



Supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities for over 60 years

Use of Seclusion and Restraints in Schools

September 2018

Survey Results Summary

The results of this survey paint a picture of shame and abuse with respect to the ungoverned use of seclusion and restraint in too many Alberta classrooms, schools and school districts. While some school districts have publicly stated these practices are “relics of the past” that they no longer sanction or use them, this is clearly not true across the province. Alberta Education’s guidelines are an abject failure in ensuring the safety and well-being of students with disabilities and this survey provides telling evidence that guidelines alone will never suffice in ensuring ethical and positive practices, keeping children safe or giving parents peace of mind.

No parent should have to continue to live in fear, every day their child is in school that they might be isolated, locked up, restrained or otherwise punished because they happen to have a disability. Nor should any parent ever again have to feel coerced into agreeing to their child’s seclusion or restraint in order to have their child educated, which is supposed to be a legal and human right in Alberta. It is time for Alberta Education to accept responsibility, be accountable and stand and act on behalf of every child’s rights and well-being; not just some.

Following the data summary are quotes from many parents, highlighted responses of key questions pertaining to the summary data and some of the photos forwarded by parents.



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Seclusion and Restraints Data Summary

- 1) **Use of seclusion and restraint:** 389 parents of children with disabilities/special needs who completed the survey reported
 - 53% of their children had been secluded and restrained at school;
 - 43% had only been secluded; 12% only restrained
- 2) **Age:** Nearly 80% of the children were between 5-10 years of age when secluded, restrained or both. In effect, the more vulnerable of this student population were being subject to the harshest forms of punishment. A little more than half were reported to have autism.
- 3) **Inclusion vs segregation:** Children who were fully included in regular classrooms were less likely to be restrained or secluded while children only partially integrated or completely segregated were more than twice as likely to be secluded/restrained (33% vs. 70-75%).
- 4) **Types of restraint and seclusion:**
 - Restraint:** 50% of parents reported their child was restrained either in a seated or standing position and 24% reported their child was held down on the floor either face up or face down.
 - Seclusion:** 50% of parents reported their child was locked in seclusion and about the same percentage reported their child's exit was blocked by an adult, with 20% also saying their child was physically restrained.
- 5) **Knowledge of seclusion or restraint:** The majority of parents learned from their child, not school personnel, that their son or daughter was being secluded, restrained or both.
- 6) **Length of seclusion or restraint:**
 - Almost a 1/3 of parents did not know how long their child was either secluded or restrained as they were not provided with this information.
 - About 30% of children were restrained for more than 30 minutes with 12% of those restrained for an hour or more and 3.4% more than 3 hours.
 - 71% of parents were never told how long their child was restrained or were rarely told.
 - 57% were secluded for more than 30 minutes, and of those 22% were secluded for an hour or more and 15% more than 3 hours.



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- 53% of parents were rarely told or never knew how long their child was kept in seclusion.

7) Frequency:

44 - 47% of parents reported their child was restrained or secluded on a daily or weekly basis.

Almost 33% did not know how often their child was restrained and 22% did not know how often their child was secluded.

8) Harmful effects:

Approximately 82% of parents whose children were restrained reported their child experienced emotional trauma or distress, 26% noted their child showed signs of physical trauma and 27% signs of physical pain.

Almost 80% of parents whose children were secluded reported their child was emotionally traumatized or distressed, 19% reported signs of physical injury and 15% signs of physical pain.

9) Ethical practices:

- 75 to 78% of parents **never** gave their consent for their child to be restrained or secluded.
- 62 to 67% of parents reported that restraints and seclusion were not being used as part of a positive behaviour plan.
- Only 15 to 20% could say restraints and seclusion were part of a positive behaviour support plan.
- 66 to 69% reported that a psychologist was not involved in approving restraints or seclusion and only 8% to 9% could say one was.
- 71 to 77% stated that the use of restraints or seclusion was not a part of their child's Individual Program Plan (IPP) and only 12% to 17% could say it was.
- 92 to 95% of parents were not given a copy of the school district's guidelines on the use of restraints and seclusion.
- 77 to 80% reported their child's behaviour did not improve with use of restraints or seclusion.
- 90 to 93% of parents were not told of the possible harmful effects of restraints or seclusion.



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- 84 - 88% of parents contacted their school systems with their concerns about restraints or seclusion but only 12 - 15% were satisfied with the response they received; of those who contacted Alberta Education only 3 - 8.5% were satisfied.

10) Other responses:

About 7% reported positive reasons for the use of restraints and seclusion. A number of these related primarily to buses, where students were restrained when a bus attendant and/or positive behaviour support program to enable safe transportation was not provided. Others confused the use of sensory rooms or sensory breaks that students voluntarily used or needed for self-regulation, which this survey was not questioning. Nor did this survey question the isolated use of restraint or seclusion in instances of unforeseen emergencies when no other safe options existed.

A Sample from the 214 Parents who left comments

"Thank you for this research. We are currently on the road to recovery from my son's trauma."

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart, my son needs a voice and didn't have one."

"I would like all occurrences to be investigated further. I'm happy there has been light shed upon this issue."

"I will never forget seeing these 2 women (one being the principal) holding him down in the hallway. He was so traumatized he couldn't even talk about it until later that night. Keep in mind he never displayed physical violence, he just did not want to complete some of his assignments."

"I found out in junior high they put him in a headlock and forced him in that room every single day; that's why he didn't want to go to school."

"WE MUST STOP TREATING OUR CHILDREN LIKE CRIMINALS."

"He was put into seclusion over the lunch hour daily at high school. This was partially done for his protection against bullying with no supervision available. Though it did make him feel 'different' and he learned that "everyone was too busy to be with him", and concluded that he wasn't worthy of friendships."

"The worst of which was restraining him on the floor beside a large garbage can in the hallway and the incident where 4 staff members participated in locking him in a bathroom by way of a chair and staff blocking it for over an hour."



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"He spent all day, every day, working in a very small storage room."

"I was surprised at the school's use of physically restraining my daughter, by being sat on and held by two LARGE aides. It had no positive effects."

"We also engaged with our MLA about the issue to no avail: the government refused to hold the District accountable or even to follow-up on the general issue. This is flat-out unacceptable."

"This has to stop. It is medieval and there is no place for it in our school system."

"My son now experiences symptoms of PTSD- vivid memories of seclusion."

"I was not aware that my son was placed in a room, until my son told me that he was being placed in a room the size of the closet."

"I left work almost daily to take my son home because he was locked in the time out room."

"I am not always made aware of when and how long my child visits the break room. I have assumed that he was with support staff, so I'm most sure if it fits the definition of seclusion room. He is often overwhelmed with sensory issue and disruptive, so it was looked at as a positive step to help him calm down and regulate. I guess I should clarify with the school if he is ever alone and if so for how long."

