to them through district policies and procedures to fulfill that duty, including alternatives to suspension.[60,61] Exclusionary discipline practices, such as classroom exclusions, suspensions, and expulsions, may temporarily address a safety need posed by a student's interfering behavior. However, it is important to emphasize that school exclusions do not positively change student behavior. This manual provides multiple effective pathways to support students in learning prosocial behaviors as alternatives to interfering behavior, including guidance in Section 4 about supporting individual students with behavior needs that significantly interfere with learning.

This portion of the manual describes several key considerations for school discipline. It is not intended to be a comprehensive resource for understanding school discipline requirements – for guidance and further information, visit OSPI's Student Discipline page. While student discipline laws and rules apply to all students, there are additional requirements for students eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Those requirements are described in brief in Section 5 of this manual.

Avoiding Ineffective and Harmful Disciplinary Practices

A study in 2006 by the Journal of Adolescent Health[62] analyzed the use and effect of exclusionary discipline practices in Washington State. The study found that zero-tolerance disciplinary practices, a form of mandatory and uniformly applied pre-determined consequences, were commonly relied on in Washington State to punish students who engaged in interfering behavior. While the study stated these practices were intended as a means for preventing school violence, a follow up report by the American Psychological Association's Zero Tolerance Task Force[63] found no evidence that zero-tolerance disciplinary practices reduced violence, improved school climate, increased consistency in schools, or deterred future behavior. The report did find evidence, however, that these practices increased racial disparities and were likely to have negative effects on child development. In response, the report offers recommendations including reforming disciplinary response practices to implement preventative and appropriate measures that improve school climate and promote a sense of belonging.

Current Washington State guidance on student discipline under Chapter 392-400 WAC states that the purpose of disciplinary response should implement culturally responsive discipline policies and practices that "respond to the needs and strengths of students, support students in meeting behavioral expectations, and keep students in the classroom to the maximum extent possible".[64] This guidance aligns with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act which requires state and district plans to include provisions for improving school learning conditions by reducing the overuse of

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[60] RCW 28A.600.410.

[61] Examples of alternatives to suspension are described in the Behavior Menu of Best Practices and Strategies (pages 71-82, 151-156).

[62] Hemphill, S. A., Toumbouroum J. W., Herrenkohl, T. I., McMorris, B. J., & Catalano, R. F. (2006). The effect of school suspensions and arrests on subsequent adolescent antisocial behavior in Australia and the United States. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *39*(5), 736 – 744.

[63] American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force. (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools?: An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist, 63*(9), 852–862.

[64] WAC 392-400-010.

exclusionary discipline practices and the use of "aversive behavioral interventions that compromise student health and safety."[65]

Reducing Student Exclusions with School-Based Threat Assessment

School-based threat assessment is a preventative, trauma informed process, utilizing early interventions to keep students safe and engaged in school.[66] The main objectives of school-based threat assessment are to assess potential threats to determine the level of concern and action required to address, organize resources and strategies to support identified students, and maintain a sense of psychological safety within the community.

According to RCW 28.A.320.123, suspension or expulsion based solely on the grounds of a school-based threat assessment referral is explicitly prohibited. These are separate but parallel procedures. Disciplinary decisions for interfering behavior should be made separately from, and should not rely on, the outcome of a school-based threat assessment. However, discipline processes may certainly incorporate the findings or recommendations from the threat assessment, such as shortening the length of an exclusion and/or informing the development of a culturally sensitive and responsive reengagement plan under WAC 392-400-710 to support the student in successfully returning to school.

All districts are required to have a School-Based Threat Assessment Program, team, and adopted school board policy and procedure. All nine educational service districts also have Threat Assessment Coordinators within their Regional School Safety Center to provide additional guidance, training, and implementation support.

Additional resources and guidance on threat assessment can be found at:

- OSPI - School-Based Threat Assessment
- OSPI - Washington State Threat Assessment Fidelity Document

Documenting Disciplinary Removals

All school districts must collect data on disciplinary actions taken in each school and must record these actions using the statewide student data system.[67] This allows districts to take required actions, described below, to monitor the use of school discipline and prevent discriminatory use of school discipline against student groups. It can also assist districts to determine local needs for professional development and resources based on school discipline patterns.

Some districts may be accustomed to addressing student interfering behavior with "informal" disciplinary removals that are not appropriately documented as exclusions by school staff. OSPI is aware of a variety of "informal removal" practices that would be considered school or classroom exclusions, including but not limited to:

[65] PUBL095.PS - SEC. 1111(g). [20 U.S.C. 6311]
[66] Madfis, E., Silva, J. R., Crepeau-Hobson, F., & Sulkowski, M. L. (2025). School threat assessment team recommendations: Surveillance versus social support and racial/ethnic equity. *School Psychology Review*, 1–14.
[67] RCW 28A.600.460.

- Calling parents to pick up a student early without referring to or documenting the action as a suspension
- Repeatedly responding to a student's behavior by having them wait in a staff member's office for extended periods of time without documenting it as a classroom exclusion and/or in-school suspension
- Excluding a student from school unless their parent or other caregiver attends with them
- Excluding a student from school if their assigned paraeducator is absent for the day

Informal removals violate the requirements in RCW 28A.600.460 when not documented appropriately as a school suspension or classroom exclusion. School staff are always obligated to ensure educational access and must provide students due process rights when the student is excluded by school staff, regardless of whether school staff refer to that exclusion as a suspension or a "day off." Informal removals can also introduce confusion for parents around what disciplinary actions schools are permitted to take.

For students with disabilities, when informal removals are used repeatedly or as part of a pattern of disciplinary responses, those removals may be equivalent to suspensions -- in which case, state and federal disciplinary protections for students eligible under the IDEA and/or Section 504 must be followed. In addition, if a student's interfering behavior is impacting their learning or the learning of others, the team may have cause to suspect the student may have a disability. Districts must meet their *child find* obligation to refer for evaluation any student suspected of having a disability and needing special education or related aids and services. For further information on requirements related to discipline for students with disabilities, see Section 5.

Preventing and Addressing Disproportionate Use of Discipline

As noted above (pp. 37-38), student discipline is often implemented in ways that demonstrate and exacerbate biases in school and district systems. Students with disabilities, Black students, and boys are suspended, expelled, and referred to law enforcement many times more often than other students relative to enrollment.[68,69] These unjust practices can result in systemic discrimination, often beginning as early as preschool, leading to poorer educational and life outcomes for these students.[70]

To prevent and address possible discrimination in the use of student discipline, Washington districts are required to collect and report data on student exclusions as described on page 38 above. WAC 392-190-048 requires that, at least annually, districts must also review their discipline data – disaggregated by sex, race, multilingual learner status, and disability – and determine if the district has disproportionately disciplined students in any of these categories. If the district identifies any such patterns of disproportionate use of discipline for any of these student groups, the district "must take prompt action to ensure that the disproportion is not the result of discrimination."

Additional resources on student discipline can be found at:

[68] OCR (2023). *2020-21 Civil Rights Data Collection: Student discipline and school climate in U.S. public schools.*
[69] OCR (2020). *2017-18 Civil Rights Data Collection: The use of restraint and seclusion on children with disabilities in K-12 schools.*
[70] Executive Office of the President (2016). *Report: The continuing need to rethink discipline.*

- Chapter 392-400 WAC
- OSPI - Student Discipline
- OSPI - Special Education Behavior and Discipline
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Report of Unfair Discipline at School and Associations with Health Risk Behaviors and Experiences

SECTION 3: CLASSROOM PRACTICES FOR SAFE AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING

Social, emotional, and behavioral health (SEBH) learning and growth is part of typical childhood and adolescent development. Missing opportunities to learn and practice these skills can contribute to interfering behavior in the classroom. These gaps can be larger for students who have experienced restricted educational access and/or opportunity due to trauma, economic hardship, foster care placement, and/or discrimination (based on race, disability, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religion, and so forth). It is also likely the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on mental health, wellness, and learning of SEBH skills for many children and youth. When teachers plan their instruction and classroom practices to include teaching of SEBH skills, they can address these learning gaps and prevent most student interfering behavior.

> *Learning is inherently social and emotional.... Emotions and relationships can either motivate students to engage in learning, or, if unmanaged, interfere with attention, memory, and positive behaviors.*[71]

School staff and leaders can and should operate from the understanding that:

- SEBH skills are learned, and thus can be taught – just like any other skill
- All students need SEBH teaching and learning for positive postsecondary outcomes,
- Some students also experience a greater need for SEBH teaching and learning compared to their peers

Section 3 describes practices for school leaders and staff to establish a culture of belonging for all at the classroom level, and strategies for educators to create organized and relational learning spaces that support all students to learn SEBH skills that make interfering behavior unnecessary.

Creating a Classroom Culture of Belonging for Students, Families, and Staff

Strengthening student connection, deepening partnerships with families, and prioritizing staff well-being are essential strategies in creating inclusive, supportive school communities in which all members feel seen, valued, and safe. Exclusionary behavior responses, including restraint and isolation, can create disconnection from the school community for students, families, and staff, negatively impacting mental health, wellness, and engagement at school. To reduce restraint and eliminate isolation, educators and school leaders can take a proactive and holistic approach to building a culture of belonging that reaches students, families, and school staff alike.

Increasing Student Connection and Belonging

When students feel a strong sense of connection to their school and classroom community of adults and peers, they are more likely to maintain attendance and engage in learning, and less

[71] OSPI (2024). *Washington SEL implementation brief: For educators* (p. 1).

likely to engage in interfering and/or risky behaviors such as substance use.[72,73] Exclusionary and/or punitive classroom disciplinary actions do not teach a student prosocial behavior, and can compromise a student's feeling of connection to the school and classroom community.

To foster students' authentic feelings of belonging in the classroom, school staff can:[74]

- Seek common ground and connection with each individual student
- Establish and communicate high expectations for all students, and support students to reach them
- Structure learning and group work to foster student cooperation and connection
- Use culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive, and anti-ableist practices to ensure marginalized students feel seen and valued in the classroom
- Expect and signal to students that they will make mistakes as part of their learning
- Support all students with classroom practices and instructional design that encourages students to put in effort, challenge themselves, and value each others' contributions

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
Start the Day with Regulation and Connection

Many demonstration site staff shared benefits of starting the school day with routines that create space for students to self-regulate and connect with others. Examples include:

- Greeting students at the door to the classroom or in the hallways during arrival, taking particular care to greet students who might feel more disconnected or overlooked. Note that staff should do this in a desiloed way – students with disabilities should not be exclusively greeted by special education staff, and students without disabilities should not be exclusively greeted by general education staff.
- Starting the day with a "soft landing" where students begin with low-demand activities that help them ease into the school day
- Incorporating a "mindful minute" into the morning routine, including adult modeling and use of mindfulness strategies

When these routines are part of the school day, staff should ensure all students have access to them, including students with disabilities.

Partnerships with Families for Inclusive, Welcoming Classrooms

To create safe classrooms for all students to learn and belong, school staff should prioritize partnerships with the families of all students. However, these partnerships can be complex and challenging for families of students who engage in interfering behavior and the school staff who serve them. Many families encounter barriers to participating in family engagement opportunities, are reluctant to participate due to experiences or expectation that they will be judged by school

[72] OSPI (2023). *Washington state social emotional learning implementation guide.*
[73] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2009). *School connectedness: Strategies for increasing protective factors among youth.*
[74] Regional Education Laboratory Northwest (2018). *Shifting the current school climate: Sense of belonging and social and emotional learning.*

staff, and report that their input and opinions are not valued at school.[75] Research suggests that teachers are more likely to hold negative perceptions of the parents of these students who engage in interfering behavior, which may hinder teacher-family partnerships and discourage collaborative efforts to support the student.[76] It is important that this dynamic is disrupted, as student behavior improves when schools and classrooms provide family-centered engagement opportunities and a sense of community.[77]

Educators may consider the following actions to build classroom spaces that engage all families and students in ways that are culturally relevant, affirm the belonging of each and every student, and lead to positive student outcomes:

- Anticipate and welcome student families inclusive of a variety of configurations, including extended family members, blended families, LGBTQIA+ parents, foster parents, co-parents, disabled parents, and single parents
- Establish two-way communication with family members using translation when needed, refraining from jargon and in consideration of cultural factors for communication etiquette
- Provide and connect families with opportunities to participate in the classroom and school, including leadership opportunities, and proactively address possible barriers to participation
- In parent-teacher conferences and other collaborative discussions, ask family members about their student's strengths, preferences, interests, and needs, and make efforts to incorporate that information into teaching and learning activities
- Using reflective practice, notice which families participate in classroom events, volunteer opportunities, and two-way communication; when families do not participate, make adjustments to address barriers and ensure opportunities are designed equitably with student and family belonging in mind
- Avoid waiting to communicate with families until there is a concern about a student's behavior; instead, start the school year with a strong foundation for collaboration and mutual trust using the strategies above

Staff Well-Being for Student Well-Being

Teachers' perceptions of their own effectiveness contribute to their sense of well-being in their classrooms and schools. Supporting a student who engages in interfering behavior – especially when those behaviors impact others' safety and learning in the classroom – can put strain on a teacher's belief that they are effective. This often contributes to significant stress for the teacher, and can result in overreliance on ineffective responses to student interfering behavior (e.g., reprimands, frustration, punitive consequences, and unnecessary use of restraint and isolation). School and district leaders are strongly advised to view teacher and staff well-being, including supports needed for staff to feel capable and comfortable engaging in positive behavior support and SEBH skill development, as a necessary ingredient for student well-being in the classroom.

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[75] Kelty, N. E., & Wakabayashi, T. (2020). Family engagement in schools: Parent, educator, and community perspectives. *SAGE Open*, *10*(4).

[76] Stormont, M., Herman, K., Reinke, W., David, K., & Goel, N. (2013). Latent profile analysis of teacher perceptions of parent contact and comfort. *School Psychology Quarterly, 28*(3), 195–209.

[77] Wood, L. & Bauman, E. (2017). *How family, school, and community engagement can improve student achievement.* American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
Leadership Support for Behavior Support and Teacher Well-Being

RREI demonstration sites have shared the importance of building leaders supporting classroom staff who serve students with interfering behavior. They recommend that administrators:

- Demonstrate strong leadership during an emotional/behavioral crisis by actively supporting the student in crisis and their classroom team. This includes:
  - Being physically present, engaged, and familiar with the student's individual needs during a crisis
  - Using trained de-escalation strategies and modeling those strategies for staff
  - If a restraint is needed, conducting it (with the training to do so)
  - Debriefing with staff
- Become trained in *psychological first aid* to support staff after crisis situations
- Check in with staff after behavioral incidents and crises to see what support they need, both practically and emotionally
- Become familiar enough with a student's behavioral supports to be able to implement them, allowing staff to step away for a few minutes if needed

There are many benefits when school leaders provide support to classroom staff, including increased well-being, greater professional skills and sense of mastery in trauma-informed behavior support, and a sense of support from their leadership and school community. RREI demonstration site staff who engage in this work report overwhelmingly positive effects, both in terms of teacher satisfaction and more effective support for interfering behavior. Compassion fatigue can be contagious, so leaders should build a climate of shared community for all staff (including special education staff) that provides a sense of belonging and connection to the joy and inherent meaning in teaching.

Practical strategies for teachers who support students with behavioral needs include:[78]

- Checking in to ground oneself and other adults on the team at the beginning of the school day, before going home, and during other natural transitions in the school day
- Learning techniques for mindful breathing and/or muscle relaxation, and using those techniques during challenging moments with students
- After an incident of interfering behavior, cultivating compassion for the student by reflecting on possible reasons for the student's behavior and strategies to support their learning and belonging, rather than cultivating negative emotional reactions to the student
- Engaging in problem-solving and reflective conversations with team members and school leaders
- Developing routines with a balance of compassion satisfaction, relaxation, connection with others, and personal meaning

Selected Resources

- OSPI - Family Engagement Guidance and Toolkit

[78] Paterson, B., Taylor, J., Young, J., & Walker, L. (2019). *Compassion fatigue in teachers working with children whose distress may present as behaviour that challenges.*

- Center on PBIS - Classroom Family Engagement Rubric
- Practitioner Brief: Culturally Responsive Practices to Collaborate with Families
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: Classroom Level Effective Family Engagement
- Professional Quality of Life Scale (PROQOL)
- CPI: Trauma-Informed Care for Educators

Classroom Strategies for Prevention, Teaching, and Response to Student Interfering Behavior

SEBH skills are part of universal teaching and learning in effective classrooms. These skills directly influence students' academic success and post-school outcomes. They are necessary for students to set goals, work with others, communicate effectively, and handle stress – important for academic learning, social connection, and access to higher education and employment opportunities.

Educators and school staff can support student development of SEBH skills by creating learning spaces in which they intentionally embed teaching of those skills, instead of merely reacting to undesired behaviors as they occur. Many interfering behaviors can be prevented when school staff cultivate an organized, clear, inclusive, and engaging learning space. The following practices, adapted in part from the recommendations of the Center on PBIS, support student SEBH skill growth and can help prevent the use of restraint and isolation.

Welcoming and Organized Space

The design of a classroom often sets the stage for how students and adults will interact there. Well-designed classrooms are safe and inviting spaces intentionally designed to include and represent students, promote focus and participation in learning, facilitate smooth transitions between activities and movement through the space, and build a sense of community in the classroom.

Key Features of a Welcoming and Organized Space

- Classroom areas are arranged so that all staff and students (including anyone with mobility devices, service dogs, and other accommodations) can easily move around the space and access learning areas and materials
- Classroom areas are planned and defined, including space for a break and/or quiet work available for any student who needs it
- Clutter and distraction are minimized in all areas of the classroom, and both students and staff have a regular place to store belongings and materials when not in use
- Classroom bulletin boards and other visual elements are easy for students to see, and reflect student contributions, interests, communities, and cultures
- Unstructured and independent time, including transitions between activities and free time, is intentionally designed for student learning and practice of SEBH skills
- Transitions between activities and/or locations are practiced and efficient

Clear Expectations, Routines, and Procedures

Defined schoolwide expectations, classroom expectations, routines, and procedures set the stage for learning and SEBH skill development. Just like adults value clear expectations and understanding of usual routines and procedures in the workplace, students benefit from the same

clarity as learners in in the classroom. Expectations, routines, and procedures create a cohesive environment in which students can feel safe and secure to engage in learning, challenge themselves, and make mistakes with support to learn from them.

