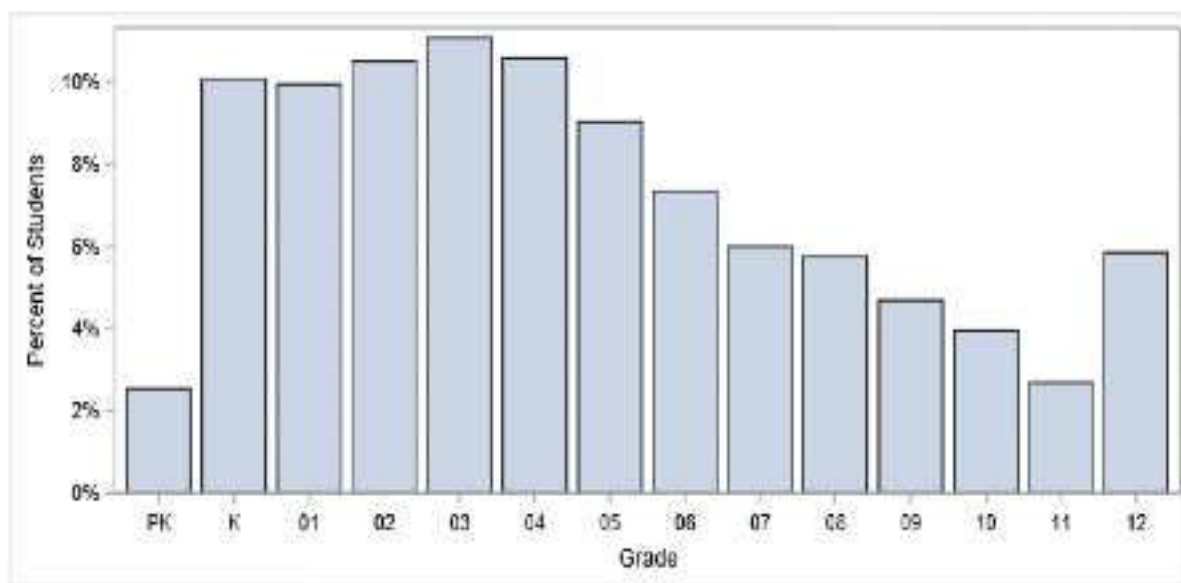


SEEK Testimony for Wednesday March 12, 2025

Honored and esteemed members of the Education Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today.

I would like to hit on 4 topics: Same-day notification of Restraint & Seclusion, a re-definition of Seclusion, Cameras in Classrooms, and Observations.

Currently, the law allows a school up to 24 hours to notify a parent when their child has been restrained. We are requesting that this be changed, and that parents are notified on the same day if their child is restrained. First and foremost, restraint is an emergency measure that is only supposed to be utilized under the most extreme condition where a student's behavior is jeopardizing their physical safety, or that of another person. A parent should have an absolute right to be immediately informed if their child were in this emergency situation. The timeliness of the parent's notification is crucial. I am going to preface the statistics that I am about to share with the caveat that CSDE has failed to issue its annual report regarding restraint and seclusion since the 2021-2022 school year. As such, that is the most recent information available to us. Students in elementary school – particularly grades K-4 – were the most likely to be restrained.



In addition to being young, many of the students also had diagnoses of autism and emotional disability. It is critical that parents are informed as soon as possible if an emergency situation arises at school so that they can address it with their child at home. Their children may not be able to communicate or express what happened, and the parents would have no opportunity to de-brief with their child, or be alerted that their child requires some extra TLC, if they do not learn of this event until the next school day. Additionally, by the time the student returns home the following day, it is likely too late to have a meaningful conversation with them regarding what happened. They also need to be able to make an informed decision as to whether their child is able to return to school the next day, or needs time to process any trauma associated

with being placed in a restraint. I am focusing my testimony on restraint because I am hoping that we can redefine seclusion, such that it would no longer be the trauma-inducing intervention that currently exists. However, if the legislature is unable to re-define seclusion, then we would also want parents to be notified the same day that their child is placed in seclusion for all of the same reasons. It is supposed to be an emergency intervention, it is traumatizing, and the parents have the right to know when their child is involved in an emergency situation at school.

Seclusion, as it is currently defined, involves placing a kid in an isolated space from which they are physically prevented from leaving. It is not a therapeutic intervention. In fact, by definition, seclusion does not include any therapeutic supports or interventions that would allow the student to calm and regulate. Hubbard Day School works with some of the most behaviorally complex students in our state. They are an APSEP and seclusion is against their policy. They do not need to utilize seclusion to keep their students safe. When we lock a student in the room – and that lock is not always figurative – they go into fight or flight mode. They experience trauma, and they experience a fracture in their relationship with their school. We are asking that seclusion be re-defined to require a trained mental health professional be in the room, working with the student, to provide therapeutic interventions that will allow the student to de-escalate and re-regulate in a safe manner.

Cameras in self-contained classrooms and time-out/ seclusion rooms are necessary to protect our most vulnerable students from abuse and to protect staff from allegations of abuse when a nonverbal student comes home with bruises or other marks on their body. Nonverbal, autistic children are incredibly vulnerable, and the threats to their safety are real. Earlier this year, a teacher in Stamford pleaded guilty to recklessly endangering a 6 yr old autistic boy, whom she had carried in a dangerous manner before throwing him onto a beanbag chair. In a different incident, a para was caught on camera biting a nonverbal autistic student. These actions are reprehensible, and these adults do not belong working anywhere near children. At the same time, there have been instances where a client has been injured at school, and cameras have been extremely helpful in examining whether staff acted appropriately – I have reviewed such footage that has exonerated staff of any wrongdoing – and have allowed for transparent discussions regarding whether changes need to be implemented.