"In elementary school, there was a room that some children with behavioural challenges were locked into so that they could regain control. Parents were not supposed to know about this room."

"I was told if I didn't like how they disciplined had I ever considered homeschooling."

"Each time my child was secluded she became violent with others."

"This has been going on for many years in schools, there is no accountability from staff in schools or Alberta Education or the teachers' association, only ones that pay the price are innocent children who have their childhood taken away from them."

"I removed my child from this school due to them thinking that it was okay to lock him in this room one day from 8:30-3:00. They told me they would eventually break him of this bad behaviour he displays and I informed them that you can't punish a disability out of a student, I took him home and homeschooled for the last 2 years."

"Though only minimal use of this seclusion the mental abuse/ affect was very noticeable in my boys. The one has had serious effects from this and has spent a year in counselling over it. He doesn't trust anyone in the school."



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"Use of seclusion in this class was very aggressive. My daughter was not allowed to attend unless I signed a form allowing the use of this room. She began to develop severe psychological issues with the use of seclusion and the force with which it was applied."

"I has told by my son's EA that she and another person were part of placing him in this spare office and they kept the door closed and locked so he could not leave the room. No one notified me at any point that this was occurring."

"He was never left alone. Being by himself was used to keep him and others safe."

"At the time I observed him being placed in the seclusion room, I could see my son's legs as he sat on a chair behind a partition and could see the teacher standing in a confrontational manner with hands on hips demanding an apology. I heard my son say a swear word then saw the teacher grab him and forcefully pull him into the seclusion room and push him inside. My son started immediately banging on the door that he wanted out; then started saying he had to go to the washroom. He was ignored. I came in the room and the teacher was surprised to see me. I started to open the door where my son was and she told me I could not do that. I told her he has to go to the washroom. I took him to the washroom where he did void. I then gathered up my son's belonging and pulled him out of the school. I was called by the principal who threatened me with truancy and told me that this 'Was the best school, bar none'."

"I'm temporarily homeschooling due to this. My son needs time to recover from the emotional effects from his school experiences."

"My son spent most of his days in seclusion."

"My child has developed anxiety, sleep issues, trust issues, and it all has only made his behaviours worse."

"When my son was placed in this seclusion room the one time that I was made aware, when I came to pick him up from the school (he was in grade 1) he was by himself in the secluded room and he had soiled himself with urine (he had been potty trained since age 3 and rarely had accidents). Principal was sitting at his desk, could see into the room, but no one had even offered to help clean my son and try to re-engage him."

"I had to be my child's biggest advocate. He needed protection from the school to be educated. When he was 10, the school locked him in roof size of phone booth."

"Please do something to protect children with autism. Even the ones who can talk and have a gifted IQ like my son are unable to advocate for themselves. The ones with intellectual disabilities are at the greatest risk. Please protect those children."



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"Son is no longer in the school that used seclusion and restraint with him. He is in another school division and doing well."

"I warned the school that the isolation room was dangerous, not properly monitored, and a lawsuit waiting to happen. We had to take our son out of school because those rooms are way too dangerous."

"I would go into the school and see staff holding the doors shut while children screamed inside."

"My child pulled out chunks of hair and a tooth."

"My trust in the Alberta school system is nonexistent."

"My child had his cell phone with him and repeatedly texted me panicked with anxiety over being in this room."

"At the time, I didn't really realize that my son was being secluded. I guess, to me, the infirmary was okay. I wish that I had realized what it was, as it made my son angry and sad."

"My son needs structured breaks to refocus, and re-group. I am ok with breaks in a quiet room or sensory room. But I am not ok with him being isolated or not under the direct supervision of a trusted adult."

"My son sometimes just needs a safe quiet space where he can calm down."

"He was locked in a room more than he was in a classroom."

"This little 8 year old boy was often put into an empty office either with the door locked or someone guarding the room. He figured out how to get out the window so ran away. After that they would physically hold him down. He never threatened or hurt anyone, but was being punished because he didn't want to do his class work. He ran away many times and hid in various places in the school just to get away from the threat of his teachers. He would call home so we would go get him, which is when we first found out that he was being restrained and/or isolated, but the school did not always call. Neither restraint or isolation helped at all, but made the situation much worse. The staff were clearly not equipped to deal with him."

"The abuse my son endured was with malice and disregard for my son's well-being. It was until a staff member informed me in secret that I had any idea as to what was going on. I removed my son from school that day and we have homeschooled ever since."

"I intend on following up on the seclusion and the restraints as my son just told me it happened again."



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"I have removed my child from the public school system and now we take part in traditional home school. Her seclusion caused bullying among her peers as she was secluded by adults therefore students and "friends" secluded her as well."

"I was so shocked by what the school board was planning on doing that I had to pull my child out of public education and home school. They actually showed me the old broom closet where my child would have "quiet time"."

"Now that my son is more verbal I have asked him about the Thinking Room. He says he did not like it, it makes him upset. He does not want to go into a thinking room any more. My son has developed a very strong dislike and anxiety for teachers, school, anything he thinks is school work (e.g., crafts, organized games/activities), reading, writing, math - he hates school."

"Multiple times, in two schools, he was isolated and left alone for extended periods of time. Several times he was only allowed out if he went in his brother's classroom so his brother, 2 years older, could take care of him because "we don't have the resources". I did not give permission for that either."

"Seclusion and restraining children causes PTSD and a slew of behaviour & traumatic issues."

"I removed my child and homeschooled for 2 years."

"The use of these seclusion rooms is absolutely unacceptable in schools AND hospitals and anywhere else they are using seclusion rooms. They 100% do more harm than good and need to be discontinued."

"...restrained my son several times over 4 hours. Since he would not willingly go back after that day is when I learned the number of times he had been restrained. More recently I left to retrieve my sons indoor shoes and found my son in a seclusion room locked banging his head with his hands. Walking in circles."

"This time out room needs to stop!"

"We were made to believe that we had no other choice but to have him in timeout rooms due to 'safety' concerns."

"Time out strategy is a kind violence to children."

"When my daughter started in grade 4, she was in the seclusion room for two months daily. Once my daughter was given an in-school suspension. She was to spend the entire day in what they call the time out room, keep in mind it was a holiday and she was supposed to sit in this room, and hear all the celebration going on that afternoon."

"I involved the Minister of Education in both schools with no results. I pulled my son out of the first school after he became so distressed he couldn't function and the final straw was a day he had phoned me from his cellphone. His



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teachers thought he had hung up, yet he had not and they proceeded to scream vulgar things at him for 5 minutes while I listened on the phone. I left work early removed him from the school and never sent him back."