- *Schoolwide expectations* describe social, emotional, and behavioral skills for students and staff to collectively create a safe and supportive school community. Schoolwide expectations are usually phrased as character traits or concepts, such as "responsibility" or "safety," and are often established through a school's multitiered system of supports (MTSS) program. For further information and resources on MTSS, see Section 2.
- *Classroom expectations* connect schoolwide expectations to specific social, emotional, and behavioral expectations relevant to the classroom setting. Teams can create other sets of expectations for a variety of school settings, including the bus, cafeteria, and hallway. This can be helpful in teaching context-dependent skills, like hand-raising, that are expected in some settings but not others.
- *Routines and procedures* connect common classroom routines for students – like turning in work, transitioning between locations, and meeting personal needs – with the teacher's preferred procedures for how students complete those routines. Identifying common routines and then teaching the procedures for each can help the classroom run smoothly.

Educators who teach expectations, routines, and procedures in their classrooms are equipping their students with the SEBH skills to navigate each school day with greater confidence. Settings in which these are not taught can be frustrating for students and staff, with frequent staff reprimands, raised voices, and lost instructional time. When designed well, expectations, routines, and procedures proactively name the specific SEBH skills students and staff will engage in for learning and community. Educators and students can also work together to co-create expectations, routines, and procedures. This can cultivate a sense of shared responsibility and ownership between students and staff for a positive classroom climate.

To achieve these positive results, expectations, rules, and procedures must be taught and re-taught throughout the year. Strategies for selecting and teaching classroom rules and expectations are outlined below.

Key Features of Clear Classroom Expectations, Routines, and Procedures

- Describe expected social, emotional, and behavioral skills:
    - That build student skills and contribute to learning
    - With clear and grade-appropriate language
    - Describing observable student actions, not feelings or attitudes
    - In terms of what students are expected to *do*, rather than what they should *not do*
- Align classroom expectations with schoolwide expectations whenever possible
- Ensure students can recall each classroom expectation by not exceeding 3-5 overall
- Teach and refer to classroom expectations and routines regularly and frequently
- Post information about expectations, routines, and procedures at student level, ensuring they are accessible for all students (e.g., including visual aids, translated text, and/or braille)
- Seek feedback from all families and students to ensure that expectations, routines, and procedures are culturally sustaining and inclusive of all students, including students with disabilities
- Avoid expectations, routines, or procedures that are arbitrary or for adult convenience only

Identifying and Intentionally Teaching SEBH Skills

To address student behavioral needs in the classroom, educators should identify the SEBH skills their students need and instructional strategies to teach those skills. Staff who take a preventative and skills-focused approach are more effective at creating safe and supportive classrooms than those who manage interfering behavior solely by reacting to it afterwards. For a student who has been restrained and/or isolated, it is even more important that educators identify and teach the student needed SEBH skills so they can learn, engage with others, and meet their needs in healthy ways.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding: *Preventing Interfering Behavior Requires Teaching SEBH Skills*

Tier 1 instruction in SEBH skills for all students is a highly effective practice for preventing interfering behavior. In one demonstration district, leaders have developed *behavior matrices* which allow staff to identify and teach SEBH skills by grade level. In these classrooms, all students benefit from planned instruction that supports both SEBH learning and increased academic engagement.

Positive development of SEBH skills should be intentionally incorporated into teaching plans and instructional design of learning spaces. Planned and embedded teaching to support student development of SEBH skills leads quickly to improved classroom behavior and wellbeing for both students and staff.

Washington State's Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Standards and Benchmarks

Washington state supports teaching many of these critical skills through the SEL Standards and Benchmarks, developed and adopted in January 2020. They follow four guiding principles that practices be equitable, universally designed, culturally-sustaining, and trauma-informed[79]. The six standards represent areas of social emotional competence that a student develops by learning, practicing, and demonstrating skills in prosocial behaviors. Each standard is listed below, along with an example of a related skill that supports reduction of interfering behaviors.

SEL Standard	Prevention of Interfering Behavior
Self-Awareness	Student is aware of their emotions, allowing them to understand their experiences of agitation or escalation.
Self-Management	Student has learned strategies for managing stress, allowing them to regulate themself while agitated or escalated.
Self-Efficacy	Student is able to self-advocate, allowing them to explain what is causing ongoing distress that previously led to a crisis situation.
Social Awareness	Student is aware that their classmates have many different opinions, cultures, and values, allowing them to better understand disagreements that might cause escalation.
Social Management	Student is able to resolve conflicts with peers, allowing them to avoid escalating to crisis during challenging social interactions.
Social Engagement	Student is aware that their actions affect others, allowing them to understand how they can help build a positive school community.

[79] OSPI (2025). *Social emotional learning (SEL).*

Key Features of Intentionally Teaching SEBH Skills

- Plan and provide instruction on SEBH skills, with examples and non-examples of each skill when appropriate based on student grade level and learning context (e.g., demonstrating how to request a hall pass, use and clean up materials for an activity, or follow expectations in the locker room)
- Help students understand SEBH skills in relation to context, including the use of different skills for different settings and activities
- Model SEBH skills for students (e.g., demonstrating taking a deep breath to calm oneself)
- Monitor students' use of SEBH skills using proximity to support skill use (e.g., reduce the distance between the teacher and student when providing directions and/or when interfering behavior may occur)
- Teach students how to monitor their own use of SEBH skills
- Allow and create opportunities for students to practice SEBH skills in natural contexts, planning ahead to provide positive acknowledgment or effective feedback when needed
- Use attention signals and/or scripts to help students know when to use a certain skill (e.g., using a clapping signal that students echo as a signal that it is time for quiet voices)
- Give directions to students that are phrased as directives that describe the expected behavior, rather than asking students to stop a certain behavior
- Remind students of expected SEBH skills at the beginning of the day and prior to routine transitions throughout the day

Engaging and Relevant Instruction

Well-designed instruction is a necessary component of effective classroom management. Students who are deeply engaged in learning are less likely to engage in interfering behavior and more likely to learn SEB skills (such as collaboration and problem-solving) that support learning. This sort of instruction is relevant, challenging, contextualized, and designed for students' individual needs, strengths, and interests.

Educators who deliver engaging and relevant instruction:

- Maintain and signal appropriately high expectations of all students
- Understand and expect individual learner differences
- Intentionally establishing supports to helping students meet those high expectations
- Provide universally designed and culturally sustaining learning experiences that allow for student voice and multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression[80]

Key Features of Engaging and Relevant Instruction

- Recognize that there is no perfect "one size fits all" strategy that will effectively engage all students. Relevant instruction uses diverse practices.
- Communicate instruction using multiple representations of the content, such as graphics, media, and/or text.
- When using imagery and other visual materials, ensure that they represent the school community, and do not promote stereotypical depictions.
- Prompt students to make connections to previously-learned concepts, including their own experiences.

[80] CAST (2024). *Universal Design for Learning guidelines version 3.0.*

- Relate content to real-life applications that might be encountered by students, such as current news, school events, or future interests.
- Invite students to engage with materials in different ways, such as through writing, drawing, or verbal discussion.
- Provide opportunities for students to become involved in lesson creation or topic selection.
- Provide opportunities for students to collaborate with peers in co-creating a shared understanding of a text or topic.
- Consider student demographics to identify any specific materials that should be included, or that should be excluded, from instructional use.

Authentic and Supportive Feedback

As students learn and refine their SEB skills, school staff can support these skills with thoughtful encouragement and feedback. *Specific praise*, when delivered authentically, is an evidence-based teaching practice to support SEB skill development.[81] Just like any area of learning, when students make mistakes in their use of SEB skills, school staff can provide timely and teaching-focused corrective feedback to help students self-correct and learn from each mistake. Through both specific praise and corrective feedback, school staff can enhance teaching and learning of SEB skills in a growth-focused way.

Key Features of Authentic and Supportive Feedback

- Use specific praise to reinforce students for using SEB skills by naming the skill or behavior and providing sincere positive feedback
    - "Thanks for helping your partner brainstorm – I noticed you really listening to their ideas before jumping in with your own"
    - "Hey, thanks for welcoming [new student] to class today. I bet that made them feel more comfortable."
    - "Thanks for keeping your hand up and waiting for me to call on you – I appreciate the patience!"
- Cultivate opportunities for students to provide gratitude and appreciation to one another
- Provide corrective feedback in a calm, matter-of-fact voice to redirect students to use SEB skills (e.g., "Remember to walk when you're headed out to recess")
- When a student makes a mistake in their use of SEB skills, focus on supporting/reteaching the intended skill instead of focusing on the mistake
- Provide corrective feedback on an SEB mistake quietly and away from other students
- Aim to provide five specific praise statements for every one corrective feedback statement
- Give all feedback as soon as possible to maximize student learning
- Learn how students prefer to receive feedback (e.g., public, private, written, verbal) and provide feedback in that manner whenever possible

[81] IRIS Center (n.d.). *Behavior-specific praise.*

SECTION 4: EFFECTIVE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH EXTENSIVE BEHAVIOR LEARNING NEEDS

When serving individual students with more extensive behavioral needs, effective teams use collaborative processes, student-centered problem solving, and evidence based practices for social, emotional, and behavioral health (SEBH) support. For students with the most intensive needs, these practices typically include the development of a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) and behavioral intervention plan (BIP). This section describes each of these areas of support in detail.

Although this section focuses on developing effective individual supports for students, the classroom environment, interactions, and relationships are important predictors of student interfering behavior. In other words, successful behavior support requires that teams create welcoming and inclusive schools and classrooms that support students where they are. Individual behavior supports will not be as effective without these features in place. The problem solving and collaboration processes described in this section are also opportunities for teams to review, reflect, and address needed practices in areas related to school climate, school and district SEBH support, and classroom practices. For related resources, refer to Sections 1, 2, and 3 of this manual.

Throughout this section, the term *behavioral intervention plan* (BIP) will be used to refer to an intensive and individualized behavior support plan. It is important to note that a BIP can be developed for any student who requires this level of support, regardless of their eligibility for services via an IEP or 504 Plan. Also, some districts use other terms to refer to individualized behavior plans. Regardless of how a district names these plans, the guidance in this section can be used to understand recommended practices and requirements to collaboratively develop and implement effective behavioral teaching strategies for individual students with extensive behavior support needs.

Teaming for Individual Behavioral Interventions

This section describes a teaming and problem-solving process, aligned with best practices, that districts and schools can use or adapt to address student interfering behavior in a positive and teaching-focused way. It is especially compatible with the three tiers of the MTSS framework, including SEBH support, discussed in Section 2. While the process can be used in settings without MTSS established, MTSS markedly enhances the effectiveness and resource efficiency of this process. Without the intentional structure of MTSS and emphasis on high-quality universal supports, teams may find that they have a disproportionately large number of students who appear to need individual behavior plans. Teams that have incorporated the MTSS framework typically have regular team meetings to review student data, discuss progress, and determine next steps for support. This allows teams to proactively address student needs before larger problems develop. These steps are embedded in the problem-solving process described in this chapter.

Multidisciplinary Teaming for Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health (SEBH)

In this section, the term "multi-disciplinary team" is used as an inclusive term to refer to school teams which meet regularly to discuss student needs across the whole school. Schools may refer to these teams in a variety of ways (e.g., MTSS team, Response to Intervention [RTI] team, Student Success Team [SST], etc.). No matter the name, multi-disciplinary teams should engage in a variety of actions and processes to support student needs, including:

- Collectively committing to a student-centered problem-solving process that affirms the student's belonging and worth as a member of the school community
- Collecting and reviewing data to determine student and staff needs
- Implementing tiered supports and/or interventions that are evidence-based for the specific needs of students, including steps like:
    - Planning the support or intervention based on student data
    - Preparing materials
    - Arranging for training for all staff involved in implementation
    - Reflecting on the outcome of the support or intervention using data
- Coordinating team meetings, managing the team's agenda, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and outlining next steps

Multidisciplinary teaming should not be reserved just for specialists – it is best when used in a team approach including the staff who serve the student. The specific individuals who comprise a school's multi-disciplinary team can vary. Effective teaming depends on whether the individuals on the team are prepared for the different responsibilities of the team, not on whether the school or district has specific individuals with specific job titles available to participate. In other words, even if a district does not employ a certain specialist, such as a school behavior analyst or school social worker, they should still have staff prepared to discuss and address student behavior who can participate in a multi-disciplinary team.

In most situations, a typical multi-disciplinary team focused on SEBH could include the following:

- The student's teacher(s), including:
    - General education teacher(s)
    - Special education teacher (only if applicable)
- Principal or assistant principal
- Certificated staff who provide services related to social, emotional, and behavioral health (e.g., a school psychologist, behavior analyst, counselor, and/or social worker)
- Other support staff or educational staff associates who serve the student

Student-Centered Problem Solving

This section outlines a student-centered problem-solving process for SEBH support that can be used by multi-disciplinary teams to support individual student needs. Guiding questions for the team are included on page 56.

Step 1: Define the Behavior and Collect Baseline Data

First, the team collaboratively identifies one specific, measurable, and observable interfering behavior to prioritize. It is important that the team centers the student's access to educational and social opportunity as they identify a priority behavior. The team should not prioritize a behavior that is of concern primarily due to staff convenience, personal preferences, or expressions of the student's disability that do not interfere with safety or learning.

Once an interfering behavior is selected to prioritize, the team should define it in clear, measurable, and observable terms. The definition should allow anyone unfamiliar with the student to record the behavior's occurrence or nonoccurrence as consistently as the student's teacher. The team should then establish a short period for baseline data collection, gathered daily, and designate roles and responsibilities for recording data. This ensures the baseline captures a representative and reliable picture of the behavior over an adequate time span. Baseline data should be graphed using a line graph showing one data point per school day.

When appropriate, the team may use this time period to conduct a *functional behavioral assessment* (FBA; pp. 57-59) to gather more systematic information about the root cause, or *function*, of the student's behavior. Developing an FBA greatly increases the likelihood that the BIP will be effective. In an MTSS framework, this step typically occurs as the student is considered for, or is already served by, Tier 3 supports. **The student does not need to qualify for special education or 504 services to have an FBA completed.**

Step 2: Identify Underlying Needs and Select Alternative Skills to Teach and Support

After baseline data are collected, the team should reconvene to review the data together and develop a hypothesis about the underlying need(s) indicated by the student's interfering behavior. To do this, the team should consider any patterns in their baseline data as well as other observations and information about the student's overall needs. If the team has completed an FBA as recommended as part of the previous step, they should review and discuss the results at this time.

Once the team believes they have identified the underlying need(s) based on the information above, they can select at least one *alternative skill* (sometimes referred to as a replacement behavior) to teach the student. An alternative skill allows the student to meet the same underlying need as the interfering behavior. To be considered a skill, it must pass the *potato test* – meaning that it is not an action that cannot be performed by an inanimate object, such as a potato.[82]

An alternative skill is characterized by the following:

- Equally or more effective at meeting the underlying need than the interfering behavior was
- Positive and reflective of student strengths
- Appropriate for the student's age/grade level
- Does not stigmatize the student
- Passes the potato test

It can also be very helpful for the team to discuss short-term and long-term goals for the student, both in terms of reducing the interfering behavior and learning the alternative skill. Since positive behavioral change is often a slow process, this can support the team in recognizing small indicators of early success.

[82] "Peter will sit quietly in his chair" is a description that does not pass the potato test.

Case Study Example: Choosing the Right Alternative Skills for Michael

Michael's team has been working to support him in his 8th grade math class. Michael is an outgoing student with many friends and great taste in music. This year, in math, he often acts out by swearing, flipping off the teacher or his classmates, making dismissive comments ("You don't even know how to teach"), and leaving the room without permission. His team believes the underlying need is that Michael has been struggling with math this year, leading to high stress and outbursts. Michael also seems to be too embarrassed to ask for help. The current BIP is ineffective. The team's desired behaviors for Michael in this BIP are as follows:

Michael will stay in math for the full duration of class, complete his work, and refrain from making rude comments.

After meeting to review his BIP and reflect on why it is not effective, Michael's team determined the behaviors they were trying to teach him were not well-designed alternative skills:

- ✘ None of the desired behaviors were *as effective or more effective* at helping Michael get support for his learning needs or cope with his stress
- ✘ None of the desired behaviors tapped into Michael's existing strengths
- ✓ The desired behaviors are age/grade appropriate
- ✘ While the desired behaviors did not directly stigmatize Michael, they did nothing to help him avoid the embarrassment of struggling academically
- ✘ Several of the desired behaviors do not pass the potato test

Michael's team decided to select more thoughtful alternative skills to teach Michael instead. After a collaborative discussion centered in Michael's strengths and underlying needs, they identified the following alternative skills to teach:

Michael will access extra math support in WIN time, and will use those skills (with subtle reminders from his teacher) in class. When he is frustrated, Michael will identify his need for a 5-minute break by asking for a hall pass, or will take a break when prompted by his teacher. Breaks will be presented by his teacher as requests for classroom help (e.g., "Can you pick up some copies from the front office?") to avoid embarrassment. Michael will be permitted to listen to music on headphones during his breaks.

These alternative skills:

- ✓ Are as effective or more effective for Michael's underlying needs
- ✓ Incorporate one of his strengths (taking a break to listen to music)
- ✓ Are all age/grade appropriate
- ✓ Prevent stigma and embarrassment
- ✓ All pass the potato test

Step 3: Prepare Additional Teaching and Support

Once the team has identified an alternative skill to teach, they should prepare a BIP that both teaches the student to use the skill in real-world situations and provides reinforcement when the student does so. In districts using an MTSS framework, a BIP is typically considered a Tier 3 support. The BIP should be developed collaboratively with the student's parent or guardian, as well as the student whenever possible. When a BIP is developed for a student eligible for special education services, it becomes part of the IEP. **However, a BIP can be developed for any student, regardless of whether or not they are eligible for special education or Section 504 services.**

When developing the BIP, the team should document the necessary time, resources, and staff responsibilities required for effective implementation. This includes decisions about when the intervention will begin, who will create and/or purchase any materials, and which team members need additional training or support. This ensures the intervention is ready for implementation and helps the student benefit from the plan immediately. All implementing team members should be trained to implement the plan. Without this step, the plan may not be implemented consistently and the student will likely not benefit. The team should review the intervention start date, identify involved staff, and schedule training. A coaching period may be helpful, offering opportunities for modeling, practice, and feedback, while helping address any practical challenges with implementation.

Step 4: Teach and Support the Student and Gather Outcome Data

The plan should begin after any necessary materials are prepared and implementing staff are trained. Behavior change involves student learning, and all learning takes patience, time, and practice. Additionally, the success of any behavior plan depends on consistency and a good fit in the contexts in which it is implemented. To set up the plan for success, teams should schedule periodic fidelity checks during which team members observe one another implementing the plan. If challenges arise, staff should proactively discuss barriers with the team, as small adjustments to the intervention may resolve them. These activities can help the team ensure the plan is both feasible and successful, and avoid delays in student growth due to flaws in the intervention's design or inconsistencies in implementation.

