

***Keep Kids in Classrooms. Stop the Use of Exclusionary Time-Out Rooms in Schools*** Conference was held on Friday, May 17th, 2024. The goal of the conference was to provide information to schools and families in a user-friendly format and to assist the work the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is doing to reduce and eliminate the use of time-out rooms in Massachusetts schools.

### **Background:**

The Disability Law Center (DLC) is a private, non-profit organization responsible for providing protection and advocacy for the rights of Massachusetts residents with disabilities.

In 2020, the DLC received multiple calls about children experiencing trauma from being placed in time-out rooms. These calls triggered a state-wide monitoring, which found a systemic problem within our schools. Since this time, the DLC has been working systemically to provide teachers and administrators with the tools they need to eliminate exclusionary time-out rooms. These tools benefit everyone - students, teachers, and administration.

The Disability Law Center believes the following steps are necessary to eliminate the use of exclusionary time-out rooms in Massachusetts schools:

- Increase grant money so that ALL schools can get the training they need in order to eliminate exclusionary time-out rooms.
- Issue regulations that would eliminate time-out rooms and make important shifts towards the themes consistently spoken of on May 17th.
- Collect data from schools that receive alternative training, to document the positive impact. This impact includes eliminating trauma, increasing time in the learning environment, improving teacher morale and retention, and reducing student and staff injuries, restraints, and crisis calls.

In September of 2021, DESE issued an [advisory](#) that strongly recommended schools and districts in Massachusetts make concerted efforts to reduce or eliminate the use of time-out rooms.

Following through on their commitment to assist schools in reducing and eliminating time-out rooms, DESE introduced a federally funded [competitive grant](#) in the spring of 2024. The purpose of the grant is to assist schools and districts as they implement strategies, interventions, and supports to reduce or eliminate the use of time-out rooms and increase the amount of time that students spend learning alongside their peers.

## **Key Takeaways from Conference Sponsors:**

The co-sponsors of the conference included The Ed Law Project, The Federation for Children with Special Needs, TASH, Mass Advocates for Children (MAC), Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress (MDSC), & the Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL). All sponsors are committed to moving forward to protect the emotional health of students in Massachusetts.

The recurring theme on Friday, May 17th was hope. Witnessing so many people coming together around such an important issue was extremely moving. It will take all of us working together, and it will take collaboration across the board. It is a call to action for all of us - to embrace new practices and to work towards a place of healing, a place of connection, and a place of accountability in our Massachusetts schools.

- Collaboration and partnership are key. There is a need to build a better understanding within our school systems around trauma-informed practices. Collaboration between families and schools, learning together, and talking about best practices is imperative. When families and schools work together, students have better outcomes.
- Prevention is fundamental. This includes creating a positive climate and culture where adults recognize the impact of their behavior, as well as the role that neuroscience and trauma play in the behavior we see from children.
- What we are witnessing in our schools is stress and the stress response from families, children, and teachers.

- *Kids do well if they can.*  
-Dr. Ross Greene.
- The most vulnerable of populations continue to be the people harmed by exclusionary time-out rooms. We need to look at what is helpful and what is harmful. It is vital that we work to eliminate any further harm from the use of exclusionary time-out rooms.
- *R.R.R – Relationship, relationship, relationship.*  
-Guy Stephens, Founder of the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint
- *We can prevent seclusion, restraint, and excessive discipline from happening. If we can, we must.*  
-Guy Stephens, Founder of the Alliance Against Seclusion and Restraint

### **What Can You Do?**

#### **Action Steps Around Exclusionary Time-Out Rooms:**

- Ask questions. If your school uses time-out rooms, ask to see the space and inquire if the school is tracking usage, as recommended in the [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education \(DESE\) advisory](#).
- Contact the *Keep Kids in Classrooms* Sponsors.
- Start a conversation with your legislators and state leaders about exclusionary time-out rooms in schools.
- Share alternatives with your school system. Educators are looking for helpful, practical information. Many times, they know what the challenges are, but they may not necessarily have the tools and support within their systems to put them into practice.
- Share the frameworks that were presented at the *Keep Kids in Classrooms* conference at team meetings and with your school district's School Committee and Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC). Start educating others about the alternatives to exclusionary time-out rooms.
- Submit a Letter of [No Consent](#) to the school district.
- Contact the Commissioner's Office at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and request that schools stop using exclusionary time-out rooms.

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