"For my child, seclusion works because it is used properly. He is never forced to go into the room, he actively seeks out the room to 'take a break.' Teacher and aides always inform me of when he goes in, why and for how long. However, I have known other children who were forcibly put into a room and were thereafter traumatized by it and had to be taken out of said school. More training needs to be done. These rooms should never be used as punishment. Only as a tool to calm."

"I was told they were trying to reprogram his mind, it takes 21 days to form a habit and locking him in a room would change his habits."

"My son cries every day when he has to go to school and he is in tears when I pick him up. He is visibly distressed and suffers anxiety from this abuse."

"The school told me they were using this as a sensory room to give him breaks. While I did agree to that, I later found out they were using this strategy inappropriately and in a way that I would not have agreed to. I stopped into the school one day unexpectedly and found him screaming and crying, banging on the door trying to get out. He was very upset, this is not the agreed upon use for the 'sensory room'. I was never notified by the school when they were using seclusion. They did not agree that they were secluding or restraining him, so they didn't feel they needed to notify me. I took him to a different school the next year."

"Our son has had to attend therapy and psychological treatment from the trauma of seclusion and restraint at school."

"My child has since been diagnosed with PTSD as a result."

"Due to the overuse of her being in the office or taken out of the classroom, my daughter has severe anxiety & fear of school. I have decided to keep her home this school year & homeschool her. She was fighting & crying almost every morning when trying to get her to school."

"We had to pull him from school Grade 4 and treat him for trauma and PTSD."

"They accepted bullying and chose to isolate him during classes in jr. high when the classes were less supervised. He'd be removed for 'his safety'."

"Locking a child up in a concrete cell is in no way conducive to calming or settling them. A properly equipped sensory room maybe, but not a locked concrete cell. The teacher that usually uses it has used it for EXTREMELY inappropriate reasons, for example 'talking back'. She locked my then 8 year old in a tiny concrete cell because he was talking back."



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With respect to restraints - I have witnessed on MULTIPLE occasions them physically restraining my son, often with 3 - 4 grown adults pinning him down. I have taken myself the non-violent crisis intervention course so I KNOW that they are not doing it correctly. Improper restraints is extremely dangerous for anybody, let alone a young child."

"We pulled our son out of that school, he was traumatized by the treatment he got from the teacher and aides."

"Restraint (physically held) &/or seclusion were used only as a last resort, when my child became a danger to himself or others."

"My son's teacher was well aware I did not consent to the use of this room, because my son would self-harm, and it would escalate the situation. On our simple school tour, the teacher violated every aspect of the plan and threw my son in there where he fell. The school didn't offer an apology or accept responsibility and instead blamed myself and my son. This teacher at our meetings had made comments of locking a grade 6 student in there for 3 days and said it broke him."

"Even with IPP's and our own personal behaviour consultant coming into the school, I was never told this room existed for 3 years and my son was in it. I contacted teachers, aides and trustee to find out 'policy' regarding this and no one had an answer."

"I do believe Seclusion Rooms are helpful when used properly and everyone is trained. There should be other intervention strategies used. Seclusion rooms should be a last resort."

"The school or school board never communicated that the school even had an isolation room. I learned that it existed from another parent. There appears to be no publicly available policies or procedures from the school board on the use of these rooms."

"As any child who went to school with anticipation to make friends and learn my daughter was no different. Her body didn't move like other children, but she was always smiling and happy. When she was put in a closet so the teacher didn't have to be bothered by her, my daughter's smile started to fade. I was never told until grade 4 and who knows how long she was put in a closet before this. We then moved into the city hoping for better, and once again she was hidden in a closet to do her work! In the end she hated to go to school her spirit was broken and she was changed forever because of this experience. So much more needs to be done and this needs to be uncovered and the truth needs to come out. You fight all the way to the Education Minister and nothing ever changes. You become defeated by everyone, tell me how many more surveys have to be done?"



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Respondents Percentage Responses per Key Survey Questions

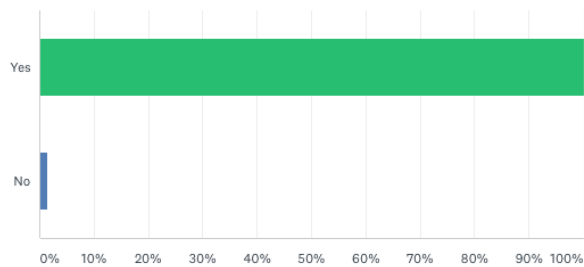
Q1

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Are you a parent, foster parent or legal guardian of a child with developmental disabilities who was restrained and/or secluded at school?

Answered: 404 Skipped: 0



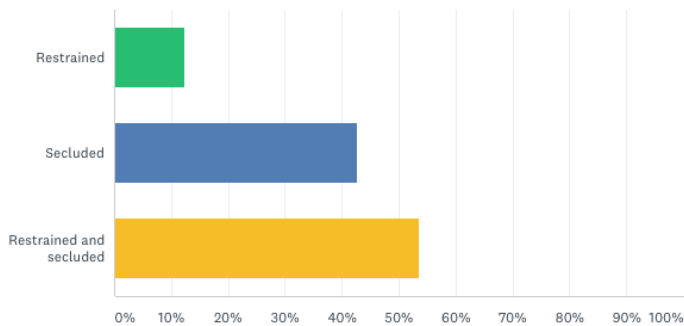
Q6

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Has your child been restrained, secluded or both? Please check only one box.

Answered: 389 Skipped: 15





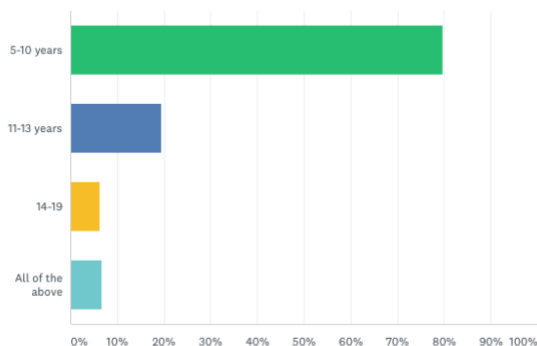
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Q8

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How old was your child when restraints were applied? Please check all that apply.

Answered: 206 Skipped: 198

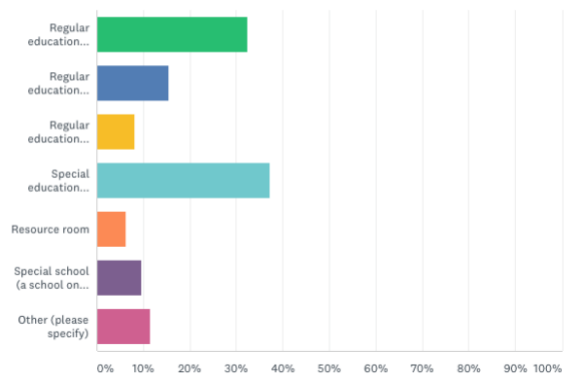


Q9

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When your child was restrained, what was their primary educational setting?