At the start of plan implementation, a student's interfering behavior may initially increase, a temporary pattern known as an "extinction burst," before decreasing. Ongoing data can help identify this pattern. During this phase, it's crucial that all staff stay consistent with the plan and avoid making changes until the extinction burst subsides.

To measure the outcome of the plan, team members should continue to collect behavior data daily, using the same method used in the baseline phase. Outcome data should be graphed and compared regularly to the graphed baseline data. This will support the team in determining if and when the plan shows signs of success. It will also support any data-based discussions of modifications to the plan the team might consider.

Step 5: Review Outcome Data, Reflect on Student Needs, and Adjust Teaching and Support as Needed

After the plan has been implemented consistently for about four to six weeks, the team should reconvene to review progress data, evaluate whether the plan for teaching and reinforcing the student to learn the alternative skill is effective, and determine whether the student's interfering behavior is decreasing as a result. As part of this discussion, it is also helpful for the team to revisit the student's short-term goal(s) established in Step 2.

For this step to be effective, the team must have data that reflect consistent implementation of the plan. This allows the team to review outcome data and engage in data-driven problem solving. As discussed in Step 4, if significant barriers to implementation arise early in the process (e.g., major concerns about feasibility, lack of training, or other obstacles to implementation), team members should identify and address these immediately. This allows the team, when they meet for Step 5, to have implementation-based outcome data to review together.

General guiding questions for this step, as well as all preceding steps, are provided on page 56. In addition, teams can use the resource [Resource Name] to guide the process of reviewing graphed behavior outcome data, identifying patterns of need, and problem-solving to improve the plan.

Step	Guiding Questions
Step 1: Define the Behavior and Collect Baseline Data	• What is the interfering behavior we are prioritizing, and what does it look like when it happens? • How will we measure this behavior? Who will be responsible for data collection?
Step 2: Identify Underlying Needs and Select Alternative Skills to Teach and Support	• Where, when, and how often does the behavior occur? What is the student usually doing (or is expected to be doing) when the behavior occurs? Is the behavior more likely in particular situations, with particular people, or at certain times? • What purpose (i.e., function) might the behavior be serving for the student? • What alternative skill (behavior) will we teach the student so they can meet their underlying need in a more healthy way? • What does the alternative skill look like, and how will it be measured? • What are our short-term and long-term goals for growth for the student, recognizing that positive behavior change takes time?
Step 3: Prepare Additional Teaching and Support	• How can the team address the interfering behavior's antecedents to prevent the behavior from occurring? • How and when will the alternative skill be taught? How can we ensure that, when the student uses the alternative skill, that it is *immediately* effective at meeting the underlying need? • What error correction responses will we use if the interfering behavior occurs? • How will staff implement the plan and collect outcome data? Are roles and responsibilities clear? Is any training needed?
Step 4: Teach and Support the Student and Gather Outcome Data	• Is the plan being implemented as discussed in Step 3, including outcome data collection? • Are there any factors which may be hindering the effectiveness of the plan? If so, how can those be addressed?
Step 5: Review Outcome Data, Reflect on Student Needs, and Adjust Teaching and Support as Needed	• How do the outcome data compare to the baseline data? Has the level and/or trend of the interfering behavior declined? • Is the student on track to meet a short-term goal set in Step 2? • Considering the data, does the plan need to be adjusted? If so, how? Were there issues with the plan or its implementation?

Understanding Intensive Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Teaching and Support

When a student's interfering behavior is not adequately addressed by supports at Tiers 1 and 2, the multidisciplinary team may determine that Tier 3 supports are needed.[83] These supports are provided *in addition to*, not instead of, Tier 1 supports. The intensive, individualized behavior support at Tier 3 typically involves two steps for the team: completion of a *functional behavioral assessment* and subsequent development of a *behavioral intervention plan*.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)

The FBA is a process of structured, intentional information gathering about an interfering behavior that poses a significant barrier to the student's learning, safety, and/or social relationships. Because it includes observation of the interfering behavior and its patterns in school contexts, it typically takes multiple days or weeks to complete. Through the FBA, the school team can determine why the student is engaging in interfering behavior and what underlying need (or function) that behavior meets for the student.

Conducting an FBA supports the development of a BIP based on the function of the interfering behavior. The BIP supports the student to learn an alternative behavior that meets the same underlying need as the interfering behavior. **Teams are strongly encouraged to view the FBA and resulting BIP as two equally important parts of the same student support process.**

In pages 5-6 of their 2024 joint guidance, "Using Functional Behavioral Assessments to Create Supportive Learning Environments," the federal Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) described the characteristics of an FBA.[84] Those characteristics are condensed and provided below.

Description of Behavior

An FBA should include a clear, specific, measurable, observable, and objective description of the behavior that interferes with learning. The description of the interfering behavior should be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences, and should reflect objective observations free from bias and judgment.

Data Collection

An FBA should be individualized and provide insights into the environmental and behavioral factors impacting the student. To do this, data should be gathered from multiple sources, including observations and interviews, to:[85]

- **Collect and analyze direct data** (e.g., classroom observations) to record when the behavior happens and when it does not happen (referred to as occurrence and non-occurrence). Data collection methods may include conducting observations to collect data on the frequency or duration of the behavior, the conditions and context in which the behavior

[83] A team may also elevate a student's supports to Tier 3 more rapidly; this may be warranted if the student's student's interfering behavior poses a significant safety risk to themselves and/or others.
[84] OSERS & OESE (2024). *Using functional behavioral assessments to create supportive learning environments.*
[85] Center on PBIS. (2022). *Tier 3 comprehensive functional behavior assessment guide.*

occurred, and the physical location, environment, and individuals present to inform an *antecedent-behavior-consequence* (ABC) analysis, described below.

- **Collect and analyze indirect data** (e.g., interviews with teachers) on when the behavior happens and when it does not happen. Data collection methods may include interviews with or anecdotal reports from educators, early childhood education providers, parents, and the student, if appropriate, that are focused on the interfering behavior; and
- **Review existing data** in areas such as attendance, academic performance, prior behavioral incidents, student health records, and previously implemented academic or behavioral interventions.

Data collection for an FBA should be conducted by professionals with the necessary skills, training, and knowledge to identify and analyze, and address the student's interfering behaviors. These staff should actively engage and collaborate with parents and students throughout the process.

ABC Analysis and Function-Based Behavior Review

Once data are collected, educators analyze the data related to:

A. The events that happen before the behavior occurs, known as **antecedents**;
B. the interfering **behavior**; and
C. the events that happen immediately after the behavior occurs, known as **consequences** that maintain or reinforce the behavior[86]

Analyzing ABC data allows the team to determine the function of the behavior. By considering the relationship between the antecedents, behavior, and consequences, the FBA identifies the function – or purpose – an interfering behavior serves. Typically, the function of behavior is categorized as a student's effort to obtain something (e.g., peer or adult attention, access to a preferred activity, stimulation/sensory experiences), or to escape/avoid something (e.g., social experiences, a non-preferred activity, stimulation/sensory experiences).

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
A Good FBA Is More Than a Checklist

RREI demonstration site staff emphasized that FBAs should not be limited to a simple checklist, and should yield more than just the function of the behavior. ABC information used to determine the function is invaluable when designing a plan. Teams that take the time to conduct the data collection and function-based behavior review described here will set the stage for a high-quality BIP that can meet the student's needs.

Skill Development

After analyzing the data, educators identify what social, emotional, or academic skills the student needs to develop, and how and when those skills will be taught and supported by the team to support the student in using the new skills at appropriate times. The new skills should also address the function of the interfering behavior (e.g., obtain a reaction from classmates or escape/avoid schoolwork) by applying those skills (e.g., new social skills or academic strategies to complete work) rather than engaging in the behavior that interfered with learning.

[86] National Center for Intensive Intervention (2021). *Behavior basics: Understanding principles of behavior.*

Considerations for an Effective FBA

To develop a well-rounded FBA that facilitates the development of a strengths-based BIP, teams should ensure the FBA includes information about the following areas.

Student Strengths: Teams that ground planning in student strengths are more likely to engage in the mindset that frames the student as a whole person, rather than operating from a deficit lens. Knowledge of student strengths yields valuable insight into their behavior needs. For instance, noting that the student thrives during outdoor recess and other physical activities may help explain a pattern of interfering behavior after extended seat time. Learning the contexts in which a student seems "happy, relaxed, and engaged"[87] can help teams analyze situations in which the student seems comfortable versus when they seem stressed. Identifying the student's particular interests and preferences can also support the team to craft a BIP that connects the student to the activities and opportunities in which they feel motivated and successful.

Social Connections and Interaction: Students who engage in interfering behavior often lack positive social connections with peers and adults at school. Some students may also experience barriers around social skills that lead to interfering behaviors. For instance, a student who makes unkind comments to get reactions from peers may not have learned more prosocial ways of initiating social interactions. Positive relationships with others are powerful protective factors that make interfering behavior less likely over time. Teams can use information about the student's interactions with others to identify teaching and support opportunities in the BIP.

Communication Skills: Many students use interfering behavior when they have difficulty communicating their needs in other ways. Documenting how the student does and does not currently communicate needs to others can support the team to identify any needed teaching strategies, such as functional communication training, to include in the BIP.

Health Factors and Needs: Sleep, diet, medication, conditions that result in pain or discomfort, and mental health symptoms are just a few wellness factors that may result in interfering behavior at school. In addition, school teams often mistakenly overlook mental health factors for students with disabilities. School teams should ask the parent about the student's health and wellbeing during the FBA, especially if their interfering behavior has developed or intensified suddenly. It is important to note that the BIP should never be used as a substitute for physical or mental health services. However, including this information in the FBA can help the team plan for any health-related adjustments to the student's other supports at school.

Precursor Behaviors: As part of documenting patterns related to the prioritized interfering behavior (see pages 51-52), the team can also document any observed precursor behaviors. These behaviors typically precede the interfering behavior and indicate the student's behavior is escalating. When teams identify precursor behaviors, they can learn more about the antecedents that trigger interfering behavior, and develop a BIP that proactively supports the student before their behavior escalates.

Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIP)

[87] Hanley, G. (2020, January 24). *Practical functional assessment and treatment of severe problem behavior* [PowerPoint presentation]. Presentation at the Melisa Nellesen Center for Autism, Utah Valley University.

A BIP can be developed for any student regardless of disability. At minimum, a BIP must describe:[88]

(1) The pattern of behavior(s) that impedes the student's learning or the learning of others;
(2) The instructional and/or environmental conditions or circumstances that contribute to the pattern of behavior(s) being addressed by the IEP team;
(3) The positive behavioral interventions and supports to:
    (a) Reduce the pattern of behavior(s) that impedes the student's learning or the learning of others and increases the desired prosocial behaviors;
    (b) Ensure the consistency of the implementation of the positive behavioral interventions across the student's school-sponsored instruction or activities;
(4) The skills that will be taught and monitored as alternatives to challenging behavior(s) for a specific pattern of behavior of the student.

Teams can follow the *student-centered problem solving* process described on pages 51-56 to develop a BIP, support its implementation, and revise it (if needed) to meet the student's needs.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
Review BIPs to Confirm They Are Positive and Function-Based

Several RREI demonstration site teams determined it was necessary to review existing BIPs as part of their work reducing restraint and eliminating isolation. Following that review, they identified two key issues that teams should address:

1. Each BIP should be focused on positive strategies to teach an alternative skill that aligns with the behavior's function. If the BIP is punitive and/or not teaching-focused, RREI teams recommend revising it.
2. Each BIP should be based on the results of an FBA. The BIP can incorporate function-aligned strategies that positively and proactively address all of the ABC data described on page 58 above. If the BIP does not align with the FBA, and the function of the behavior is not reflected across the BIP's components, RREI teams recommend revising it.

Grounding the BIP in the FBA

The BIP should reflect the findings of the FBA and meaningfully incorporate them into function-based supports. OSERS and OESE have recently provided federal guidance on BIP components,[89] including the components that address the behavior's function. This guidance is adapted below, with examples added to illustrate key points. While some of these components are beyond what Washington state minimally requires, they are evidence-based and linked to better and safer outcomes for students. Districts are encouraged to adopt these components in their policies, procedures, and practices for BIP development for all students.

- **Summary statement** describing the findings in the FBA, including 1) typical patterns in the environment and/or events observed just prior to the interfering behavior, 2) the specific

[88] WAC 392-172A-01031 defines the minimum requirements for a BIP for students eligible for special education services. Districts are strongly encouraged to follow these requirements for a BIP developed for any student (regardless of special education eligibility) and should not create a different definition for BIPs developed for students ineligible for special education services.
[89] OSERS & OESE (2024). *Using functional behavioral assessments to create supportive learning environments.*

interfering behavior observed, and 3) patterns in the response or environment change observed just after the interfering behavior that highlights the function of the behavior
    - For example: "When Carlotta experiences pressure from peers or adults to complete learning tasks quickly or without error, she may run out of the classroom to escape the task and/or the person she feels is pressuring her."
- **Antecedent conditions that provoke the interfering behavior:** Environmental factors such as lighting, seating arrangements, noise level, interactions with peers and/or adults, and accessibility of the academic curriculum that may contribute to the behavior occurring or not occurring
- **Antecedent supports that prevent the interfering behavior:** Prevention strategies, such as addressing antecedent events and environmental factors that provoke the interfering behavior
- **Teaching strategies for a function-based replacement behavior:** Instructional strategies and interventions that teach the student a replacement behavior that addresses the same function as the interfering behavior
    - For example: Since the function of Carlotta's behavior is *escaping tasks and pressure from others*, the team decides to teach her how to request a short break to engage in self-regulation strategies, including physical activity (one of her preferences)
- **Positive consequence/response strategies:** Function-based reinforcement strategies that are used after the student uses the replacement behavior, and that encourage the student to continue to use that behavior as a way of meeting their needs (e.g., providing authentic positive feedback, access to preferred activities, or another form of recognition that is connected to the interfering behavior's function)
    - For example: Each time Carlotta uses the replacement behavior of requesting a break, her teacher immediately responds by allowing her to use the break space for 5 minutes. This meets her need for *escape,* reinforces her for using the replacement behavior, and prepares her to return to schoolwork in a regulated state.

Considerations for an Effective BIP

Teams that use the practices below are more likely to develop a BIP that is effective for the student as well as acceptable for parents and staff.

Develop and Revise the BIP as a Team: When meeting to develop an initial BIP, team members should include the student whenever possible, their parent, and the staff who will implement the plan. For best results, these individuals must find the plan acceptable and feasible (provided there is adequate staff support and training). Including all parties ensures the BIP reflects all voices, is practical for the team, and is a good fit for the student and family.

Schedule Time to Review Data as a Team: The BIP is a working document, and its effectiveness comes from small changes driven by ongoing review. When the team finalizes the initial BIP, they should immediately schedule a meeting to review the data that will be gathered on the student's progress. This is typically scheduled within 4-8 weeks of the BIP's start date.

Consider the Whole Child: When writing a BIP, the team should ground their work in their understanding of the student as a whole person. To do this, guiding questions include:

- How are student strengths and preferences reflected in this plan?
- How does the plan support the student to have increasing access to educational, social, and extracurricular opportunities at school?
- How might the student's language and/or culture influence what strategies are included in the plan?
- Does this student have any physical or mental health concerns that need to be considered? Are there other supports, outside of the BIP, that should be coordinated?
- Does the student have accommodations or modifications on a 504 plan or IEP that must be factored into the BIP?

Develop an Individualized, Function-Based Plan: The BIP should provide intensive, individualized support -- which means that it must reflect a *different* arrangement of preventive and responsive strategies than the team has used with the student in the past. Strategies in the BIP must not consist primarily of punitive consequences, and should not include practices already been found to be ineffective for the student. The team must not have a practice of employing a "generic" BIP copied and pasted from one student to the next.

The team should also consider the function of the problem behavior when determining what replacement behavior to teach and how to teach it. The purpose of completing an FBA prior to writing the BIP is to allow for this high level of individualization and function-based support.

Consider Feasibility and Fidelity: Plans must be feasible to be implemented consistently. It is usually best practice to start with a streamlined BIP that incorporates the function of the student's behavior throughout and facilitates consistent implementation. Progress data can not be interpreted if the plan has not been implemented with fidelity. Teams are encouraged to conduct fidelity checks periodically, especially during the first 4-8 weeks of implementation. If the plan is consistently implemented and progress data indicates that additional supports are needed, the team can modify the BIP at that time.

Monitoring Progress of Intensive Behavior Supports

Intensive behavior supports require close and thoughtful monitoring. Students who engage in extensive interfering behaviors can take time to respond to a BIP or other support practices. Daily progress monitoring in the first stage of a BIP's implementation can help teams distinguish between a BIP that is *ineffective* versus a BIP that is *not yet fully effective*.

When a BIP appears ineffective after 4-6 weeks of implementation, teams should consider two critical questions:

1. Is the BIP fully implemented?
2. Is the BIP a good fit for the student?

In order to consider these critical questions, teams must have gathered and graphed behavior progress data to review together. Strategies for data collection are described below. After that, teams can use the resource [Resource Name] to guide problem-solving.

Choosing the Right Tool for Data Based Decision Making

There are a variety of ways to measure a student's behavior. To select a measurement tool, teams should consider the characteristics of the behavior they are measuring, and the question they are seeking to answer. Identifying the best measurement method depends on 1) how frequently the behavior occurs, and 2) whether the behavior is discrete or non-discrete.

- Discrete behaviors have a clearly recognizable (and usually rapid) start and stop. Examples include raising one's hand, kicking a wall, or screaming.
- Non-discrete behaviors typically have a less clear start and stop, and are often more complex categories of behavior the student engages in for longer periods of time. An example includes off-task behavior – which might include varying degrees of more than one behavior considered off task (e.g., being out of seat, talking to neighbors, looking off into space, sleeping during instruction, working on things not related to the task).

Whatever method of data collection the team uses, that method should be the same across baseline and intervention phases to allow for accurate comparisons between phases.

The sections below summarize a variety of common behavior data collection methods, and include guidance for their selection. Each section includes a link to a companion resource with a sample data sheet, example of a completed data sheet, and example graph.

Frequency Data

Frequency data can answer the question, "How often does this behavior occur?" and are collected by recording a tally mark each time the behavior occurs during data collection. This method is appropriate for discrete behaviors with a clear start and stop, and for behaviors with low to moderate frequency. Behaviors that occur with extremely high frequency (e.g., many times per minute) are usually not practical to record with frequency data.

Download the resource "Frequency Data Collection" for a blank data sheet and example data.

