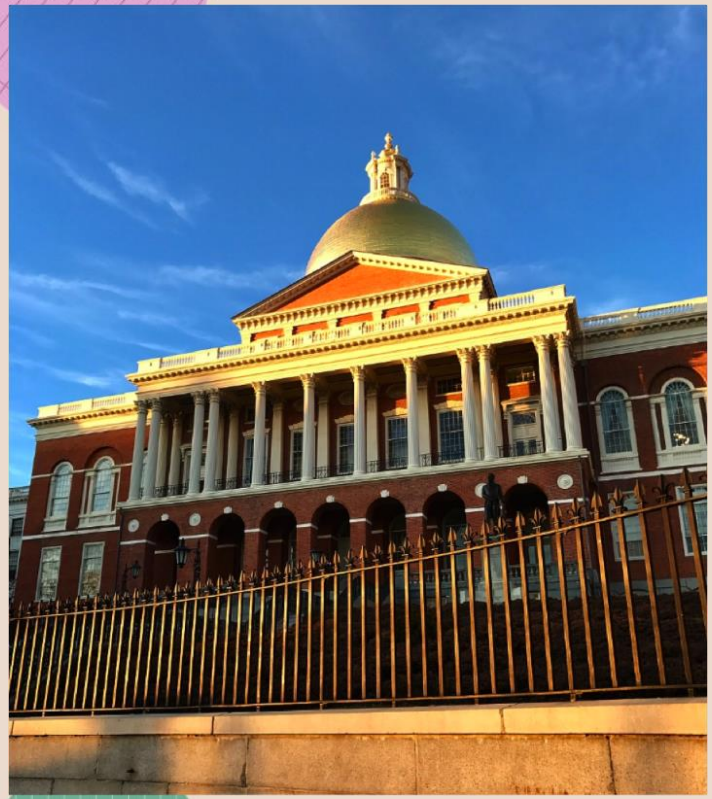
Massachusetts Restraint and Behavioral Intervention Training

Training Objectives

- Understand Massachusetts regulations 603 CMR 46.00 and 2026 updates
- Learn when restraint is permitted and when it is prohibited
- Practice prevention and de-escalation strategies
- Review documentation and notification requirements
- Apply knowledge through case studies and scenarios

603 CMR 46.00 Overview



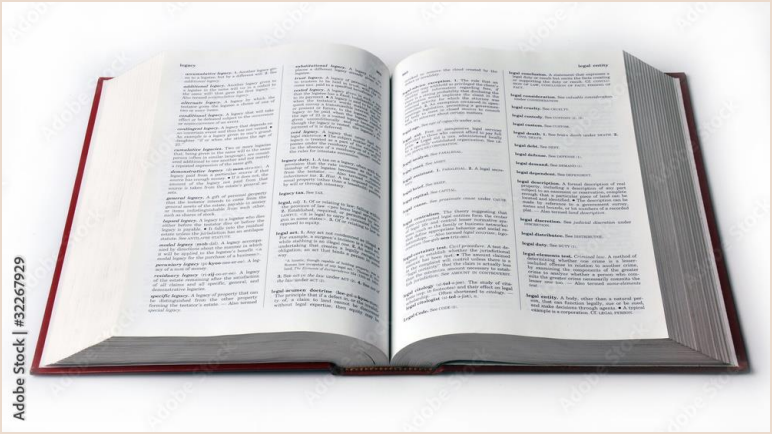
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regulation
- Governs the use of physical restraint on students in public schools
- Designed to protect student safety and dignity
- Requires annual staff training and strict documentation
- Emphasizes prevention as the primary approach

2026 DESE Updates

- Clarified definitions of time-out versus seclusion
- Strengthened requirements for trauma-informed practices
- Enhanced monitoring protocols during restraint
- Updated parent notification timelines
- New guidance on post-incident support for students

Key Definitions

- Physical restraint: direct physical contact that prevents or restricts movement
- Mechanical restraint: use of devices to restrict movement (prohibited in schools)
- Seclusion: involuntary confinement in a locked space (prohibited)
- Time-out: behavioral strategy where student is separated but not confined
- Prone restraint: face-down position (prohibited except in specific emergencies)