Answered: 207 Skipped: 197





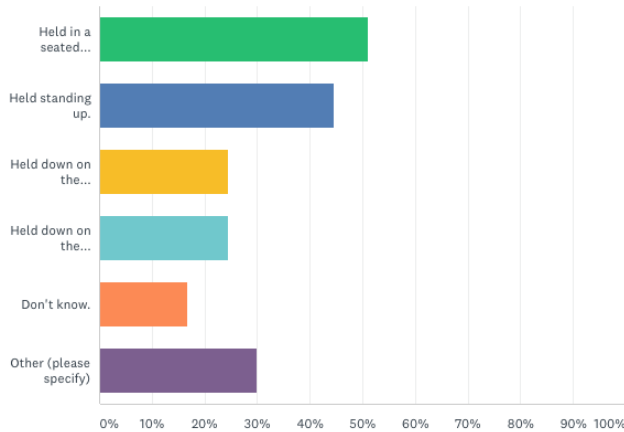
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Q10

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What type of physical restraint was used? Please check all that apply.

Answered: 204 Skipped: 200

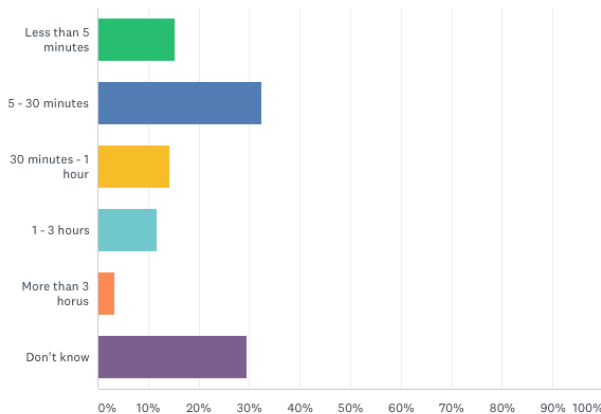


Q12

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What was the longest amount of time your child your child was restrained?

Answered: 204 Skipped: 200





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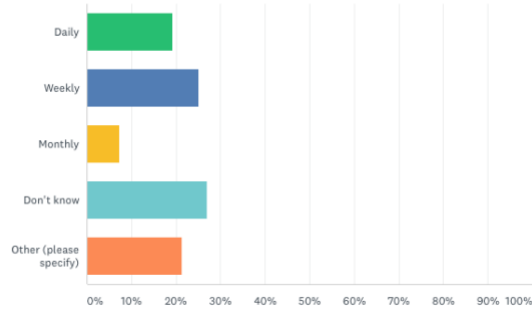
Q13

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When your child was restrained, approximately how often did this occur?

Answered: 207 Skipped: 197



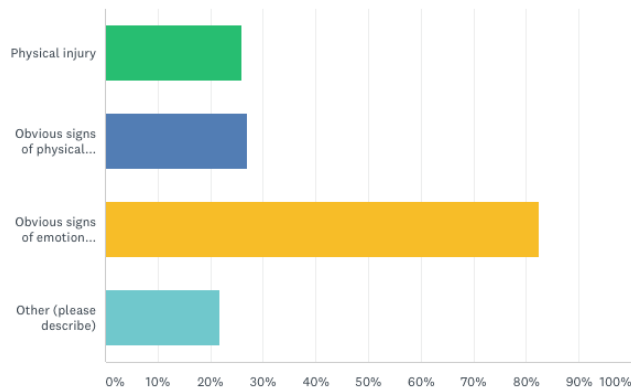
Q15

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Sa

When your child was restrained, did any of the following occur?

Answered: 193 Skipped: 211





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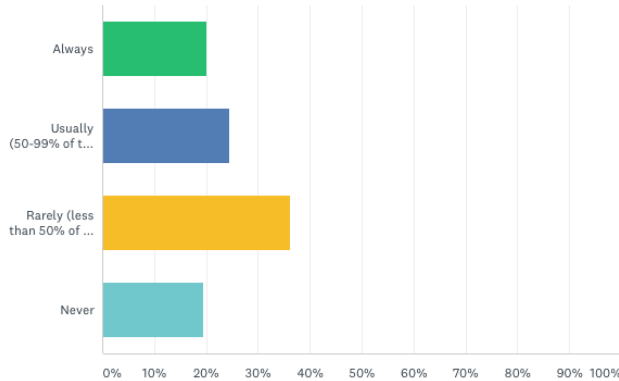
Q16

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When your child was restrained, were you told this had been done?

Answered: 205 Skipped: 199

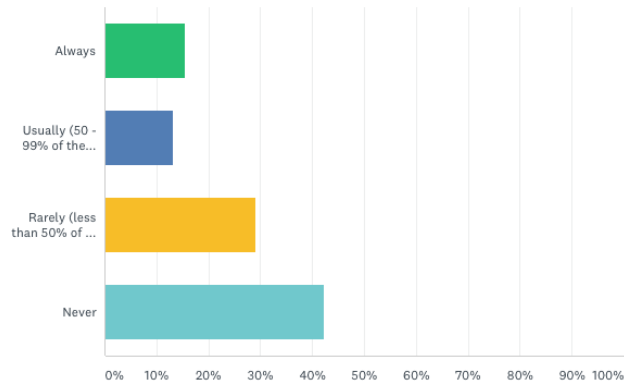


Q17

Customize

When your child was restrained, were you told for how long?

Answered: 206 Skipped: 198





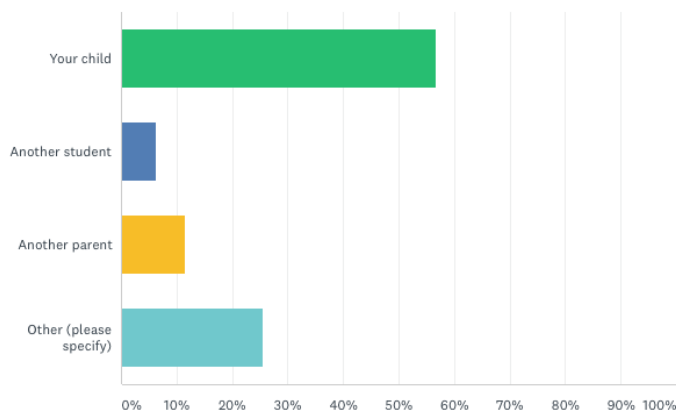
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Q19

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If you were not informed by school personnel that your child was being restrained, who told you?