Duration Data

Duration data can answer the question, "How long does this behavior last?" Data are collected by writing down the start and end time for each instance of the behavior, and then subtracting the earlier time from the later time to get the duration. Data should indicate whether the time measured is in seconds, minutes, or hours. This measure is appropriate for non-discrete behaviors.

Download the resource "Duration Data Collection" for a blank data sheet and example data.

Latency Data

Latency data can answer the question, "How long until a behavior occurs?" It involves similar timing procedures as duration recording, and measures the time between an event (e.g., the teacher asking students to start independent work) and the beginning of a desired behavior (e.g., the student beginning their work). This requires careful observation during specific moments. This measure is appropriate when supporting the student to learn certain alternative or replacement skills. It can also help the team measure changes in a student's prompt dependency (which can develop if the student has been oversupported by adults).

Download the resource "Latency Data Collection" for a blank data sheet and example data.

Interval Recording: Overview

Interval-based methods of data collection involve dividing a predetermined timeframe into equal intervals of time, continuously observing the student, and marking whether a behavior occurred (+) or did not occur (-) during each interval. Interval recording provides an estimate of the behavior, rather than precise information about a behavior's frequency or duration. It yields *the percent of intervals* in which the behavior was observed, calculated by dividing the number of intervals scored with a plus (+) into the total number of intervals observed.

Interval recording is not feasible without a dedicated observer to conduct it, so it should only be used for short observation periods. If the team needs ongoing data about a behavior that continues for many minutes or hours at a time, duration data collection is a more efficient and precise alternative. When determining interval length, teams should keep in mind that interval lengths longer than 60 seconds are not advised as the estimate of the behavior becomes inaccurate. Shorter intervals are more precise, but can be challenging for the observer.

Three types of interval recording are described below: whole interval, partial interval, and momentary time sampling. These types should never be mixed within one observation. Also, results from one type of interval observation cannot be compared to results from a different type of observation (this is an apples-to-oranges comparison).

Interval Recording: Whole Interval

Whole interval data collection involves scoring the interval with a (+) if the behavior of interest occurred *for the entire interval*. For example:

- A teacher is measuring screaming behavior using intervals that are 15 seconds long. The student screamed for the entire 15 second interval, so the teacher marks that interval with a (+).

- A school social worker is measuring on-task behavior using intervals that are 30 seconds long. The student was on task for the entire 30 second interval, so the school social worker marks that interval with a (+).
- A paraeducator is measuring out of seat behavior using intervals that are 60 seconds long. The student was out of her seat for the first 55 seconds and seated for the last 5 seconds of the interval, so the paraeducator marks that interval with a (-).

This method of interval recording can be appropriate when measuring non-discrete behaviors with a long duration. Whole interval recording is not usually appropriate for behaviors best measured with frequency data (e.g., hitting, swearing). In addition, whole interval recording tends to underestimate behavior since the interval is only scored if the behavior occurs for the entire time. To address this, select a shorter interval length, or consider a different measure (such as duration recording or momentary time sampling).

Download the resource "Whole Interval Data Collection" for a blank data sheet and example data.

Interval Recording: Partial Interval

Partial interval data collection involves scoring the interval with a (+) if the behavior of interest occurred *at any time during the interval*. For example:

- A teacher is measuring screaming behavior using intervals that are 15 seconds long. The student screamed once during the interval, so the teacher marks it with a (+).
- A school social worker is measuring on-task behavior using intervals that are 30 seconds long. The student is briefly on task for one second at the start of the interval, so the school social worker marks that interval with a (+).
- A paraeducator is measuring out of seat behavior using intervals that are 60 seconds long. The student is seated for most of the interval, but stands up once for a couple seconds, so the paraeducator marks that interval with a (+).

This method can be effective with behaviors that are infrequent or hard to anticipate. It tends to overestimate behavior since the interval must be scored if the behavior occurs at all during the interval. To address this, select a shorter interval length, or consider a different measure (such as frequency recording or momentary time sampling).

Download the resource "Partial Interval Data Collection" for a blank data sheet and example data.

Interval Recording: Momentary Time Sampling

Momentary time sampling involves scoring the interval with a (+) if the behavior of interest is occurring *at the moment the interval ends*. For best results, the observer should look away from the student until the last moment of the interval, then look at the student to determine if the behavior is occurring. This allows for the most accurate measurement without allowing the rest of the student's actions leading up to that moment to influence data collection. For example:

- A teacher is measuring screaming behavior using intervals that are 15 seconds long. The student screams twice during the interval, but neither time was at the 15-second mark, so the teacher marks the interval with a (-).
- A school social worker is measuring on-task behavior using intervals that are 30 seconds long. When the school social worker glances up at the end of 30 seconds, the student is on

task, so she marks that interval with a (+).
- A paraeducator is measuring out of seat behavior using intervals that are 60 seconds long. The student is seated when the paraeducator looks up at the 60-second mark, so he marks that interval with a (-).

This method balances some of the disadvantages of whole interval and partial interval recording. It is appropriate for a variety of behaviors, but still carries the risk of underestimating behavior if intervals are inappropriately long.

Download the resource "Momentary Time Sampling Data Collection" for a blank data sheet and example data.

Behavior Rating Scales

A behavior rating scale is another method of estimating behavior change. Teams can create a simple scale based on their knowledge of the student and their specific behavior patterns. Data should be collected frequently enough that it can inform decision making. For example:

- A team wants to collect baseline data for a student's behavior using a 3-point rating scale. Using this scale, the teacher circles the appropriate rating on a datasheet at the top of each hour. The points on the scale are defined as follows:
    1: Last hour, the student followed classroom expectations with 0-2 reminders
    2: Last hour, the student followed classroom expectations with 3-4 reminders
    3: Last hour, the student received 5+ reminders to follow classroom expectations

Teams may also use the Direct Behavior Rating (DBR)[90] scale. Using this scale, teachers can estimate the occurrence of a behavior using a 0-10 scale. A rating of 0 estimates that the behavior occurred 0% of the time, while a rating of 5 estimates the behavior occurred 50% of the time, and so forth. Since teachers may disagree on their subjective rating using DBR, it works best for showing changes in an individual teacher's ratings over time.

While less precise than other measures, a rating scale is very feasible for teachers and other staff. It can be a good fit when measuring a student's use of desired behaviors, or when a student's specific expression of the interfering behavior changes frequently. It's important to predefine the points on the rating scale using definitions that are as measurable and observable as possible. All team members should have a shared understanding of which end of the scale corresponds to desired behavior. Teams should also decide in advance *when and how often* a rating should be recorded.

Download the resource "Behavior Rating Scale Data Collection" for a blank data sheet and example data.

[90] University of Connecticut (n.d.). *Direct Behavior Ratings.*

SECTION 5: CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Public schools have a legal responsibility to identify and evaluate, and then serve, eligible students with disabilities. For students whose disabilities impact their behavior at school, teams must be aware of the legal requirements that protect the rights of these students to access and benefit from public education while also supporting them to learn alternative behaviors.

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) establishes the rights of eligible students with disabilities[91] to have equal access to public educational settings with the individualized services and supports necessary to benefit from that access. This concept is broadly referred to as the right to a *free appropriate public education* (FAPE).[92] Each eligible student with a disability also has the right to be educated in their *least restrictive environment* (LRE),[93] including access to grade/age-appropriate core content standards, curricular materials, and resources, based on team consideration of the individual student's needs. Students served under the IDEA receive special education in addition to other individualized services to address learning needs. Special education requires *specially designed instruction* (SDI)[94] that addresses the unique needs of the student with a disability while ensuring access to the grade level core/general curriculum for that student. Each district is responsible for providing FAPE in the LRE to each eligible student with a disability, as well as access to the general education curriculum and equal opportunity to participate in nonacademic services (e.g., extracurricular activities)[95] as students without disabilities. **These responsibilities continue even if a student with a disability engages in interfering behavior that violates the school's code of conduct.**

Some content in this section includes information about the rights and protections for students with disabilities under federal and state law. This manual does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice. Content in this manual is presented for general information purposes only.

Designing District and School Behavior Support Systems for Belonging and Anti-Ableism

For districts to support students with disabilities who have behavior support needs, they must also prioritize providing equitable and just behavior support systems for all students. It is a persistent myth that students with disabilities and extensive behavior support needs should only receive individualized behavior supports.[96] Students with disabilities benefit significantly from being fully included in all tiers of the school or district's multitiered system of supports (MTSS), including tiered positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).

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[91] Students with disabilities also have rights under Section 504, including rights to access accommodations, aids, and services necessary for them to access and benefit from education. Section 504 requires that public schools provide a FAPE to every student with a disability, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability.

[92] WAC 392-172A-01080.

[93] WAC 392-172A-02050.

[94] WAC 392-172A-01175(3)(c).

[95] WAC 392-172A-02025.

[96] OSPI (2024). Extended myths & facts about inclusionary practices in Washington: Myth #9 (page 19).

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
To Support Students with Disabilities, Address Tier 1 and School Culture

To provide a learning environment in which a student with extensive behavior learning needs can succeed, district and school leaders must examine their universal systems and ensure they are inclusive and evidence-based. Based on input from demonstration sites in the *Inclusionary Practices* and *Reducing Restraint and Eliminating Isolation* projects, schools and districts that effectively prevent and respond to student interfering behavior:

- Foster a culture in which staff feel shared responsibility for each student (whether or not they have a disability)
- Ensure all students feel a sense of belonging at school, including in general education classrooms and shared spaces
- Provide Tier 1 social/emotional/behavioral supports to all students, including students with extensive support needs
- Support staff in understanding that behavior is communication so that any efforts to shape interfering behavior reflect the student's agency, belonging, and authentic needs

Improvement in these areas can reduce student interfering behavior across classrooms, schools, and districts. For guidance on building and refining systems and practices for the social, emotional, and behavioral health of all students, refer to Sections 2 and 3 of this manual.

Supporting Students with Disabilities in Behavior Learning

School and district teams have many options for providing proactive and positive behavior support for students with disabilities who are eligible for an IEP or 504 Plan. This section will describe these options, including:

- Requirements that districts must follow so that students with disabilities can access and benefit from those supports
- Specific IEP and 504 processes to address a student's behavioral needs in ways that are both positive and student-centered

Foundational Requirements and Considerations

IDEA Child Find and 504 Identification

Both the IDEA and Section 504 require districts to continually seek out, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities living within the district's boundaries. This requirement is referred to as *child find*. Districts must act on their child find obligation as soon as there is reason to suspect or believe a student may have a disability. Waiting to evaluate a student suspected of having a disability for any reason – such as waiting for the parent to request an evaluation or imposing prerequisite steps such as insisting the parent produce a medical diagnosis – violates the child find requirement.

As discussed in Section 4, interfering behaviors are an indication the student's needs are not yet met. In some (though not all) cases, this may be due to a disability. Refer to the box on page 70 for patterns of behavior that may prompt school staff to consider whether the student may also have a disability and need to be evaluated to determine if they are eligible for special education.

Free Appropriate Public Education: IDEA and 504

All students with disabilities who qualify for services under the IDEA and/or Section 504 are entitled to a *free appropriate public education* (FAPE). Any student, whether or not they have a disability, can receive positive behavioral interventions and supports, including with a behavioral intervention plan (BIP). Additionally, for students eligible for special education services whose behaviors interfere with learning, these interventions and supports are explicitly required to be considered as part of the district's offer of FAPE in the IEP.

> *The IDEA and its implementing regulations require IEP Teams to follow certain procedures to ensure that IEPs meet the individualized needs, including the behavioral needs, of students with disabilities….For any eligible student with a disability whose behavior impedes their own learning or the learning of others, the IDEA specifically requires that IEP Teams consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and other strategies, to address the behavior, including behaviors that may not be caused by or related to a child's disability. IEP Teams can utilize FBAs to gain a better understanding of a student's behavioral needs and to determine the positive behavioral interventions and supports needed to provide FAPE to a student with a disability.*[97]

IEP teams must always consider the student's right to access a FAPE when considering a student's need for positive, proactive, and teaching-focused supports for social/emotional/behavioral learning in the IEP. If the IEP team does not consider and provide any necessary positive behavioral supports in the IEP of a student whose behavior interferes with learning, the IEP may not appropriately provide the student with FAPE in their LRE.[98]

[97] OSERS & OESE (2024). *Using functional behavioral assessments to create supportive learning environments.*
[98] OSERS (2022). *Questions and answers: Addressing the needs of children with disabilities and IDEA's discipline provisions*.

Interfering Behavior and Disability

As discussed in Section 4, interfering behaviors are an indication the student's needs are not yet met. In some (though not all) cases, this may be due to a disability. The following sorts of behavior patterns may indicate a student's disability-related needs are not being met:

- The student is subjected to disciplinary removals that occur frequently and/or are becoming more frequent over time
- The student frequently misses school and/or skips classes for reasons that may be related to a possible disability
- The student is frequently "in trouble" for concerns related to:
    - Executive functioning, including attending to instruction, turning in work on time, starting and completing complex tasks, and organizing materials
    - Social interactions, including navigating disagreements and conflicts, interacting in age-appropriate ways with peers, following social cues, and self-monitoring socially expected nonverbal behavior like voice volume or personal space
    - Self-regulation, including coping with emotions like anger or disappointment, responding appropriately to criticism, and handling frustrating situations
- The student engages in interfering behaviors related to avoidance of specific academic tasks, sensory stimuli, social interactions, etc.
- The student has been repeatedly restrained and/or isolated by staff for interfering behavior that poses an imminent likelihood of serious harm to the student or others
- The student continues to engage in interfering behaviors even with consistently implemented positive behavior support interventions
- The student's parent/guardian has expressed concern that the student may have a disability and/or requested an evaluation for special education and related services

For a student already eligible for services under the IDEA and/or Section 504, any of these behavior patterns may indicate the student needs additional support through their IEP or 504 Plan. For a student who is not eligible, teams 1) should examine and consider enhancing the positive supports available to a student, and 2) may consider whether the student may also have a disability and need to be evaluated to determine if they are eligible for special education or 504 services.

IDEA and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Students eligible for special education services have the right under state and federal regulations to be educated in their LRE. Teams are not permitted to remove a student from education in age-appropriate general classrooms solely because of needed modifications in general education.[99] Removal of students eligible for special education services from the general educational environment is only permitted if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.[100]

LRE must be thoughtfully considered for a student with behavior support needs. **Limiting the**

[99] WAC 392-172A-02060(4).
[100] WAC 392-172A-02050.

student's LRE solely for safety is rarely, if ever, appropriate. An IEP with appropriately ambitious goals for learning prosocial alternatives to interfering behavior typically cannot and should not be implemented in isolated settings alone. Since most interfering behavior is related to avoiding/escaping difficult demands and/or obtaining social responses/attention from others, IEPs with meaningful annual goals that address those behaviors typically require teaching and learning in settings with access to the general curriculum and same-age peers without disabilities. For additional considerations that relate to *placement* of a student who engages in interfering behavior, see pages 78-80.

Evaluation of a Student's Behavior-Related Needs

Evaluations, whether for special education eligibility and IEP development or for 504 eligibility and 504 Plan development, must be individualized. Each special education evaluation must be comprehensive and address all areas of suspected disability, including those areas which may or may not be directly related to the suspected eligibility category. This means the district *may not* restrict assessments that might relate to a student's behavior support needs (for instance, measures that evaluate a student's social, emotional, behavioral, communication, and/or sensory needs) to students who are being evaluated for eligibility in a particular category. Any student, regardless of eligibility category, may have needs related to behavior – and those needs, when present, must be addressed in the evaluation.

Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs)

As described in Section 4, a *functional behavioral assessment* (FBA) is a process of structured information gathering about a particular behavior a student engages in that interferes with their learning, social relationships, or other participation in their school and community. The FBA assists a school team to determine the underlying need (or function) that behavior is currently meeting for the student.

Information gathered in an FBA is best used to design a positive, supportive, and cohesive set of function-based individualized interventions referred to as a *behavioral intervention plan* (BIP). The process for developing an effective BIP is described in Section 4. Information gathered in the FBA should also inform other parts of the IEP, such as:

- Special factors (p. 73)
- Strength-based present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (p. 74)
- Annual goals (p. 75)
- Services (p. 77)
- Placement (p. 78)

Other Evaluation Areas

District staff should keep in mind that evaluations can support the team in understanding the reason(s) for a student's interfering behavior, not merely demonstrating that the interfering behavior is present. For a student with interfering behavior, it is likely that the student has unmet needs that are contributing to patterns of interfering behavior, such as academic learning needs, communication needs, social and emotional needs, health needs, and/or sensory needs. In these cases, the evaluation can also be used to understand the scope and nature of the student's needs so any root causes of interfering behavior can be supported in the IEP or 504 Plan.

Student and Family Participation in IEP and 504 Teams

Parents are key partners in IEP and 504 teams, and their participation is critical to the process of developing effective IEPs and 504 Plans. State and federal regulations require that parents are afforded the opportunity to participate in IEP team meetings and decisions.[101] Students are also key participants and must be invited to IEP team meetings in which postsecondary goals and transition services are discussed.

Furthermore, OSPI guidance recommends[102] that IEP teams conduct an initial *collaborative conversation with the family* (including the student whenever possible) at the start of each school year to learn about the student and family's long-term vision and priorities. This allows the whole family to fully participate in the development of a strengths-based, appropriately ambitious, and meaningful IEP.

For a student with behavior support needs, it is essential that school team members prioritize family engagement and partnership. Parents are often experienced in supporting and addressing their child's interfering behavior and can provide valuable insight to the school team. Authentically centering student and family voice builds a foundation for mutual collaboration, trust, and respect[103] – all of which are vital in developing and implementing successful positive behavior interventions and supports for a student.

[101] WAC 392-172A-05001.
[102] OSPI (2024). Comprehensive inclusive education in Washington - Step 1: Collaborative conversations.
[103] OSPI (2021) Family Engagement Framework Workgroup: 2021 report to the Legislature.

Guiding Questions to Ask a Parent About Their Student's Behavior Support Needs

When developing an IEP or 504 Plan for a student with interfering behavior, the team may consider asking the parent any of the following questions to learn more about the student's needs for positive behavioral interventions and supports:

- When do you see your child happy, relaxed, and engaged?
  - What is your child doing when they feel that way, and who are they doing it with (if anyone)?
  - Are there particular ways the environment is set up so they feel comfortable?
- How does your child communicate their preferences, interests, feelings, and needs?
- What are the early signs that your child is uncomfortable or stressed?
  - How do you respond when you notice those signs?
  - Is your child able to communicate their distress in any ways other than interfering behavior?
- When you ask your child to do something you know they will find difficult, what supports do you provide for them to be successful?
- What circumstances typically result in your child engaging in interfering behavior?
  - Why do you think these behaviors occur?
  - What do you believe your child is trying to communicate with these behaviors?
  - Are there strategies that you've found to help prevent the interfering behavior?
- What are the most effective ways to respond to your child's interfering behavior?
- What would you like to see your child do instead of the interfering behavior?
- What strategies *don't* work that we should know about?

