

Seclusion Working Group,

I wanted to provide public comment on the Seclusion Working Group Report. I live in Rep. Marion Rarick & Senator Michael Holmstrom's districts (respectively). I serve on the Maple Lake School Board, ISD 881 and on the MAWSECO Special Education Cooperative Board (which serves ISD 881). I heard about the Seclusion Working Group during a MAWSECO board meeting. Our Executive Director, Melissa Hanson spoke about the importance of the appropriate and correct use of seclusion in regards to MAWSECO. I wanted to provide my own personal thoughts and experiences on the use of seclusion as a mother of a child with an IEP due to emotional / behavior disorders. Reading through the entire report the below excerpts stood out.

Report page 11, Reference 28 & 29:

"seclusion is the only way to disrupt injurious behavior from students to staff, other students, and to themselves by giving students a way to pause and reset (28)"

"but sometimes those physical holds start to become dangerous for the staff involved. Students may start to engage in additional behaviors towards the staff that can lead to injury to the staff that are attempting to keep the students safe at that moment." (29)

Report page 12, Reference 32:

"In short, seclusion is not the go-to strategy to address emergency situations; when used correctly it is implemented when a suite of preventative strategies and other interventions have unsuccessfully regulated students' behavior and ended emergencies. Audrey Allorie added that "When seclusion is used well, it also provides teams with an alternative to other emergency interventions, such as physical holding and restraint, and EMT or police intervention," (32)

Report page 13, Reference 37:

"One parent mentioned that: "When a student becomes a danger to themselves or others, a seclusion room can serve as a temporary, last resort intervention, allowing them the necessary space and time to regain control in a safe, supervised setting. In our experience, the use of the seclusion room has alleviated the need for police intervention when my child has become so dysregulated at school. This not only protects the classmates but protects the dysregulated child's wellbeing." (37)

Report page 15, Reference 46:

"Testimony and Working Group discussion spoke at length about the importance of addressing seclusion misuse. As one parent concluded, "the solution to this problem is not to target the tool, but to target misuse of the tool," highlighting both their support for the need for seclusion as a restrictive procedure, as well as assurances that it is not misused. (46)

Report page 18 & 19: discusses importance of mental health supports in detail.

The above sections provided much evidence for the appropriate and correct use of seclusion. I can personally attest that seclusion when used correctly is an important support for children

dealing with emotional and behavioral incidents. When my child had outbursts, a good way to defuse was to remove them from the situation aka seclusion of some way shape or form. I was thankful that this was an option, as it helped my child calm down. But I also know for a fact that removing my child kept other children and staff safer, again I am thankful for this tool. I know that staff and other children have been kicked, scratched, etc by my child. I know that these are not isolated incidents occurring with just my child. A friend who taught special education, went into early labor with her baby because her special education student lashed out punching her pregnant belly; thankfully her baby was ok. I have heard of other incidents as well. Having the ability to remove a child from a situation protects other children, staff, and the child themselves.

The use of calm down rooms are mentioned as good tools, but often children can't comprehend when they need to move to these spaces. Incidents occur because young children (and many older) are not always able to recognize their emotions soon enough, thus a process to defuse is absolutely necessary. We were able to help my child identify the calm down rooms as options as my child aged up. But that took many, many years. However, being able to provide a child with a secluded space when it's clear that is the best next step, is the safest option for the child, and it should absolutely remain an option, a tool for our teachers and most importantly for our children. Removing our child from a situation has never been treated as a punishment but as a tool.

My child is actually going through the process of "graduating" out of the IEP program. This is only happening due to the combined hard work of our child, school staff, and us as parents - each working toward a common goal of our child's emotional and behavioral regulation. As I was reading the report I found it disturbing that on page 17, reference 60, the MPS representative stated that seclusion "does not teach students better coping strategies". I have found this to be the opposite with my child. Through the use of removing one's self from a situation we (as parents and child) have recognized the importance of calming down and thinking straight, which for my child often can't happen in the heat of a situation. As my child has aged up I have seen instances of self-reflection - the ability to recognize the situation and understand what's happening isn't healthy, and my child has decided on their own accord to remove themselves. This is because seclusion was never used as a punishment but as a tool, my child has likewise used it as such.... Aka it's a crowded space and causing anxiety that we know might lead to behaviors, it's time to move to a quieter space. Another example - my child has gotten irritated by something and instead of blowing up, has recognized I need to go for a walk to clear my head or go to the calm down room at school. And yet another example, someone is purposefully trying to escalate my child's behaviors and my child chooses to walk away rather than engage knowing what that will likely lead to. These situations have been defused because my child was able to use ALL the tools in their toolbox, seclusion included. As an adult I find it interesting to try to say seclusion is not a coping method when how many times have we heard other adults say "I need to go for a walk to clear my head" or something similar. Using seclusion in some way shape or form is a natural tool that is used as a healthy way to work through things.

Separately it would be interesting to include statistics on law enforcement intervention for the various ISDs involved with the report. That might provide some insight into how interventions are or are not working.

I apologize for the long-winded response, but from a parent perspective my experience has taught me that the appropriate and correct use of seclusion in some way shape or form is a helpful tool to deal with emotional and behavioral outbursts in students in the school setting. Without having utilized that tool (and my child's understanding of how to use it), my child wouldn't be in the positive position they are in, and instead would be a bigger danger to staff, other children, and themselves.

Thank you for your time & effort on this workgroup.

Sincerely,

Jen Rasset

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