Answered: 157 Skipped: 247

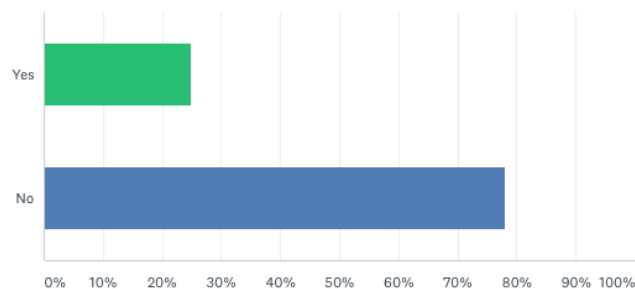


Q20

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Did you give permission for restraints to be used?

Answered: 205 Skipped: 199





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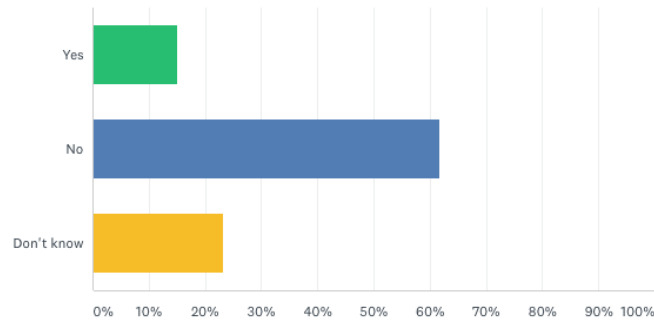
Q21

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Were restraints applied as part of a written positive behaviour support plan?

Answered: 206 Skipped: 198

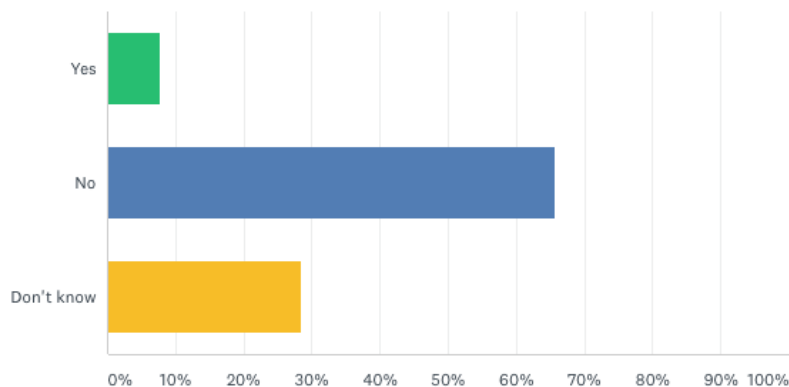


Q22

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Did a Registered Psychologist approve the use of restraints?

Answered: 207 Skipped: 197





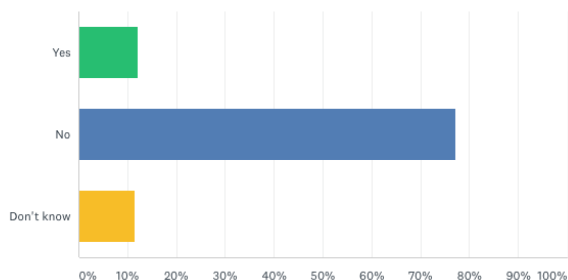
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Q23

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Was the use of restraints part of your child's written Individual Program Plan (IPP)?

Answered: 207 Skipped: 197

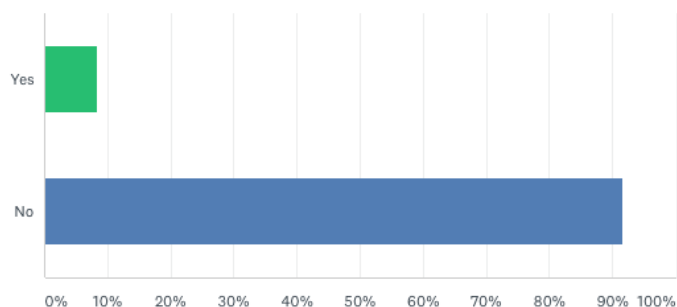


Q24

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Were you given a copy of the school district's policy on the use of restraints?

Answered: 205 Skipped: 199





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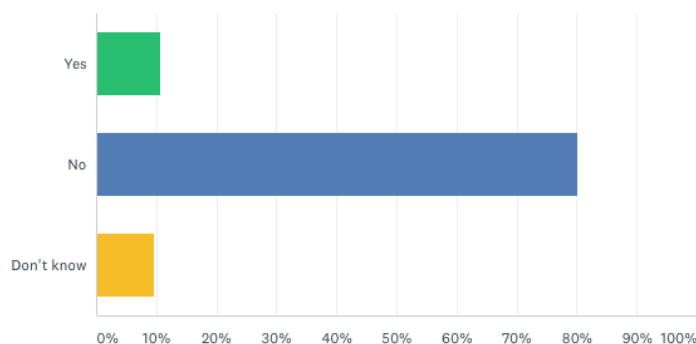
Q25

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Did the use of restraints result in improvements in your child's behaviour, such that the use of the restraints diminished over time?

Answered: 207 Skipped: 197



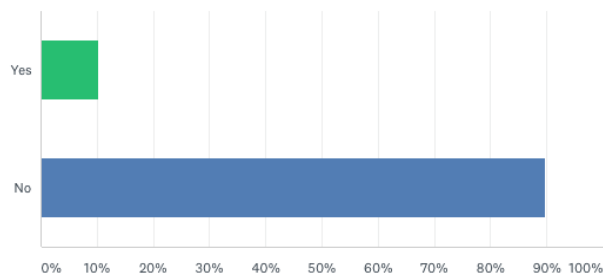
Q26

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Sa

Were you advised as to the potential negative effects of restraints?

Answered: 206 Skipped: 198





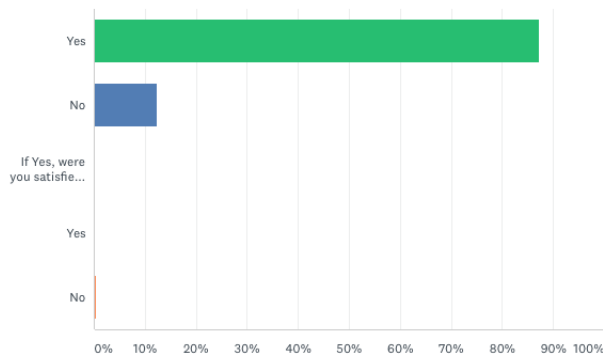
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Q28

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If you were concerned about the use of restraints, did you raise your concerns with school personnel?