Behavior Supports and the IEP

In 2017, the United States Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* clarifying the requirement for IEPs to promote meaningful, rather than minimal, progress for students with disabilities. According to the ruling, each student's IEP must be "reasonably calculated to enable a [student] to make progress appropriate in light of the [student]'s circumstances."[104] Furthermore, behaviors that interfere with the student's progress must be considered as part of the IEP.[105]

For IEP teams, the message is clear. If a student served under the IDEA engages in behaviors that interfere with their progress, impact their access to a FAPE, and/or are related to the student's disability, the student's IEP must be reasonably calculated to address those behaviors. This is the case regardless of the student's disability eligibility category. Therefore, a student's behavior needs should be addressed across all relevant portions of the IEP.

Special Factors

The IEP team must consider the presence of each of five *special factors*[106] when developing a student's IEP. Special factors are variables that have the potential to limit the student's progress in

[104] *Endrew F. v. Douglas County Sch. Dist. Re-1*, 69 IDELR 174 (2017).
[105] U.S. Department of Education. (2017). *Questions and Answers on U. S. Supreme Court Case Decision Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1* (page 5).
[106] WAC 392-172A-03110(2).

their IEP goals overall and may also limit the student's access to a FAPE in their LRE. Special factors can shape the direction of the IEP and therefore must be considered early in the IEP process.

A student's need for positive behavior support to address interfering behavior is one of the special factors the team is required to consider, regardless of the student's disability category. The presence of this special factor may influence many areas of the IEP as it is developed, including:

- Assessment data (including FBA data) and other information presented in the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP)
- Measurable and meaningful annual goals to address social/emotional/behavioral skills and, if applicable, academic skills (including academic skill gaps that lead to avoidance or other interfering behavior)
- Specially designed instruction (SDI) and/or related services that may be needed to support the student in managing interfering behaviors *and* learning alternative prosocial behaviors
- Placement that allows the student to access the general curriculum in their LRE, make progress on their annual goals, and have adequate opportunities to practice necessary social/emotional/behavioral skills with peers without disabilities

The IEP team should not restrict their consideration of behavior as a special factor to students eligible in a particular disability category. However, it is also important to consider how a student's disability impacts their behavior, and determine how those disability-related needs can be addressed in the IEP. For instance, a student whose disability impacts their language may have learned to use interfering behavior to communicate their needs. In this case, the team should additionally consider communication (and, potentially, the need for assistive technology) as a special factor, and should ensure that the student's communication needs relating to behavior have been specifically addressed in the IEP.

Strength-Based Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance

All IEPs must contain a statement of *present levels of academic achievement and functional performance* (PLAAFP).[107] Consistent with current OSPI guidance[108] and best practice, teams are advised to ensure their PLAAFP statements are also strengths-based. This means that, for a student with an IEP and interfering behavior, the PLAAFP will reflect the following:

1. Connection to the student and family's **valued life outcomes and priorities** for the student.
2. Evidence of **high expectations,** facilitating IEP decisions that presume the student's competence, honor the student's belonging in general education settings, and develop skills that support the student's increasing social/emotional/behavioral wellbeing.
3. A **person-centered approach** that considers the individual student and their inherent worth, not just their disability category or level of interfering behavior
4. Explicit **focus on student strengths,** first describing the skills, strengths, and preferences of the student (including those that relate to social/emotional/behavioral skills), and then identifying what needs remain
5. Awareness of **the whole child across the whole day**, leading to team development of

[107] WAC 392-172A-03090(1)(a).
[108] OSPI (2024). Comprehensive inclusive education in Washington - Step 2: Creating an inclusive IEP.

goals that increase, maintain, and generalize meaningful skills the student can use in multiple facets of life.

To develop the PLAAFP for a student who engages in interfering behavior, data sources might include classroom observation files, discipline referrals, attendance records, and assessments completed for the student's special education evaluation or re-evaluation. If the team has completed an FBA for the student, information from the FBA should also be included in the PLAAFP (e.g., the interfering behavior's function, antecedents, and consequences). An effective PLAAFP includes a baseline measurement of the interfering behavior, where/when/with whom it typically occurs, what the function might be, and in what circumstances the student engages in socially expected behavior instead.

Annual Goals for Positive Behavior Support

Each annual IEP goal must be *measurable* and include three components: the *condition* in which the skill is needed, the *skill* being taught, and the *criterion* to determine when the goal has been mastered. All parts of the goal must reflect the *Endrew F*. standard described on page 73. In other words, the goal should reflect an "appropriately ambitious" expectation for what the student could achieve in a year with the special education and related services described in the IEP.

Further, OSPI recommends that IEP goals are also *meaningful*. Meaningful goals are broad, rich, varied, and written with implementation in general education settings in mind. For more on developing meaningful IEP goals, refer to pages 20-21 of *Comprehensive Inclusive Education in Washington*.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
Align IEP Goals to State Standards

Every student is a general education student. For students who are also eligible for special education services, their educational program has three parts:

1. The general education curriculum
2. The school's routines and activities
3. The IEP

Aligning IEP goals to state standards is essential. This supports instruction in general education settings and ensuring strong relational connection and a sense of belonging for each student. These are protective factors that make interfering behavior less likely.

Best Practices for Developing Measurable IEP Goals for Positive Behavior Support

The IEP team can consider the following best practices when developing measurable IEP goals that address a student's interfering behavior.

To write the **condition**:

- Consider routines, activities, situations, and/or times of day when the student is likely to benefit from the desired skill and/or may engage in the interfering behavior
- Identify opportunities to teach the student to use the desired skill in their least restrictive environment, keeping in mind the following:
    - New behaviors are best learned in setting(s) in which they are necessary, so the condition should represent routines, activities, or settings with many natural opportunities for the student to use the target skill/behavior
    - It is generally not best practice or effective to teach replacement behaviors in isolation unless that teaching strategy is strongly indicated by student data (e.g., assessments, PLAAFP) as the way the student learns best

To select and describe the **skill**:

- Reducing the occurrence of the interfering behavior must not be the sole focus of an IEP goal; however, the team may choose to include this as a secondary focus so long as the primary focus is teaching an alternative or replacement behavior
- When selecting the skill to teach, teams are strongly advised to select a replacement behavior that matches the function of the interfering behavior, as determined by an FBA
- The skill should be age-appropriate, relevant to the student's needs, and socially acceptable (i.e., it should not stigmatize or create additional barriers for the student)

To establish the **criterion**:

- Consider measuring frequency or duration of behavior or skill use, percent of opportunities in which a behavior or skill was used, and/or a rating scale (such as the Direct Behavior Rating[109] scale) corresponding to specific patterns of behavior
- Data measuring the behavior or skill should be graphed (using a line or bar graph of daily and/or weekly behavior data) for the most effective support and team decision making
- For goals related to changing an interfering behavior, the criterion might measure the student engaging in the alternative or replacement behavior more frequently, more independently, in more difficult situations, or across a wider range of settings
- The criterion should facilitate rapid and reliable measures of the skill (e.g., a lightweight daily measure) rather than time-consuming measure(s) collected monthly or quarterly
    - A criterion that facilitates daily data collection should be considered for intensive behavior support
- Behavioral data collection should be preplanned and not on an "as needed" basis, as that can produce serious systematic errors and bias in data collection and interpretation

[109] University of Connecticut (n.d.). *Direct Behavior Ratings.*

Services

All IEPs must include *specially designed instruction (SDI)*.[110] Some students may also have *related services* and/or *supplementary aids and services (SAS)* included in the IEP. Each of these types of services should support the student in making progress in the general education curriculum and grade-level standards as well as attaining the annual goals in their IEP.

Students with behavior support needs may benefit from a variety of services to address their learning needs. Teams are advised to determine the function of the individual student's interfering behavior to best guide decisions about services. For instance, for a student whose interfering behavior relates to difficulty communicating when stressed, it may be important to incorporate communication and/or self-advocacy skills into the IEP's goals and associated services. On the other hand, if the student's interfering behavior arises from peer conflict, goals and services might instead address the student's social/emotional/behavioral skills during routines and activities with the most peer interaction (e.g., group activities, lunch, and recess).

RREI Demonstration Site Finding: *General Education Staff Should Assist with the Provision of SDI*

Multiple demonstration sites reported that general education teachers were key partners in improving services and relationships with students with disabilities whose behaviors interfered with learning. General education teachers must be valued and empowered members of the team assisting with the provision of SDI. This builds the student's sense of belonging and relationships in the general education setting, leading to improved behavior.

When considering how and where services will be provided, special education services must be provided in the student's LRE, and, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the general education environment. This includes services for positive behavior support. School teams cannot decide to remove a student from age-appropriate general education settings solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum.[111] Special education services should only be delivered in a separate setting when absolutely necessary. Both students and staff benefit when behavior support services are coordinated with the schoolwide schedule and designed for shared implementation across the school team, rather than provided by a single teacher or paraeducator.

[110] WAC 392-172A-01175.
[111] WAC 392-172A-02060.

IEP Related Services and Mental Health Support

The purpose of *related services* in the IEP is to provide the student with any necessary services to ensure they can benefit from special education. IEP teams sometimes overlook school-based mental health related services when considering the student's individual needs.[112] However, the non-exhaustive list of related services provided in WAC 392-172A-01155 includes counseling, psychological services, therapeutic recreation, and social work services. For some students with behavior support needs, underlying mental health concerns may be a significant factor.

Students with disabilities experience mental health needs at far greater rates than their classmates without disabilities.[113] In some cases, students with disabilities who engage in interfering behavior may also experience symptoms of mental health concerns, like self-harming behaviors, repetitive or ritualized behaviors, or indications of suicidal ideation. These symptoms can pose a barrier for the student with a disability to access a FAPE (for example, if the student's mental health difficulties contribute to chronic absenteeism or refusal to attend certain classes).

While a BIP can address environmental factors contributing to interfering behaviors, teach more appropriate replacement behaviors, and provide reinforcement to strengthen those behaviors, it cannot treat any underlying mental health concern (e.g., anxiety or depression) contributing to the use of interfering behaviors. If the team believes a student is experiencing mental health needs, it is unethical to attempt to address those needs with a BIP alone. In these cases, the team should determine what school-based mental health related services are appropriate to support the student, consider making changes to the IEP (including related services as described above), and identify any other necessary supports to ensure the student has access to a FAPE.

Placement

A student's placement must be determined by the IEP team, which includes the parent, and must be based on *all* of the following:[114]

- The student's IEP,
- The student's least restrictive environment (LRE),
- The placement option(s) that provides a reasonably high probability of supporting the student to reach their IEP goals, and
- A consideration of any potential harmful effect the placement may have on the student or on the quality of services they need

A student's placement can only be determined after the team has developed the student's IEP, so that the above factors can be meaningfully considered. Predetermination of placement – including writing goals or offering services based on what is available in a pre-selected school or classroom or based on a bell schedule – is not permitted. As noted above on page 70, teams also cannot remove a student from education in age-appropriate general classrooms solely because of needed

[112] Skaar, N. R., Etscheidt, S. L., & Kraayenbrink, A. (2020). School-based mental health services for students with disabilities: Urgent need, systemic barriers, and a proposal. *Exceptionality,* 29(4), 265-279. https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2020.1801437

[113] OSERS (2021). *Supporting child and student social, emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs.*

[114] WAC 392-172A-02060(2).

modifications in general education.[115]

For a student who engages in interfering behavior, the placement decision (as with placement decisions for any student) must provide the student with opportunities and services to access and progress in the general education curriculum, reach their IEP goals, and receive social, emotional, and behavioral support. Further, as described above, IEP goals for a student with interfering behavior should focus on meaningful and function-based alternative or replacement behaviors, such as skills for age-appropriate peer interaction, teamwork, communication, and stress tolerance. It is neither effective nor evidence-based to limit access to general education instruction and social opportunities to teach these skills; in fact, practice in natural contexts is frequently necessary for students to make progress in these goals.

For these reasons, IEP teams must not determine placement based solely on the amount of support a student needs. It would not be appropriate, for example, for the IEP team to place a student with extensive behavior support needs who is on/above grade level academically in a "life skills" classroom (that does not provide the academic instruction the student requires) for convenience or other staffing reasons. Regardless of a student's need for behavior support, they are entitled to the same rights, individualized determinations of FAPE and LRE, and access to general education instruction and nonacademic/extracurricular activities as any other student eligible for special education services.

[115] WAC 392-172A-02060(4).

Can Districts Require Students to "Earn Their Way" To Less Restrictive Placements?

No, districts may not place the burden on the student to earn time in a less restrictive placement – it is contrary to the IDEA to require a student to earn time in general education. Students who receive special education services should be allowed to participate in a district's educational programs and services to the same extent as their non-disabled peers. It would be even more concerning if access was restricted as the district's way of responding to behavioral needs that might be related to the student's disability. Any decision to limit or restrict a student's access to and participation in general education settings, including decisions made due to the student's interfering behavior, must be made by the IEP team based solely on any adjustments necessary due to their disability and/or unique needs.

Districts should not use a more restrictive placement or shortened school day as a form of punishment or as a substitute for positive behavior strategies and supports or a BIP. Instead, the IEP team should ensure the IEP includes positive behavior supports, including (if appropriate) IEP goals and a BIP that describes the use of positive behavioral interventions, supports, and strategies reasonably calculated to address the student's behavioral needs and enable the student to participate in the full school day in their LRE.

While there may be rare cases in which a student's disability-related needs necessitate a shortened school day or a more restrictive placement, it is the district's responsibility to demonstrate how the student's IEP is reasonably calculated to provide the student with the level of support (for instance, social/emotional/behavioral support as part of the IEP and/or a BIP if appropriate) needed to enable the student to participate in a full school day and access general education. To facilitate this, the district may consider a reevaluation (for instance, by conducting an FBA) to determine the student's needs and how best to address them so the student can achieve meaningful educational benefit consistent with their rights under the IDEA.

Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)

When behavior is identified as a need by the IEP team (for instance, in the *special factors* described on page 73), the team must consider use of positive behavioral interventions and supports to address behavior that interferes with learning. This should include a consideration of whether or not the IEP team will develop a BIP. The purpose of a BIP is to describe the positive behavioral interventions and supports the team will use to reduce the student's use of the interfering behavior by teaching the student prosocial alternative behaviors. A BIP must, at minimum, include a description of the skills that will be taught and monitored by school staff as alternatives to the interfering behavior. When a student eligible for special education services has a BIP, it becomes part of their IEP and thus must be followed by the school team implementing it.

The process for developing an effective BIP for any student is described in Section 4 on pages 59-62. It is important to note that the process for developing a BIP (and integrating information obtained with an FBA into the BIP) should be the same regardless of whether or not a student is eligible for special education services or a 504 Plan. Districts should not have separate processes for BIP development based on whether or not a student has a disability.

Emergency Response Protocol

An *emergency response protocol* (ERP) must be developed, following the requirements in WAC 392-172A-02105, if the parent and the school district determine that a student requires advanced educational planning. The ERP describes the response to be used in the case of emergencies that pose an imminent likelihood of serious harm. The district must obtain parent consent in advance for the ERP.

The district may not develop an ERP that violates the requirements in RCW 28A.600.485, regardless of whether or not the parent has provided consent. This means **the ERP must not contain,** for instance:

- Language that suggests restraint and/or isolation will be used as a punishment for a specific predetermined behavior, irrespective of whether or not the student's use of that behavior poses an imminent likelihood of serious harm in a given instance
- Conditions for using restraint and/or isolation for behaviors that do not pose an imminent likelihood of serious harm
- A predetermined duration for restraint and/or isolation
- An exit criteria for restraint and/or isolation that extends the use of these practices past the requirement in RCW 28A.600.485(3)(b) that restraint and isolation "must be discontinued as soon as the likelihood of serious harm has dissipated"

An ERP is not a substitute for a collaboratively developed BIP. Developing an ERP does not fulfill the team's requirement under state and federal regulations to provide an appropriate offer of FAPE in the IEP, including (if applicable) using positive behavioral interventions and supports to address the student's interfering behaviors and supporting the student to learn alternative behaviors. Districts are strongly encouraged to follow the recommendations in Section 4 for developing BIPs.

Behavior Supports and the 504 Plan

When preparing to develop a 504 Plan for a student who engages in interfering behavior, the team should review information provided for the evaluation, including relevant assessments and any other data collected about the student's disability-related needs, to identify the individualized services the student requires to access a FAPE. This information might include:

- Notes and other documentation relating to previous behavior interventions
- Observations of the student engaging in the interfering behavior(s)
- Documentation from the school's MTSS team
- Discipline records relevant to the interfering behavior(s)
- Medical or psychological records
- Results of an FBA

When the team meets to develop a 504 Plan for a student who engages in interfering behavior related to their disability, the team "must identify individualized services, such as behavioral supports, to meet the student's educational needs."[116] 504 Plans are not required to be put in writing, but teams are strongly encouraged to do so for shared team understanding about roles,

[116] OCR (2022). *Supporting students with disabilities and avoiding the discriminatory use of student discipline under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (page 10).

responsibilities, and implementation. Services and decisions that relate to the student with a disability must be individualized and cannot be "based on stereotypes, generalizations, or assumptions about the student based on their disability or about individuals with disabilities generally."[117]

While it is not mandatory to include a BIP for a student served under Section 504 who engages in interfering behavior, the team should thoughtfully consider developing one consistent with the best practices outlined in Section 4. In its 2022 guidance for supporting students with behavioral needs under Section 504, the federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR) notes that, "if a Section 504 team chooses to use a behavioral assessment to develop a BIP, and that assessment identifies specific behavioral supports needed to ensure FAPE, the Section 504 team would need to develop the BIP with such supports, and the school would need to implement it, as part of the student's Section 504 plan for providing FAPE." Regardless of whether or not the team determines that a BIP will be developed, the student's 504 Plan must still include any other individualized services necessary to support the student in learning more prosocial behaviors and accessing a FAPE.

For more information about 504 Plan requirements, refer to:

- 504 Plans and Students with Disabilities
- Students' Rights: Section 504 and Students with Disabilities
- Preventing and Addressing Discrimination in Student Discipline

School Discipline and Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities receive additional protections under the IDEA and Section 504, as well as Washington state law, regarding school discipline. This includes students not yet eligible for special education services *if* the district had knowledge that a student was eligible for special education services before the behavior that led to the disciplinary action.[118] State and federal discipline protections for students with disabilities are intended to ensure that no student is prevented from accessing a FAPE because of behavioral concerns related to their disability or the team's implementation of their IEP or 504 Plan.

Students with disabilities who do not receive adequate supports for their individual needs may be more likely to engage in interfering behavior, and thus more likely to experience school discipline. Federal special education guidance is clear that overuse and misuse of school discipline, particularly in the absence of effective positive behavioral interventions and supports in the IEP, may violate a student's civil rights to receive FAPE in their LRE.

> *"The failure of the IEP Team to consider and provide for needed behavioral supports through the IEP process may result in a child not receiving a meaningful educational benefit or FAPE….[and] could result in an inappropriately restrictive placement and constitute a*

[117] OCR (2022). *Supporting students with disabilities and avoiding the discriminatory use of student discipline under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (p. 28)
[118] WAC 392-172A-05170.

denial of placement in the least restrictive environment. The failure of the IEP Team to consider and provide for needed behavioral supports could also lead to behavior that is inconsistent with the school's code of student conduct.…It is critical that IDEA provisions designed to support the needs of children with disabilities and ensure FAPE are appropriately implemented ***so as to avoid an overreliance on, or misuse of, exclusionary discipline in response to a child's behavior.****"*[119]

Districts must understand the implications and nuances related to school discipline and positive behavior support practices for students with disabilities. This allows districts to ensure students' rights are protected, including the right to FAPE – which includes, when necessary, positive behavior supports as part of an IEP or 504 Plan. This section will describe recommended practices for districts to appropriately consider and act on a student's need for positive behavior support as evidenced by behavior that violates the school's code of conduct.

In addition, OSPI provides extensive regulatory guidance on discipline provisions for students with disabilities. Key points in that guidance are summarized in the box below. For more on these requirements, visit the linked guidance documents.

[119] OSERS (2022). Questions and answers: Addressing the needs of children with disabilities and IDEA's discipline provisions (page 8; emphasis added).

What Protections Exist for Students with Disabilities Regarding School Discipline?

This is a non-exhaustive list of key discipline terms and protections in state law, the IDEA, and Section 504. District staff are responsible for understanding all school discipline protections, including the ones not summarized here.

Key Special Education Terms and Protections in Washington

- **Placement** is a decision that is made by the IEP team, which includes the parent. Districts may not unilaterally change a student's placement, so students who experience a **change of placement because of disciplinary removals**[120] are protected by state and federal regulations. A change of placement occurs because of disciplinary removals when:
  - The removal is for more than ten consecutive school days; *or*
  - The student has been subjected to a series of removals that constitute a pattern, because the series of removals 1) total more than ten school days in a school year, 2) occurred in response to similar student behaviors; and 3) may have additional elements of a pattern (e.g., the length of each removal, the total time the student has been removed, and the proximity of the removals to one another).
- **Manifestation determination review (MDR):**
  - An MDR must be conducted within 10 days of any disciplinary removal decision that changes the placement of a student eligible for special education.
  - School staff must determine whether the behavior(s) that led to the student's removal were caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to, their disability, and/or whether the behavior(s) were the direct result of the district's failure to implement the IEP.
    - If the student's behavior was found to be a manifestation of their disability, the IEP team **must conduct an FBA and develop a BIP**. If a BIP was already developed, the team must review and modify it as necessary to address the behavior at issue.
- **Educational services** that provide the student with a FAPE must be provided during all disciplinary removals regardless of length. District staff may provide services in an *interim alternative educational setting* (IAES).[121] Services must ensure the student continues to:
  - Participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting, and
  - Make progress toward meeting the annual goals set out in their IEP.

Section 504 Requirements

Section 504 federal regulations are less detailed than federal and state special education regulations, but discipline requirements have largely been interpreted by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) as following the IDEA requirements. The following resources are available to school teams to support the implementation of Section 504 discipline protections:

- OSPI: Students' Rights - Section 504 and Students with Disabilities
- OCR: Supporting Students with Disabilities and Avoiding the Discriminatory Use of Student Discipline under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

[120] WAC 392-172A-05155.

[121] An IAES is a temporary placement and must allow a student to receive educational services in a manner that is comparable, equitable, and appropriate relative to the services the student would have received without the exclusionary discipline. Examples of IAES settings include alternative schools, one-on-one tutoring, and online learning.

Understanding Disciplinary Removals

A disciplinary removal occurs when a student with a disability is removed from or prevented from accessing some part of their educational program and/or services for reasons related to the student's interfering behavior that violates the school's code of conduct. Suspension is a common example of formal disciplinary removal; however, there are a variety of actions that a district might take that would amount to disciplinary removals based on state and federal regulations, including:

- Issuing an out-of-school suspension or expulsion to the student
- Using informal removals as described on page 38 of Section 2, such as calling a parent suggesting or requiring that they pick up their student early due to interfering behavior (even if the word "suspension" is not used)
- Issuing an in-school suspension to the student, **unless** all of the following occurred during that in-school suspension:[122]
    - The student was afforded the opportunity to continue to participate in the general education curriculum,
    - The student continued to receive the services specified on their IEP or 504 plan, and
    - The student continued to participate with nondisabled students to the extent they would have in their current placement
- Unilaterally limiting the student's educational program due to behavior concerns, such as shortening the student's school day, barring the student from attending a class on their schedule, or requiring the student to attend school virtually
- Imposing conditions under which the student will be "allowed" to attend school that disregard the student's right to FAPE, such as requiring the parent to be present with their student during any part of the school day or requiring the student to "earn" their way back into class by demonstrating desired behavior
- Suspending a student with an IEP or 504 Plan that includes transportation as a related service from riding the school bus[123]

Note that an in-school suspension referred to by an alternative name may still be regarded as an in-school suspension under state and federal discipline provisions for students with disabilities. Some schools may have spaces that are utilized by staff in the same way as in-school suspension under different names (e.g., "Think Time Room" or "Calming Corner", etc.).[124] It is the function of the disciplinary removal and its impact on the student's access to their educational program that determines whether it is an in-school suspension, not the name given to the room by the school.

A disciplinary removal may be for a partial or full day; however, partial day removals may be equivalent to a full day under the IDEA and Section 504. Both state and federal regulation defines a school day as "any day, including a partial day, that children are in attendance at school for instructional purposes. School day has the same meaning for all children in school, including

[122] OSERS (2022). Questions and answers: Addressing the needs of children with disabilities and IDEA's discipline provisions (page 11).
[123] OSERS (2022). Questions and answers: Addressing the needs of children with disabilities and IDEA's discipline provisions (page 16).
[124] Some LEAs also assign these types of names to spaces that function as isolation rooms. Isolation is not an acceptable form of school discipline and should not be equated to in-school suspension. However, its impact on the student's access to instruction and FAPE must be considered.

children with and without disabilities."[125] Section 504 guidance similarly states that "students with disabilities are entitled to an entire school day that is as long as the school day for students without disabilities."[126]

LEAs must accurately track how many school days (including partial days) the student with a disability has been subjected to disciplinary removals and should properly document all such removals in their student information system (SIS). This allows the LEA to meet state and federal requirements to:

- Provide services during any disciplinary removal, regardless of its duration, in accordance with WAC 392-172A-05145 and WAC 392-400-610
- Determine if and when the student has been subjected to a change in placement due to disciplinary removals as defined by WAC 392-172A-05155
- Document and report accurate data collections on all disciplinary actions taken in school, as required under RCW 28A.600.460 and RCW 28A.300.042

When Must Educational Services Be Provided During Disciplinary Removals?

When a student eligible for special education services is subjected to a disciplinary removal, then regardless of the length of the removal, the district is required to provide educational services that provide a FAPE, in accordance with the student's right to FAPE (which includes access to the general education curriculum). The following WACs form the foundation for this requirement:

- WAC 392-172A-05145(2)(b) requires that the district provide services to students eligible for special education services during removals of 10 school days or fewer *if* it is also required to provide services to students without disabilities who are similarly removed

- WAC 392-400-610 requires that services must be provided to any student in Washington during removals of any duration

Therefore, during disciplinary removals of any length, students eligible for special education services must be provided with educational services that provide a FAPE "so as to enable the student to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting, and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the student's IEP."

Restraint, Isolation, and the Rights of Students with Disabilities

The U.S. Department of Education's position is that restraint and isolation are "harmful to children…There is ample evidence of significant harms to students due to these practices, including serious physical injury, emotional trauma, and even death."[127] Restraint and isolation can also cause additional layers of harm to students with disabilities. Federal guidance is clear that restraint and isolation, when used to discriminate against a student with a disability or to deny them their rights

[125] WAC 392-172A-01050.
[126] OCR (2016). *Parent and educator resource guide to Section 504 in public elementary and secondary schools* (page 30).
[127] U.S. Department of Education (2025). *Secretary Cardona letter on restraints and seclusion in schools.*

under federal and state law, is unlawful. This includes the use of restraint or isolation that follows "criteria, policies, practices, or procedures that are neutral in language and evenhandedly implemented with respect to students with and without disabilities but that nonetheless have the effect of discriminating against students with disabilities on the basis of disability, or defeating or substantially impairing accomplishment of the objectives of the school's programs with respect to students with disabilities."[128]

It should never be the case that school staff assume or communicate that restraint and isolation are practices *for students with disabilities*. RCW 28A.600.485 explicitly prohibits the use of restraint and isolation for any student, including those eligible for an IEP or 504 plan, unless a student has spontaneous behavior that poses an imminent likelihood of serious harm. A student's IEP or 504 Plan must not include the use of restraint or isolation as a planned behavior intervention unless a student's individual needs require more specific advanced educational planning and the student's parent or guardian agrees. For more, see "Emergency Response Protocol" on page 81.

The use of restraint or isolation may be evidence that a student's disability-related needs are not being adequately met by the student's IEP or 504 Plan. School teams should never regard restraint or isolation as effective behavior support interventions for students with disabilities. If the team is repeatedly restraining or isolating a student with a disability, they should use the supports described throughout this portion of the manual to address the student's interfering behavior with positive and proactive supports in the IEP or 504 Plan.

WAC 392-172A-02076 establishes a number of practices which are prohibited for use with students eligible for special education services "by reason of their offensive nature or their potential negative physical consequences, or their illegality." Some of these practices are described in greater detail in Section 6 (pp. 98-99).

The district which holds the responsibility for FAPE for a given student is also required to ensure the student is not restrained or isolated in a manner which violates state law, or subjected to practices prohibited under WAC 392-172A-02076. This means that a district which utilizes a contracted placement for a student eligible for special education services (e.g., an authorized nonpublic agency (NPA) or program operated by an educational service district) must continue to follow their responsibilities for FAPE, such as:

- Monitoring documentation of the use of restraint and isolation with the student
- Whenever needed, taking appropriate and data-based steps to address the student's behavior support needs via the processes described throughout Section 5 of this manual, such as by reevaluating the student, conducting an FBA, developing a BIP, and convening the IEP team to modify the IEP to ensure it is appropriately calculated to provide educational benefit
- Determining if and when a student at a contracted placement is being restrained and/or isolated excessively, and timely responding as described above
- Regularly and frequently reviewing records provided by contracted placements to ensure no practices prohibited under WAC 392-172A-02076 are used with the student

Civil Rights Violations in Restraint and Isolation of Students

[128] OCR (2016). *Dear colleague letter: Restraint and seclusion of students with disabilities* (page 16).

with Disabilities

Both the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the U.S. Department of Justice have the authority to investigate systematic district misuse of restraint and isolation and impose corrective actions. A review of their recent investigations suggests that district violations most commonly occur in the following area(s):

- Denial of a free appropriate public education (FAPE)
- Disability discrimination
- Parents denied meaningful participation in IEP team meetings

Districts found in violation were frequently required to provide compensatory education to students who were subjected to restraint and/or isolation, revise policies and/or procedures to ensure compliance with state and federal law, improve documentation and data-based decision making in response to restraint and isolation use, and/or provide training for staff in areas of noncompliance.

Denial of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Many districts investigated by OCR for misuse of restraint and isolation were found to have denied students with disabilities a FAPE. Typically, districts which were found to have denied students FAPE because of restraint and isolation made at least one of the following errors:

- Did not appear to consider whether a student's IEP was sufficient to provide FAPE in light of the use of restraint or isolation in response to the student's interfering behavior
- Did not appear to consider student needs for positive behavior interventions and supports as part of the IEP after staff use of restraint or isolation
- Did not consider reevaluating students subjected to repeated use of restraint and/or isolation to determine any necessary changes to student IEPs and/or 504 Plans to ensure a FAPE was provided
- Especially for students at contracted placements (i.e., NPAs), district staff had incomplete or otherwise inadequate documentation of student restraint and isolation, and thus could not develop an IEP that was appropriately calculated to provide educational benefit
- Did not address students' lost instructional time, or consider any need for compensatory services, that resulted from the ongoing use of restraint and/or isolation

OCR has also indicated that the trauma a student experiences from restraint or isolation may deny them a FAPE if that trauma and its effects are not addressed by the IEP or 504 team. "The use of restraint or [isolation] may have a traumatic impact on that student, such that even if she were never again restrained or [isolated], she might nevertheless have new academic or behavioral difficulties that, if not addressed promptly, could constitute a denial of FAPE. Depending on the nature of his or her disability, a student with a disability may be especially physically or emotionally sensitive to the use of such techniques. That traumatizing effect could manifest itself in new behaviors, impaired concentration or attention in class, or increased absences, any of which could, if sufficiently severe and unaddressed, result in a denial of FAPE for that student. Other effects could include socially withdrawn behavior, or diminished interest or participation in class."[129] IEP and 504 teams should consider what supports should be provided to students with disabilities whose access to FAPE may be impacted by the trauma of restraint and/or isolation, such as

[129] OCR (2016). *Dear colleague letter: Restraint and seclusion of students with disabilities* (pages 16-17).

counseling, school social work services, and school-based mental health services.[130]

Disability Discrimination

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits districts from engaging in disability-based discrimination. Misuse of restraint and isolation against students with disabilities can result in disability discrimination. Factors that may contribute to findings of discrimination include:

- Overuse and/or disproportionate use of restraint and isolation with students who have disabilities when compared to the use of these practices with nondisabled students
- District restraint and isolation policies, procedures, and practices that routinely result in lost instructional time for students with disabilities, such as:
    - Use of restraint and isolation for behaviors that do not meet the threshold of "imminent likelihood of serious harm" in RCW 28A.600.485(3)(b), such as "to enforce school rules, to address refusals to comply with staff directives, to prevent students from leaving a room or area, and to transport students."[131]
    - Arbitrary criteria imposed by staff to end an instance of restraint and/or isolation,[132] extending the time students spend in restraint and isolation and violating the requirement in RCW 28A.600.485(3)(b) to end restraint/isolation as soon as the likelihood of serious harm has dissipated
- Failing to leverage the range of effective practices for positive behavior support, such as FBAs and BIPs, and instead "regularly and repeatedly" using restraint and isolation to respond to behavior that district staff "should have anticipated and managed as part of educating students with emotional and behavioral needs"[133]
- Failing to implement and/or ensure the effectiveness of existing BIPs[134]
- Continuing to restrain and isolate students with disabilities "even…when students exhibited clear signs of trauma"[135]

Parents Denied Meaningful Participation in IEP Team

Parents have the right to participate in IEP team meetings, and districts must take whatever action is necessary to ensure that the parent understands the proceedings of the meeting.[136] For a student who has experienced restraint and/or isolation, it is imperative that districts ensure parents have sufficient notice and information about the use of restraint and/or isolation to meaningfully participate in related IEP discussions. Districts in violation of this requirement typically made at least one of the following errors:

- Parents were not notified of the use of restraint and/or isolation, or were notified later than the timeframe required by policy
- Documentation and/or reporting of restraint and isolation were inadequate or inconsistent,

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[130] OCR (2022). *Supporting students with disabilities and avoiding the discriminatory use of student discipline under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*.

[131] U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Civil Rights Division (2024). *Letter to Wichita Public Schools* (page 4).

[132] For example, requiring that students in isolation sit silently with their back to the wall of the isolation room for five continuous minutes before they can exit the isolation room.

[133] U.S. DOJ, Civil Rights Division (2023). *Letter to Anchorage School District* (page 3).

[134] "For students who were repeatedly restrained or secluded, many had behavior plans that the District was not implementing, and others had plans that the District did not revise after an incident to ensure their effectiveness." U.S. DOJ, Civil Rights Division (2024). *Letter to Wichita Public Schools* (page 4).

[135] U.S. DOJ, Civil Rights Division (2023). *Letter to Spokane Public Schools* (page 2).

[136] WAC 392-172A-05001.

resulting in incomplete information reported to parents

- Especially for students at contracted placements (i.e., NPAs), district staff had incomplete or otherwise inadequate documentation of student restraint and isolation, and thus could not appropriately notify or debrief parents
- Without timely and accurate information about staff use of restraint and/or isolation for a student's interfering behavior, the student's parents were denied the ability to meaningfully participate in IEP team discussions and decisions

SECTION 6: CRISIS PREVENTION AND DE-ESCALATION

This section provides guidance on crisis de-escalation, state laws and requirements governing any use of restraint or isolation, prohibited practices and other safety considerations, and the use of restraint and isolation data to support staff as they work to reduce these practices.

The reader who is interested in reducing restraint and eliminating isolation may wonder why this section of the manual was placed at the end. OSPI staff have consistently received feedback from the *Reducing Restraint and Eliminating Isolation* (RREI) demonstration schools and districts[137] that **the work of reducing restraint and eliminating isolation is nearly all prevention-based** and involves investment in inclusive multitiered systems of support (MTSS) that includes support for social, emotional, and behavioral health (SEBH).

Effective schools and districts create systems, classrooms, and individual student support plans that center positive behavior support, student belonging, and a belief shared by administrators and staff that "*all* our students are all *our* students." For guidance on creating those preventative systems, classrooms, and individual supports, refer to Sections 1-5 of this manual.

What is a Crisis?

There are many types of crises that may occur in the school environment. In this manual, the term "crisis" is used to refer to a student-specific event that is emotional/behavioral in nature. In this sort of crisis, the student's coping skills and/or capacity becomes overwhelmed, leading to less control of their actions and escalation to the point where their behavior may pose a safety risk to themselves and/or others. This type of crisis is likely to follow a predictable pattern commonly referred to as the *crisis cycle* – distinct and observable phases of escalation and de-escalation with specific opportunities to intervene for safety.

It is important to emphasize that crises are not inherently caused by a student's identity, including race/ethnicity or disability.[138] Any student may experience this type of crisis at school, perhaps as the result of stress, trauma, pressure to perform well, unmet mental health needs, social conflict, or even as an adverse reaction to an ordinary medication or supplement.