Answered: 196 Skipped: 208

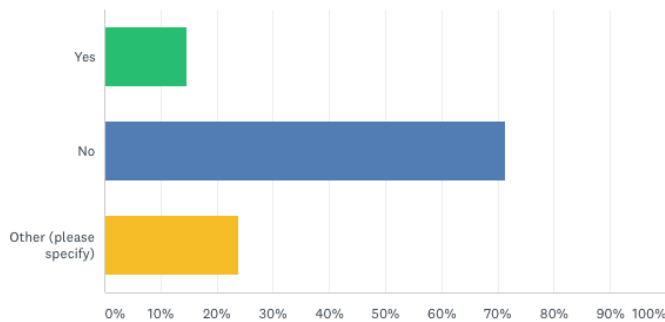


Q29

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If answered Yes to the above question, were you satisfied with how your concerns were addressed?

Answered: 185 Skipped: 219





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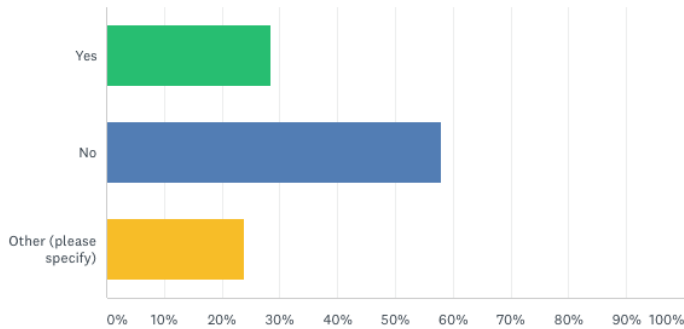
Q30

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If you wanted the use of restraints stopped or had concerns, did you contact Alberta Education?

Answered: 193 Skipped: 211



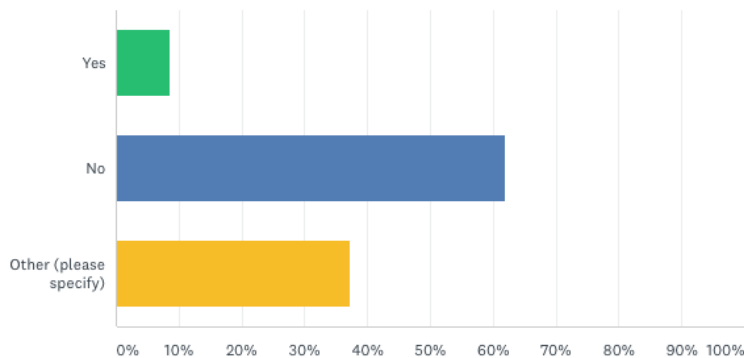
Q31

Customize

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If answered Yes to the above question, were you satisfied with Alberta Education's response?

Answered: 118 Skipped: 286





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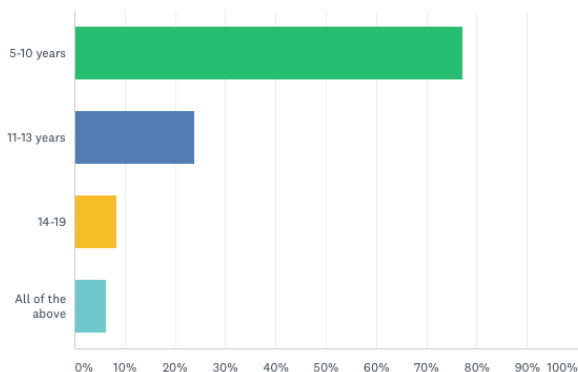
Q33

Customize

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How old was your child when they were placed in seclusion? Please check all that apply.

Answered: 307 Skipped: 97



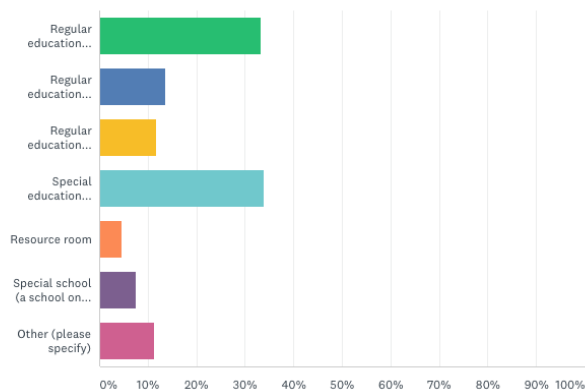
Q34

Customize

Save

When your child was placed in seclusion, what was their primary educational setting?

Answered: 307 Skipped: 97





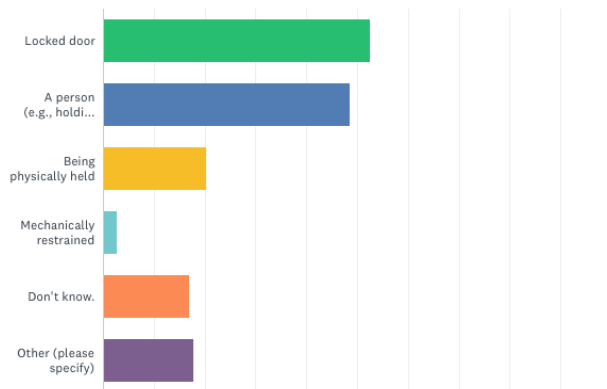
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Q35

Customize Save As ▼

When your child was secluded, how were they prevented from leaving the seclusion setting? Please check all that apply.

Answered: 305 Skipped: 99

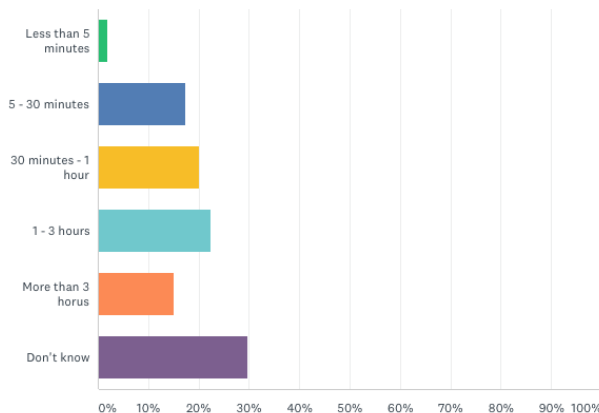


Q37

Customize Save As ▼

What was the longest amount of time your child your child was kept in seclusion?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 100





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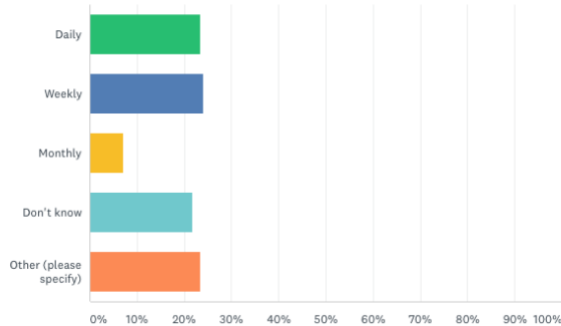
Q38

Customize

Save As

When your child was secluded, approximately how often did this occur?

Answered: 307 Skipped: 97



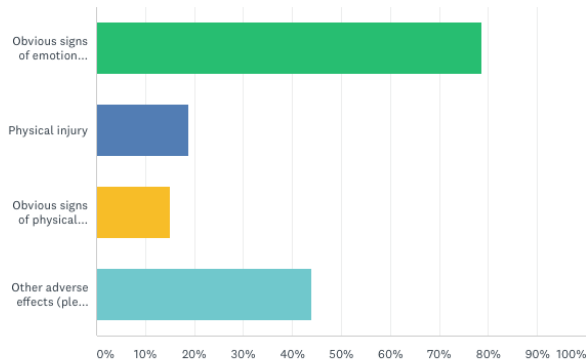
Q40

Customize

S

When your child was secluded, did any of the following occur?

Answered: 280 Skipped: 124





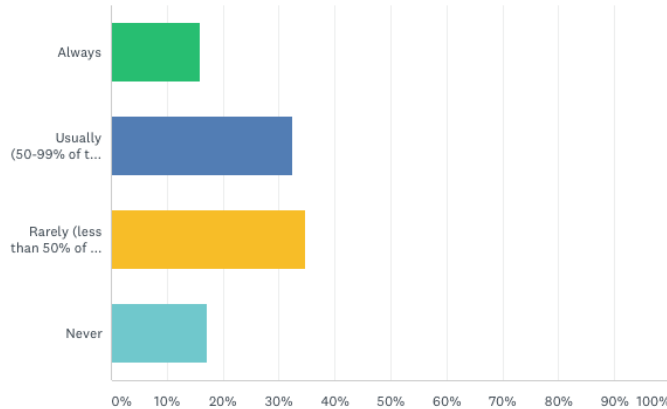
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Q41

Customize

When your child was secluded, were you told this had been done?

Answered: 303 Skipped: 101

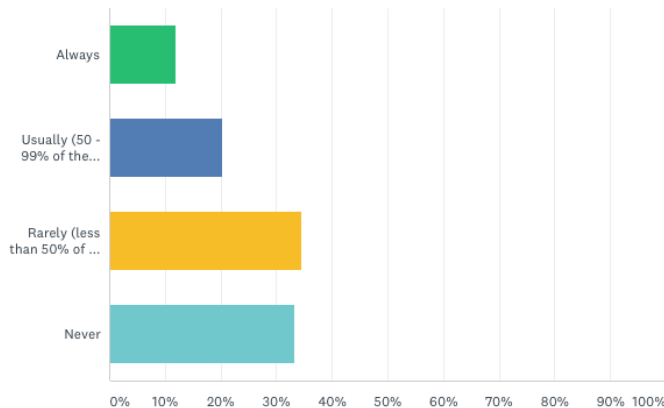


Q42

Customize

When your child was secluded, were you told for how long?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 100





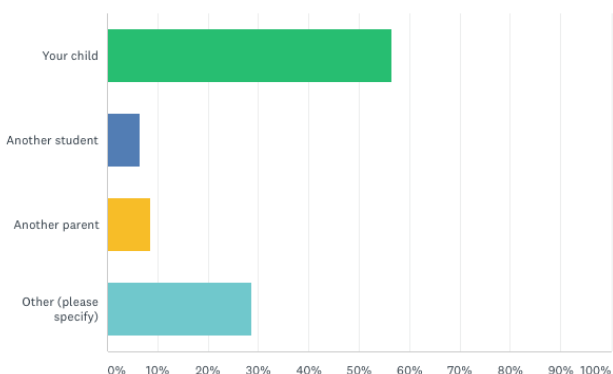
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Q44

Customize Save As

If you were not informed by school personnel that your child was being secluded, who told you?

Answered: 234 Skipped: 170

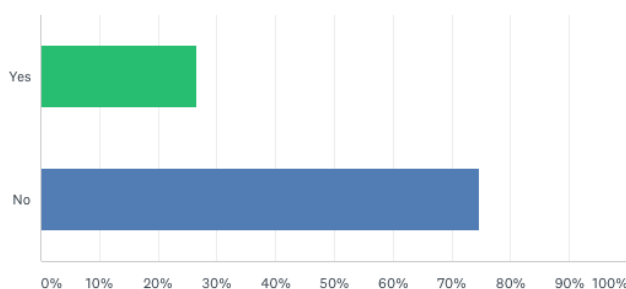


Q45

Customize

Did you give permission for your child to be placed in seclusion?

Answered: 300 Skipped: 104





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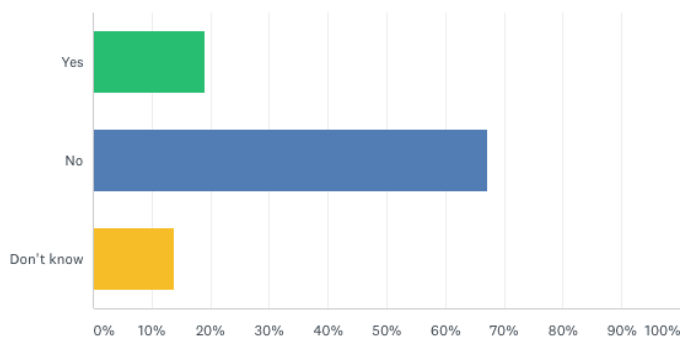
Q46

Customize

Save As ▼

Was placement in seclusion part of a written positive behaviour support plan?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 100

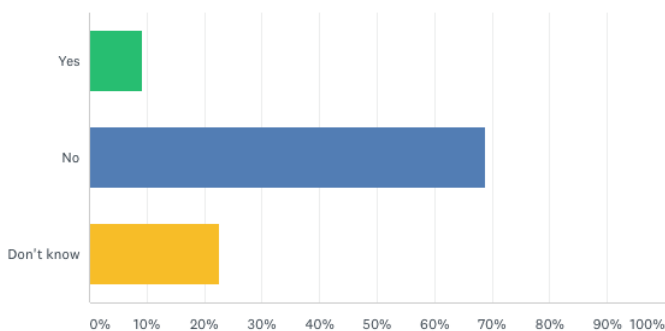


Q47

Customize

Did a Registered Psychologist approve the use of seclusion?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 100





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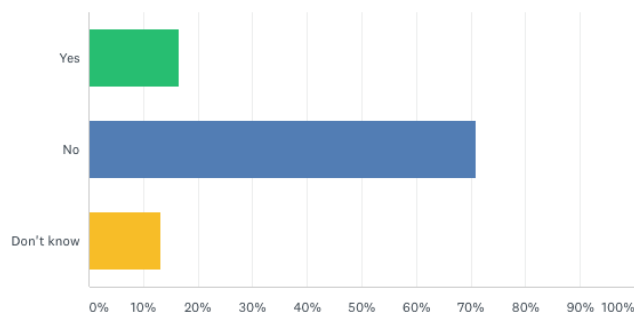
Q48

Customize

Save As ▼

Was the use of seclusion part of your child's written Individual Program Plan (IPP)?