The ideal outcome of any crisis is safe de-escalation. However, this is only possible through intentional preparation. District and school staff should plan ahead for the eventuality that a crisis will occur at some point as required by RCW 28A.320.127.[139] As part of that plan, districts are strongly advised to consider proactive and compassionate support to ensure that a student who experiences a crisis has sufficient support that strengthens their relationships and feeling of belonging, and prioritizes learning needed social/emotional/behavioral skills to prevent future crises. This will allow the student to navigate the crisis with minimal risk of harm and return to their

[137] OSPI (2025). *Reducing Restraint & Eliminating Isolation (RREI) project.*

[138] As discussed on pages 95-96, however, students who belong to certain marginalized groups are disproportionately likely to be subjected by school staff to restraint and/or isolation for a given behavior (relative to students who engage in that behavior and do not belong to that marginalized group).

[139] RCW 28A.320.127.

classroom feeling a sense of safety, belonging, and readiness to learn.

Crisis Cycle

The crisis cycle is a model of how an person responds to acute distress. Each phase in the crisis cycle is distinct and predictable, although the exact behaviors present in each phase will vary from one individual to the next. Since appropriate responses from school staff will change based on the current phase of the crisis cycle, staff should be trained in the crisis cycle so they can recognize and respond appropriately to each phase when it occurs.

The phases of the crisis cycle are described in the table below. When escalation begins, staff can engage in de-escalation responses such as those in the table below. De-escalation takes time and care, and interfering with the process can cause the person to begin to re-escalate. **It is important to emphasize that there is no phase in the crisis cycle in which restraint or isolation are automatically appropriate.** There are many effective de-escalation strategies for each phase which do not involve the restraint or isolation of the student in crisis.

The crisis cycle does not end until the person has fully de-escalated. An individual in the crisis cycle should never be pressured to de-escalate quickly as this will lead to re-escalation.

Phase	Description	Adult Responses
1: Baseline	The student appears comfortable and engaged.	• Continue usual classroom routines and instruction. • Maintain engaging and positive interactions with the student.
2: Catalyst	Something has occurred to generate distress and/or anxiety for the student.	• Acknowledge the stressor, and remove or reduce it if needed. • Provide support to use positive coping strategies.
3: Escalation Begins	The student begins to show distress through internalizing behavior (e.g., withdrawing or shutting down) or externalizing behavior (e.g., arguing, engaging in behavior that appears to be seeking a reaction).	• Support the student in problem-solving to address the stressor. • Provide 2-3 concrete choices to manage or move away from the stressor.
4: Escalation Intensifies *Not a teachable moment.*	As the student's distress increases, their behavior escalates in frequency and/or intensity. The student may direct more behaviors at others or self.	• Neutrally set and hold expectations for the student. • Use language that is concrete rather than emotional.
5: Crisis Peak *Not a teachable moment.*	The student's distress and corresponding behaviors reach their peak. The student has less control over their behavior than in other phases. Injury to the student or another person is more likely during this phase. Safe de-escalation is the highest priority.	• Refrain from any unnecessary interactions or comments. Brief interactions with the student only occur if absolutely necessary. • Ensure enough staff are present to maintain safety and all staff know their roles.

6: De-Escalation *Not a teachable moment.*	With support, the student begins to regulate their emotions and behavior. Unless adult responses are thoughtful, calm, and minimally demanding, re-escalation is likely.	• Give space and support needed for de-escalation to progress. • Avoid discussing the incident or presenting expectations until the student has fully de-escalated.
7: Exhaustion *Not a teachable moment.*	The student is physically, mentally, and emotionally drained from the crisis. They may need time and/or rest before they can return to baseline.	• Be understanding of the student's need for rest. • Invite the student to return to their routine when they are ready.
8: Recovery	The student has finished de-escalating and is at reduced risk of re-escalating.	• Support the student in re-entering their daily routine. • If the student is expected to repair harm, determine when/how they will do so. • Expectations may be presented during this phase, in a matter-of-fact way without shame or guilt.

Crises Involving Restraint and Isolation

The U.S. Department of Education states in *Restraint and Isolation: Resource Document*[140] that "every effort should be made to prevent the need for the use of restraint and for the use of seclusion [isolation]." Neither restraint nor isolation improves student behavior – in fact, they can lead to worsened student behavior, injury, and even death.[141] Restraint and isolation are prohibited for use as punishment or as a preplanned "intervention" for broad categories of student behavior. They are last resort strategies to maintain safety, and the necessity of their use in a given situation can only be assessed and determined on a case-by-case basis.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding: *Any Use of Restraint or Isolation Should Be Treated Like an Emergency*

Demo site leaders shared that any use of restraint or isolation should be treated by administrators and staff like a "red flag emergency" and a sign that there are urgent unmet needs for the student, rather than a normal part of school operations. One leader shared, "It's a crisis -- it shouldn't be happening all the time!" Staff should be supported in the *mindset work* needed to shift practice if necessary. For more about this, refer to page 34 of Section 2.

Any single use of restraint and/or isolation should serve as a cue to district staff that changes are needed in the school or district environment to ensure the student who was restrained or isolated is adequately and positively supported. Further, the repeated use of restraint and/or isolation, either with an individual student or across numerous students in the school or district, can indicate more systemic concerns about the wellbeing, belonging, and support of students with behavior learning needs. These concerns may be addressed by examining and improving school or district systems, policies, procedures, practices, or professional development. For more, refer to Section 2.

[140] U.S. Department of Education (2012). *Restraint and seclusion: Resource document* (page 12).
[141] U.S. GAO (2009). *Seclusions and restraints: Selected cases of death and abuse at public and private schools and treatment centers.*

When district staff restrain and/or isolate a student, they must adhere to state requirements contained in RCW 28A.600.485 and WAC 392-172A-02076. These requirements are summarized in more detail below.

Definitions

Restraint

Restraint of students in Washington is defined as "physical intervention or force used to control a student, including the use of a restraint device to restrict a student's freedom of movement. It does not include appropriate use of a prescribed medical, orthopedic, or therapeutic device when used as intended, such as to achieve proper body position, balance, or alignment, or to permit a student to safely participate in activities."[142]

It is important to note that restraint as defined above **does not include physical prompting or blocking** (unless those are used with force to control a student). While not defined in state or federal regulations, physical prompting and blocking are commonly used practices in school settings. Their common definitions are provided below to assist the reader in understanding the difference between these practices and restraint.

Physical prompting is commonly defined as an instructional strategy in which an adult guides a student through a motion needed to complete a task or demonstrate a skill. Physical prompting can be delivered in a variety of ways which do not use force to control a student, including:

- A tap or light touch on a student's arm, shoulder, or back to cue them to the next step in a task
- Hand-under-hand contact with the student to provide gentle assistance with a task
- Hand-over-hand contact with the student to provide additional assistance

Physical prompting is not considered a restraint unless it is used with force to control a student. However, overuse of physical prompts can lead to prompt dependency. Staff should use professional judgment and planning to ensure that physical prompts are delivered in alignment with evidence-based practices, such as the use of a prompt hierarchy or graduated guidance, to ensure students are not being over-prompted.

Blocking is commonly defined as a behavior management strategy in which a student is prevented from engaging in a particular behavior by an adult physically blocking the completion of the action. Blocking can be utilized in a variety of ways, and when used correctly should never involve the use of force to control a student. Examples of blocking include:

- School staff covering a light switch with their hand to prevent a student from playing with it
- School staff stepping between two students who appear to be in conflict with each other
- School staff standing in front of a door to prevent a student from exiting the building

Blocking does not involve staff initiating physical contact with a student. It is not considered restraint unless it is incorrectly used in a way that fits the definition of restraint above.

[142] RCW 28A.600.485(1)(b).

Isolation

Isolation of students in Washington is defined as "restricting the student alone within a room or any other form of enclosure, from which the student may not leave. It does not include a student's voluntary use of a quiet space for self-calming, or temporary removal of a student from his or her regular instructional area to an unlocked area for purposes of carrying out an appropriate positive behavior intervention plan."[143]

Examples of isolation include:

- School staff restricting the student alone in a room or other enclosed space, either by locking the door or by blocking the student from leaving in some other way (including creating the conditions in which the student reasonably believes they will be prevented from leaving the room)
- School staff conducting a "room clear" in which 1) the student remains alone in the room and is prevented from leaving, and 2) and school staff are outside the room

Isolation, as defined above, does not include any behavior management practice in which a school staff member is present in the same room as the students. This includes practices like classroom timeouts, supervised in-school suspensions or detentions, or room clears (so long as a staff member remains in the room with the student).

When are Restraint or Isolation Permitted?

Restraint or isolation of students in Washington is only permitted when the student's spontaneous behavior poses an *imminent likelihood of serious harm*.[144] This standard was introduced with Substitute House Bill 1240, which further emphasized:[145]

> *"The legislature declares that it is the policy of the state of Washington to prohibit the planned use of aversive interventions, to promote positive interventions when a student with disabilities is determined to need specially designed instruction to address behavior, and to **prohibit schools from physically restraining or isolating any student except when the student's behavior poses an imminent likelihood of serious harm to that student or another person**."*

In their 2023 report, "Coming Into the Light: An Examination of Restraint and Isolation Practices in Washington Schools,"[146] Disability Rights Washington, a federally-designated state protection and advocacy agency, along with the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, found that "the

[143] RCW 28A.600.485(1)(a).
[144] RCW 28A.600.485(3)(b).
[145] Substitute House Bill 1240 (2015) Session Law.
[146] DRW & ACLU of Washington (2023). *Coming into the light: An examination of restraint and isolation practices in Washington schools.*

interpretation of 'imminent likelihood of serious harm' by school personnel is broad, inconsistent, and erroneously applied throughout Washington." They identified a need for the legislature to clarify this standard and recommended that **the standard of imminent likelihood of serious harm should not apply to property damage unless the property damage also creates risk of injury or death.** District leaders are advised to review their local policies, procedures, and practices to ensure that "imminent likelihood of serious harm" is appropriately clear for staff.

Who is Impacted Most by Restraint and Isolation Use?

Students

In Washington, restraint and isolation are used disproportionately (e.g., more frequently than with other groups, relative to student enrollment share) with the following groups of students:

- Students in preschool, kindergarten, and grades 1-5
- Students with disabilities
- Students who are Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and/or multi-racial
- Male students
- Students from low-income households
- Students experiencing homelessness
- Students in foster care placements

These disproportionalities are indicators of school systems that react more punitively to the behavior of students of color and students with disabilities, relative to other student groups. "Students of color experience more disciplinary actions, including isolation and physical restraint, than students classified as white. However, no empirical evidence demonstrates that any racial group of students commit proportionally more offenses.[147] Students with disabilities may engage in behaviors that are manifestations of their disability and are communicative. However, empirical evidence does not demonstrate any indication that students with disabilities engage in behavior that is proportionate to the high use of disciplinary practices….Repeated use of restraint and isolation may indicate a violation of a student's right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) if the student's accommodations do not provide appropriate supports and services or are not being properly implemented."[148]

[147] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2019). *Beyond suspensions: Examining school discipline policies and connections to the school-to-prison pipeline for students of color with disabilities.*

[148] OSPI (2022). *Report to the Legislature: Crisis Response Workgroup* (pages 7-8).

Fast Facts About Disproportionate Use of Restraint and Isolation

During the 2023-24 school year in Washington public schools:

- 85% of incidents of restraint and isolation occurred with students between preschool and 5th grade.
- 93% of incidents of restraint or isolation occurred with students with disabilities, even though they comprise only 16% of student enrollment.
- Students with disabilities were 25 times more likely to experience 1 or more incidents of restraint or isolation than their peers without disabilities.
- Black students were 1.8 times more likely to experience 1 or more incidents of restraint or isolation than white students
- American Indian/Alaskan Native students were 1.6 times more likely to experience 1 or more incidents or restraint or isolation than white students
- Students of two or more races were 1.4 times more likely to experience 1 or more incidents of restraint or isolation than white students

The tragic outcome of this practice is that many students – especially students with disabilities and students of color – experience early, and often repeated, trauma associated with their experience of being restrained and/or isolated at school. That trauma often results in more rapid fight-or-flight responses, including behavioral escalation, in situations occurring at school and with school staff. This can create a vicious cycle in which a student who is restrained or isolated once is more likely to be restrained or isolated again as a direct result of the traumatic impact of restraint and isolation and its associated adverse impact on the student's emotional state and behavior at school.

Families

For parents and other family members of students who are subjected to restraint and/or isolation, one common outcome is disconnection with the school's staff, community and resources. This impact is particularly troubling given that students who are repeatedly restrained and/or isolated are typically students who are already marginalized by traditional systems due to their race, disability, socioeconomic status, housing status, foster care placement, and/or experience of abuse or neglect.[149,150] Families with less access to external behavioral health resources often *require* the coordinated support that schools can provide – therefore, as a matter of educational justice and equity, schools and districts should do everything in their power to maintain strong and productive partnerships with families of students with extensive behavior support needs.

In community outreach and communication, OSPI staff consistently observe that families of students who were restrained and/or isolated report feeling pushed out by inequitable school systems which were not designed with their students in mind. Parents also regularly report that school staff do not notify them of restraint or isolation use in a timely manner and/or until their

[149] DRW & ACLU of Washington (2023). *Coming into the light: An examination of restraint and isolation practices in Washington schools.*

[150] American Institutes for Research (AIR; 2024). *Understanding restraint & isolation in Washington schools.*

child has been subjected to repeated instances.[151] Students who experience trauma from restraint and/or isolation use – particularly repeated use in schools that inappropriately rely on these practices – may develop mental and/or behavioral health needs that require more significant support and take a toll on a family's wellbeing and resources.

Staff

The majority of school staff surveyed felt unsafe when having to use restraint and/or isolation.[152] In the 2023-24 school year, one or more staff members were injured in the course of 10% of reported incidents of restraint or isolation.[153] The risk of staff injury increases when staff rely on the so-called "hands-on" techniques of restraint and isolation, rather than preventative techniques such as crisis de-escalation strategies.

Survey data suggests that many teachers have less access to professional development that provides prevention-focused crisis de-escalation and other behavioral intervention skills than any other group of staff, including paraeducators, administrators and leadership, related service providers, and specialist staff. This gap in access may be even larger in rural and remote districts which often report greater barriers in accessing professional development and other services.

RREI Demonstration Site Finding:
"Hands-On" Training Does Not Reduce Restraint

Staff at RREI demonstration sites report that professional development in restraint and isolation techniques is insufficient to reduce their use (and may even lead to increased use). Instead, staff should have access to professional development that emphasizes crisis prevention, de-escalation, collaborative teaming and problem solving, SEBH teaching and support strategies, and relationship-building. Training in these areas should not be limited only to special education staff or general education staff, but should be inclusive of all staff and reflect a unified approach to positive and proactive student support.

When making decisions about who to provide restraint training to, districts should consider prioritizing building administrators. One demonstration site principal shared that, on the rare occasion that restraint is warranted, she has informed her staff that she will be the one to conduct it. This district team felt that was a key element in reducing overall use of restraint, sharing that "Administrators need to *feel the weight* of these practices."

Prohibited Practices Related to Restraint or Isolation

Several state statutes and regulations prohibit certain unsafe and harmful practices related to restraint and isolation. Districts must ensure all staff abide by these prohibitions.

Restraint or Isolation Use Without Imminent Likelihood of Serious Harm

Restraint and isolation are prohibited for use in response to behaviors that do not meet the

[151] DRW & ACLU of Washington (2023). *Coming into the light: An examination of restraint and isolation practices in Washington schools.*
[152] AIR (2024). *Understanding restraint & isolation in Washington schools.*
[153] In incidents that involved a staff injury, an average of 1.3 staff members were reported injured.

threshold of *imminent likelihood of serious harm* above. Note that a student's behavior may cause great concern for school team members and may necessitate additional behavioral support (e.g., a Behavioral Intervention Plan [BIP] or other behavioral supports described throughout this manual) without meeting the threshold of imminent likelihood of serious harm as described above. Examples of potentially concerning behaviors that, on their own, would likely never meet this threshold, include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Not following school staff directions
- Refusal to go to class or complete schoolwork
- Refusal to sit down or use an assigned seat
- Using profane, offensive, or otherwise disrespectful language
- Ripping decorations or artwork off the wall

Restraint That Interferes with Breathing

Restraint that interferes with a student's breathing is prohibited by RCW 9A.16.100(2)(d) and WAC 392-172A-02076. Specific restraint practices which are associated with student death by positional asphyxiation and/or cardiac distress (i.e., prone, supine, and wall restraints, and any other restraint that interferes with breathing) are also expressly prohibited by WAC 392-172A-02076.

Corporal Punishment

RCW 28A.150.300 prohibits the use of corporal punishment in public schools, without exception. Each school district must adopt OSPI's policy which prohibits this practice.

Use of Force

RCW 9A.16.100(1) addresses use of force on children, including by educators implementing restraint or isolation: "Any use of force on a child by any other person is unlawful unless it…when occurring in an educational setting and involving an educator, actually or substantially complies with limitations on the use of student isolation and restraint under RCW 28A.600.485 including that it is used only when a student's behavior poses an imminent likelihood of serious harm."

Additional District Actions to Prevent Dangerous Use of Restraint and Isolation

In addition to practices which are explicitly prohibited by WAC or RCW, there are a number of dangerous practices related to restraint and isolation which districts are advised to take steps to prohibit locally. There are also a number of practices which can increase student safety should restraint or isolation be used. For more about addressing student safety via the district's policies, procedures, and practices, see pages 105-107.

Required Actions After Restraint or Isolation Use

Parent Notification

After school or district staff use restraint or isolation with a student, the principal or their designee must notify the parent/guardian in compliance with all requirements.[154]

Parent notification must be completed in the following two ways:

[154] RCW 28A.600.485(6).

- **Verbally**, within 24 hours of the incident
- **In writing**, as soon as practical but postmarked no later than five business days after the restraint or isolation occurred

Like other communication with parents/guardians, school staff must follow all requirements and district policies for communication in the parent/guardian's home language. In addition, the written report above must be provided (in the above timeline) in the language in which the school or district communicates with the family. It should also meet the requirements outlined below for the written incident report.

Debriefing

Following any use of restraint or isolation, school staff[155] must follow up with the student, parent/guardian, and staff involved. This is sometimes referred to as *debriefing*. During debriefing, specific items are required to be discussed.

When debriefing with the student and parent/guardian, school staff must discuss, at minimum:[156]

- The behavior that led to the restraint or isolation
- How appropriate this response was to the behavior

When debriefing with the staff involved, school staff must discuss, at minimum:[157]

- Whether proper procedures were followed
- What support or training the staff member needs to avoid similar incidents in the future

RREI Demonstration Site Finding: *Debriefing is Critical*

Multiple demonstration sites reported the positive effects of strengthening their debriefing practices. Several pilot sites also reported that stronger debriefing practices were one of the most effective changes they implemented to reduce restraint and eliminate isolation. They shared that students, families, and staff all benefited from the time spent debriefing, reflecting, and problem-solving to address student support needs – resulting in lower rates of restraint and isolation afterward.