Answered: 303 Skipped: 101



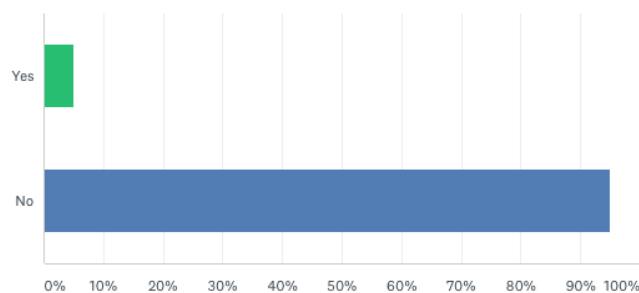
Q49

Customize

Save

Were you given a copy of the school district's policy on the use of seclusion?

Answered: 302 Skipped: 102





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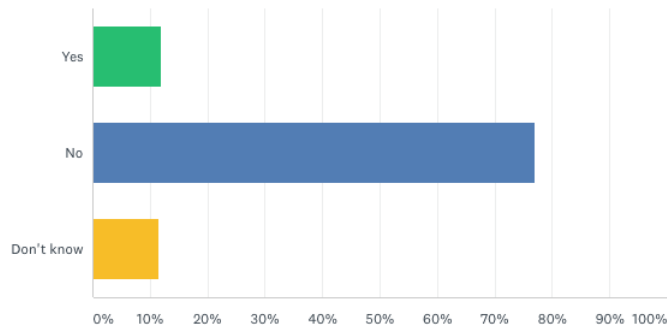
Q50

Customize

Save As ▼

Did the use of seclusion result in improvements in your child's behaviour, such that the use of the restraints diminished over time?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 100



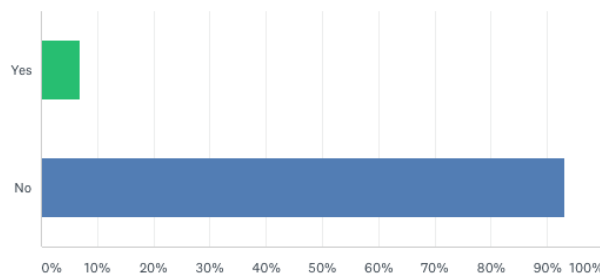
Q51

Customize

Save As ▼

Were you advised as to the potential negative effects of placing a child in seclusion?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 100





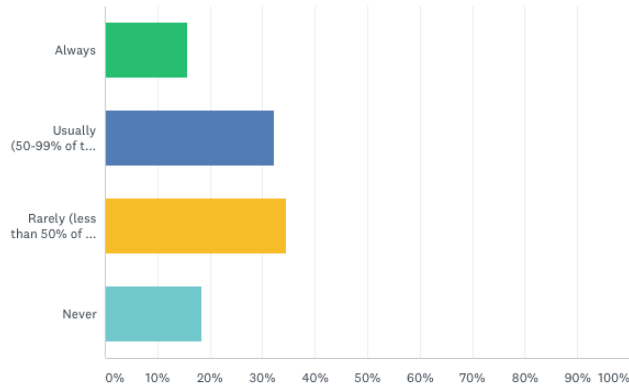
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Q52

Customize

When your child was put into seclusion, were you told why?

Answered: 304 Skipped: 100



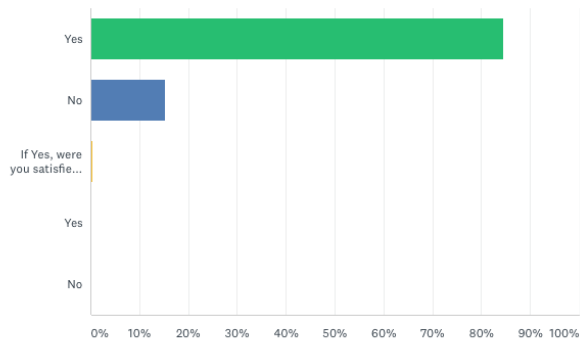
Q53

Customize

Save

If you were concerned about the use of seclusion, did you raise your concerns with school personnel?

Answered: 290 Skipped: 114





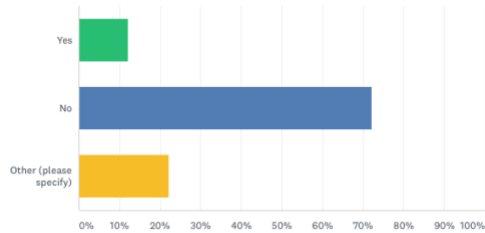
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Q54

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If answered Yes to the above question, were you satisfied with how your concerns were addressed?

Answered: 266 Skipped: 138

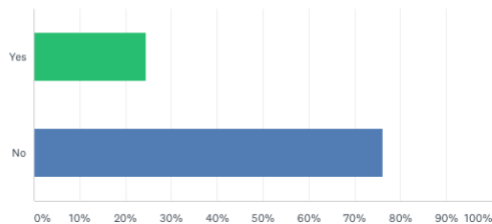


Q55

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If you wanted the use of seclusion stopped or had concerns, did you contact Alberta Education?

Answered: 281 Skipped: 123

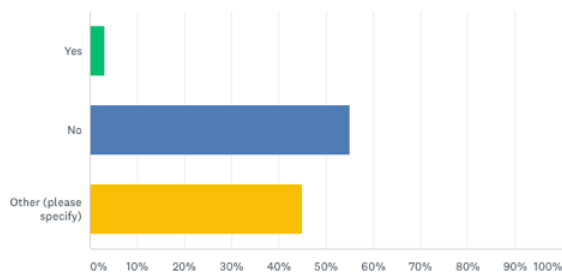


Q56

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If you answered Yes to the above question, were you satisfied with Alberta Education's response?

Answered: 162 Skipped: 242



Inclusion Alberta

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This is a picture of a student being held down in a barricaded corner of a classroom with a cloth pressed over their mouth to stop them from screaming



Inclusion Alberta

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A picture of the lowest portion of a cupboard where a student was put into seclusion.



Inclusion Alberta

Supporting children and adults with developmental disabilities for over 60 years

A school inclusion room that resembles a solitary confinement cell.