Effective debriefing conversations are focused on positive support for a student's social, emotional, and behavioral learning, not on assigning blame. During all debriefing conversations, staff are strongly encouraged to approach the process in a manner that is prevention-focused, culturally responsive, anti-racist and anti-ableist, and affirming of the belonging and strengths of the student who was restrained and/or isolated. To enrich the debriefing process, school staff may consider incorporating some or all of the guiding questions presented below.

[155] Though state law does not specify which school staff should facilitate this, effective debriefing might include roles like as a school administrator, a member of the school and/or district team involved in positive behavioral interventions and supports, and (if applicable) a special education leader or mentor.
[156] RCW 28a.600.485(4)(a).
[157] RCW 28a.600.485(4)(b).

Guiding Questions to Consider During Debriefing

- Does the team understand why the student was in crisis and what authentic need the student's behavior was communicating, or is more information needed?
- Were the student's supports provided consistently as outlined in an IEP, 504 Plan, Behavioral Intervention Plan, or other support plans?
- During the specific incident, was there an imminent likelihood of serious harm that warranted the use of restraint and/or isolation?
- Were all district and state requirements followed for the use of restraint and/or isolation?
- Would the staff member benefit from additional professional development on topics such as crisis de-escalation, trauma-informed practices, or positive and proactive social, emotional, and behavior supports?
- Did the specific incident reveal gaps in staffing patterns and/or availability of trained staff that need to be addressed?

Written Incident Report

If school or district staff uses restraint or isolation with a student, they must notify the building administrator (or their designee) as soon as possible. Within two business days, the staff member must submit a written report of the incident to the district office. The written report must include the following:[158]

- Date and time of the restraint or isolation
- Name and job title of the staff member(s) involved
- Description of the actions and circumstances that led to the restraint or isolation
- Type of restraint or isolation
- How long the restraint or isolation lasted
- Whether or not the student was injured
- Whether or not the staff member was injured
- What medical care was provided (if the student or staff was injured)
- Recommendations for student and staff member supports and resources, to avoid similar incidents in the future

In addition to these requirements, districts must also report when a school safety and security staff has used force against a student.[159] Any instance of school safety and security staff using restraint with a student is a use of force and must be reported. For guidance, please visit the OSPI CEDARS webpage and refer to the CEDARS Reporting Guidance for the current school year. For more on these roles and restraint and isolation, see pages 108-109.

[158] RCW 28a.600.485(5).
[159] RCW 28A.320.1241.

Best Practices for Describing Incidents

When describing the incident and student behavior that led to restraint and/or isolation:

- **Use precise and neutral language** that describes the situation so a third party could understand what occurred without assumptions or misunderstandings
    - Describe the specific observable behaviors the student engaged in that met the threshold of "imminent likelihood of serious harm," including any contextual factors staff considered when determining if the threshold was met (e.g., "the student attempted to run into the busy street in front of the school" or "the student struck the teacher in the side forcefully and repeatedly")
- **Be mindful to refrain from criminalizing language**, including:
    - Referring to the student as an "offender" or "perpetrator," rather than as "Student 1" or simply using the student's name
    - Referring to the student's behavior with law enforcement terms that do not precisely describe the behavior (e.g., "the student tried to assault the principal"), rather than describing the behavior using precise and neutral language as summarized above
- **Use descriptions that are measurable, observable, and objective.** Avoid vague, subjective, and/or emotionally-loaded descriptions, such as:
    - Describing the lack of a general quality rather than the presence of a specific behavior (e.g., "the student was unsafe" or "the student was dysregulated")
    - Using descriptions that are interpreted very differently from one person to another (e.g., "the student was defiant" or "the student was violent")
    - Making assumptions about the student's intentions, motivations, and/or emotions (e.g., "the student was trying to manipulate the teacher" or "the student enjoys hurting others")

School teams should make productive use of the requirement in RCW 28a.600.485(5)(f) to document any recommendations for changing the nature or amount of resources available to the student and staff to avoid similar incidents in the future. As part of generating those recommendations, teams are advised to implement the following best practices: [160]

- If the student has an FBA and BIP, the team can use the resource [Resource Name] to guide problem-solving.
- If the student does not have an FBA and BIP, the team should consider following the processes described in Section 4 to develop them

These steps are appropriate for any student regardless of eligibility for IEP or 504 Plan services. As described in Section 4, an FBA and BIP can be completed for any student as part of the school and/or district's implementation of Tier 3 of a multi-tiered system of supports.[161]

[160] U.S. Department of Education (2012). *Restraint and seclusion: Resource document* (pages 17-19).
[161] OSERS & OESE (2024). *Using functional behavioral assessments to create supportive learning environments.*

District Reporting Requirement

As required by RCW 28A.600.485(7)(a), districts must annually submit restraint and isolation data to OSPI. Restraint and isolation incidents are entered into district student information systems (SIS) and submitted to OSPI through CEDARS. Records should be entered into the district's SIS as soon as possible to ensure accuracy and compliance with reporting requirements. In the fall of the following school year, this data is pulled to fulfill OSPI's public data reporting requirements. The district's CEDARS administrator can help district staff certify that this data is being reported accurately to OSPI. If a district needs to make updates or corrections to submitted restraint & isolation data, changes must first be made in the district's SIS and then resubmitted to CEDARS. If a district has zero restraint or isolation incidents to report, then they will submit zero records in CEDARS File S. Other than submitting restraint and isolation data through CEDARS, no additional actions are necessary.

For further guidance on recording and submitting restraint and isolation data to OSPI, visit the OSPI CEDARS webpage and refer to the CEDARS Reporting Guidance for the current school year.

Reviewing Restraint and Isolation Data for Decision Making

Districts can review their restraint and isolation data from a variety of lenses to improve practice and prioritize both student and staff safety. The primary purposes of a restraint and isolation data review should be:

- To identify any trends in usage
- To provide additional professional development and/or other resources focused on improving proactive student supports and reducing the use of restraint and isolation
- **To facilitate root cause analyses into any patterns of restraint and isolation use, with the goal of reducing or eliminating these practices**

For best results, data should be graphed and reviewed at the district level, building level, and student level on a regular basis (e.g., once every 1-2 months, depending on frequency of restraint and isolation use). Regardless of the scope, the data review should always involve a consistent multidisciplinary team, including staff representing general education as well as MTSS. Examples of common concerning data trends for teams to flag and follow up on are provided below.

All restraint and isolation incidents should be captured in the district's student information system. Once entered, the district's student information system administrator can assist in extracting data for review and analysis.

Reviewing Data to Reduce Restraint and Eliminate Isolation

At the district level, concerns include:

- Higher than average district restraint and isolation use compared to state rates
- Disproportionate restraint and isolation use…
    - …for any demographic group of students in the district, including groups by race or ethnicity, special education eligibility status and/or disability category, household income, or any other group
    - …in a particular school, relative to other schools in the district
- Increasing frequency and/or duration of restraint and isolation use over time…
    - …for any demographic group of students in the district, including groups by race or ethnicity, special education eligibility status and/or disability category, household income, or any other group
    - …in a particular school, relative to other schools in the district
    - …year over year across the district

At the building level, concerns include:

- Higher than average building restraint and isolation use relative to other district schools
- Disproportionate restraint and isolation use…
    - …for any demographic group of students in the school, including groups by race or ethnicity, special education eligibility status and/or disability category, household income, or any other group
    - …in any classroom relative to other classrooms in the school (irrespective of whether the classroom is a general education or special education setting)
- Increasing frequency and/or duration of restraint and isolation use over time…
    - …for any demographic group of students in the school, including groups by race or ethnicity, special education eligibility status and/or disability category, household income, or any other group
    - …in any classroom relative to other classrooms in the school (irrespective of whether the classroom is a general education or special education setting)
    - …year over year across the building

At the student level, concerns include:

- Increasing frequency and/or duration of restraint and isolation use over time
- Documentation of student self-harm, injury, toileting accidents, school avoidance, or other indicators of trauma
- Restraint and isolation used without imminent likelihood of serious harm, and/or for behaviors that staff believe are precursors to behaviors that have posed a risk of harm in the past
- Restraint and isolation used disproportionately with an individual student relative to other students who engage in similar behaviors that pose a similar imminent likelihood of serious harm
- Restraint and isolation used without medical follow up for student injury
- Restraint and isolation used without evidence that the team mobilized significant positive, proactive and teaching-focused supports to provide the student with instruction and authentic reinforcement for alternative social/emotional/behavioral skills

Additional Considerations for Crisis De-Escalation Practices, Policies, and Procedures

District and school leaders have significant influence over the use of restraint and isolation as well as systems changes that lead to increased staff and student wellbeing and decreases in restraint and isolation. This section provides several key considerations for high leverage practices to increase safety for all members of the school community and decrease or eliminate the use of restraint and isolation through a trauma-informed lens.

Ensure Student Safety During Restraint and/or Isolation

Restraint and isolation carry serious risks, including the risk of student injury and death. Should school and district staff elect to use restraint and/or isolation with a student when there is an *imminent likelihood of serious harm*, they are advised in the strongest possible terms to ensure student safety is explicitly prioritized in district restraint and isolation policies, procedures, and practices. In a recent study of restraint-related child fatalities, researchers found:[162]

- Over half of student fatalities related to physical restraint occurred while the child was placed in a prone position, often with evidence that staff ignored the child's attempts to communicate their distress
- Most fatalities during physical or mechanical restraint are due to asphyxia or cardiac arrhythmia (the latter often due to stress and/or breathing difficulties)

District and school staff must remember that WAC 392-172A-02076 prohibits several specific types of restraints (prone, supine, and wall restraints) as well as a variety of other harmful practices. Additionally, several key practices are also recommended to minimize the likelihood of an adverse outcome.

Protecting the Student's Ability to Breathe

Restraint must never interfere with the student's ability to breathe easily and naturally. Safe and appropriate restraint techniques, such as those provided by evidence-based de-escalation training programs, are designed to ensure that no pressure is applied to a student's face, throat, chest, or stomach during restraint. WAC 392-172A-02076(2)(j)[163] prohibits any restraint that interferes with the student's breathing, and RCW 28A.600.485(3)(b) requires school staff to "closely monitor [restraint and isolation use] to prevent harm to the student."[164] To comply with these requirements, staff should, at minimum:

- Refrain from prohibited restraints (prone, supine, and wall restraints) as described in WAC 392-172A-02076(2)(j)[165]
- Ensure any physical restraint technique is implemented correctly and does not compress the student's neck, chest, or abdomen
- Monitor the student's breathing throughout the restraint

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[162] Nunno, M. A., McCabe, L. A., Izzo, C. V., Smith, E. G., Sellers, D. E., & Holden, M. J. (2022). A 26-year student of restraint fatalities among children and adolescents in the United States: A failure of organizational structures and processes. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 51,* 661-680.

[163] WAC 392-172A-02076(2)(j).

[164] RCW 28a.600.485(3)(b).

[165] WAC 392-172A-02076(2)(j).

- Ensure the student's face is uncovered during a restraint
- Respond quickly and appropriately to *any* indication of respiratory distress by adjusting or discontinuing the restraint

Addressing Other Dangerous Practices in Physical Restraint

The following practices are explicitly prohibited by many reputable and evidence-based crisis de-escalation professional development programs due to heightened risk of injury or death to the individual being restrained:

- Applying pressure to the student's chest, neck, or throat, including any practices that could be described as choke holds
- Applying pressure to the student's back or upper abdomen, including by forcibly holding the student against the back of a chair or other surface
- Compressing the student's chest or obstructing circulation as part of a restraint, such as sitting on or straddling any part of the student's body
- Putting the student off balance and/or engaging the student in such a way that forces them to the floor (e.g., pressing on the backs of the student's knees, supporting the student's weight and then dropping them, tripping or pushing the student)
- Covering or manipulating any part of the student's face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth), or threatening to do so to gain compliance
- Any other practices which use pain or the threat of pain to gain compliance

For student safety and clarity in professional expectations, district leaders are encouraged to review their local policies and procedures and consider incorporating specific prohibited restraint practices, consistent with state requirements and the content of their de-escalation training program.

Protecting the Student's Ability to Communicate

To prevent harm to the student, school staff should respond immediately when a student who is restrained or isolated communicates they are in pain or other distress. This means that staff must ensure the student can communicate freely using their primary mode of communication. For example:

- A student with a disability affecting speech should have access to their primary method of communication, including sign language, a picture board, or any other other forms of augmentative or alternative communication (AAC)
- A student whose primary language is not English may require the presence of a staff member who speaks their language during the restraint or isolation

Guiding Questions for Student AAC Use in Restraint or Isolation

If a school team believes they will need to restrain or isolate a student who uses AAC to communicate, they should proactively consider questions such as the following:

- Is the student currently able to communicate distress with their AAC system? If not, the team should prioritize teaching the student this skill in a way that is responsive to their individual needs (e.g., teaching "help," "it hurts," "I need the nurse," and/or "I can't breathe"). All team members should be aware of the student's method of communicating distress so they are prepared to take *immediate* action to assist the student when needed.
- For a student who uses their hands to communicate (e.g., sign language, picture exchange), has the team identified a restraint technique that does not immobilize the student's hands?
- If the student uses an AAC speech output device to communicate, can that device be safely used by the student in isolation? If not, the team should prepare and teach alternative methods of communication for student use when the device is unavailable.

Provide Professional Development in Positive Alternatives to Restraint and Isolation

Both state and national education leaders consistently recommend that districts seeking to reduce restraint and eliminate isolation invest in professional development into positive, student-centered alternatives. The following recommendations were synthesized from findings from the state Crisis Response Workgroup,[166] Disability Rights Washington[167], American Institutes for Research (AIR)[168], and the federal Department of Education[169].

- Building a strong professional culture that includes Universal Design for Learning (UDL), culturally responsive teaching, and relationship-building with students as Tier 1 practices, to universally affirm and promote the dignity and belonging of each and every student
- Proactively defining, teaching, and reinforcing age-appropriate school and classroom expectations for social, emotional, and behavioral skills
- Providing tiered support for students to address additional learning needs for social, emotional, and behavioral skills
- Supporting staff to build their skillset for managing stress and responding effectively/safely to student interfering behavior and crisis situations
- Developing a robust and data-driven framework of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), including evidence-based assessment, intervention, and progress monitoring for Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports

Considerations for these practices are provided across this manual, particularly Sections 2, 3, and 4.

Provide Professional Development in Trauma-Informed Crisis

[166] OSPI (2022). *Report to the Legislature: Crisis Response Workgroup.*
[167] DRW & ACLU of Washington (2023). *Coming into the light: An examination of restraint and isolation practices in Washington schools.*
[168] AIR (2024). *Understanding restraint & isolation in Washington schools.*
[169] U.S. Department of Education (2012). *Restraint and seclusion: Resource document.*

Intervention

Staff who implement restraint and isolation must be trained and currently certified by a qualified professional development provider.[170] A provider that is *qualified* provides, as stated in WAC 392-172A-02105(1)(d), training in trauma-informed crisis intervention (including de-escalation techniques) and the *safe* use of isolation, restraint, or a restraint device. This means that the provider should adhere to and abide by the prohibited practices in WAC 392-172A-02076[171] in professional development content delivered in accordance with this WAC.

Additional Considerations for Selecting a Crisis De-Escalation Program

OSPI does not provide an approved or vetted list of crisis de-escalation professional development providers. District staff must ensure any professional development providers are qualified, and their content complies with the requirements in RCW and WAC. In selecting a crisis de-escalation program, district staff may wish to consider the following guiding questions:

- Is it evidence-based?
- Is it compliant with Washington requirements?
- Does it include non-contact techniques for de-escalation?
- Is there a training and certification process with continued technical assistance?
- Do training materials and procedures include cultural sensitivity and inclusivity?
- Is the program trauma-informed?
- Is the focus on prevention of crisis situations through positive and proactive support?
- Is it adaptable to various needs, including student use of AAC as described on page 107?
- Is the cost manageable, including the cost to maintain staff certification?
- Have we engaged the community for their input, with particular focus on any communities for whom restraint and isolation are disproportionately used in the district?

Involvement of School Safety and Security Staff

School safety and security staff include *school security officers (SSOs)* and *school resource officers (SROs)*. One of the primary roles of school safety and security staff is in "creating a positive school climate and positive relationships with students."[172] While school staff may request support from school safety and security staff for a student experiencing an emotional/behavioral crisis at school, their involvement in formal school discipline is prohibited.[173]

Districts are responsible for the safe and nondiscriminatory use of restraint and isolation, including restraint and isolation implemented by an SSO or SRO. All school safety and security staff must complete training on 13 mandated topics within six months of their start date, which includes compliance with all state requirements in the use of restraint and isolation in schools. District and school administrators are advised to familiarize themselves with this training content. Federal guidance from the Office for Civil Rights states: "Schools cannot divest themselves of responsibility for the nondiscriminatory administration of school policies, including restraint, by relying on SRO's school district police officers, contract or private security companies, security guards or other

[170] WAC 392-172A-02110.
[171] WAC 392-172A-02076.
[172] RCW 28A.320.124(1)(c).
[173] RCW 28A.320.124(1)(a)(i).

contractors, or other law enforcement personnel to administer school policies. "[174]

Any use of force by school safety and security staff, including restraint, must be recorded and reported to OSPI as described on page 101.

Tips for School and District Administrators to Support the Work of SSOs and SROs

To foster effective partnerships between school safety and security staff and instructional staff, school and district administrators can consider the following practices:

- Integrate restorative practices into school and district systems (for more, see Section 2)
- Ensure all staff in a building understand their roles regarding classroom management, school safety, and crisis-de-escalation
- Provide training to help staff identify appropriate situations for seeking support from SSOs or SROs, clarifying that these roles are not expected to engage in routine classroom management activities or respond to all student interfering behavior
- Facilitate productive and collaborative relationships between school safety and security staff and instructional staff that allow SROs and SSOs to embrace their work of cultivating positive relationships with students
- Support teachers to communicate their needs to school safety and security staff, including communicating if they do *not* need the SRO or SSO to intervene in a particular situation in their classroom
- Include principals and other school leaders in the training for school safety and security staff described above so they are aware of requirements and best practices for these roles

For more information from OSPI about requirements and recommendations for district school safety and security staff, visit School Safety and Security Staff.

[174] OCR (2016). *Dear colleague letter: Restraint and seclusion of students with disabilities.*

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