When Restraint Is Permitted

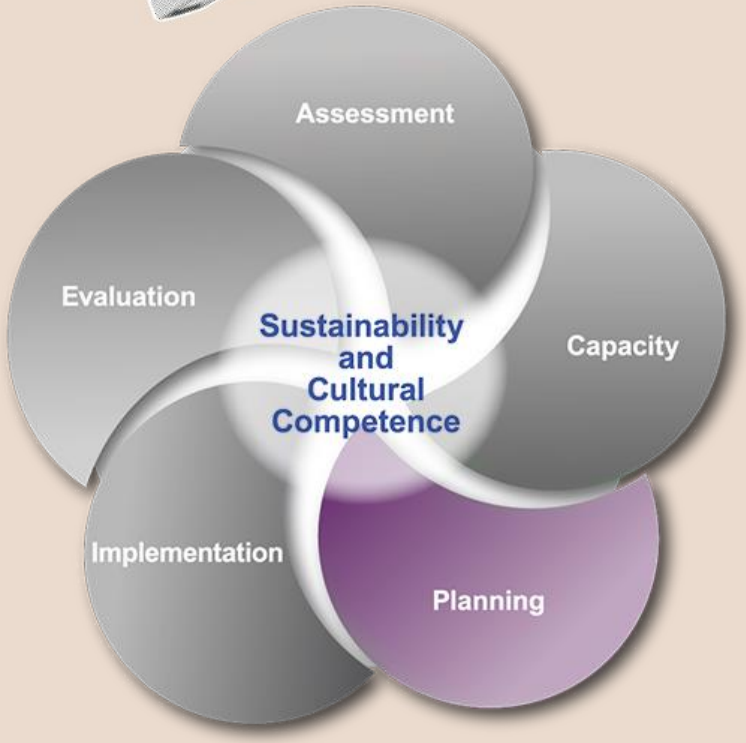
- Only as an emergency response to prevent immediate physical harm
- When non-physical interventions have failed or are inappropriate
- Student is presenting a clear and present danger to self or others
- No alternative method is available to ensure safety
- Must be discontinued as soon as danger has passed

When Restraint Is Prohibited

- Never use restraint as punishment or discipline
- Never use restraint for staff convenience or to control minor behavior
- Prohibited as a response to property destruction alone
- Cannot be used to prevent a student from leaving unless safety risk exists
- Never use mechanical restraints or locked seclusion

Prevention First

- Prevention is always the preferred approach to managing behavior
- Build positive relationships with all students
- Create predictable routines and clear expectations
- Teach and practice social-emotional skills
- Turn to a partner: What prevention strategies do you use in your classroom?



Positive Behavioral Supports

- Use positive reinforcement to encourage desired behaviors
- Provide clear, consistent expectations across all settings
- Offer choices and opportunities for student autonomy
- Recognize and celebrate student successes regularly

Trauma-Informed Practices

- Recognize that behavior often communicates an unmet need
- Understand how trauma affects student responses and regulation
- Create safe, predictable environments that build trust
- Avoid practices that may re-traumatize students
- Focus on connection before correction

Recognizing Escalation

- Early signs: changes in body language, tone, or engagement
- Middle stage: increased agitation, verbal outbursts, pacing
- Late stage: physical aggression, throwing objects, self-harm behaviors
- Know your students' individual escalation patterns
- Early intervention prevents the need for restraint

De-escalation Strategies

- Remain calm and use a low, steady voice
- Give the student space and avoid crowding
- Offer choices and acknowledge feelings
- Remove audience or distractions when possible
- Use non-threatening body language and positioning
- Allow time for the student to regain control

Crisis Decision-Making Flow

- Assess the immediate safety risk to student and others
- Attempt verbal de-escalation and redirection first
- Consider environmental modifications or removing others
- Use physical restraint only if imminent danger exists
- Continuously reassess and end restraint as soon as safe

Safe Physical Restraint Principles

- Use only trained staff whenever possible
- Apply the least amount of force necessary
- Never restrict breathing or place pressure on chest, neck, or joints
- Avoid prone position unless no other option and monitor continuously
- Position student to allow breathing and communication
- Maintain constant visual and verbal contact

Medical Risks and Positional Asphyxia

- Positional asphyxia occurs when body position restricts breathing
- Prone restraint carries the highest risk of asphyxia
- Watch for signs of distress: difficulty breathing, color changes, unresponsiveness
- Students with certain medical conditions face increased risk
- If student vomits, shows breathing difficulty, or becomes unresponsive, call 911 immediately

Monitoring During Restraint

- Continuously monitor student's physical and emotional state
- Watch for signs of physical distress or medical emergency
- Communicate with the student throughout the restraint
- Another staff member should observe and assist when possible
- Document the student's responses and any changes in condition
- If a restraint is longer than 20 minutes, staff must seek Principal approval to extend.

Ending the Restraint

- Release restraint as soon as the student is no longer a danger
- Transition gradually to allow student to regain composure
- Provide a calm, quiet space for recovery
- Offer support and check on the student's physical and emotional state
- Discuss with a partner: How do you help students recover after a crisis?

Time-Out vs. Seclusion

- Time-out: student is separated but can leave and is monitored (permitted)
- Seclusion: student is confined in a locked space (prohibited in Massachusetts)
- Time-out spaces must be safe, unlocked, and supervised
- Students must have the ability to exit a time-out area
- 2026 update clarifies that any locked confinement is seclusion

Documentation Requirements

- Document every use of restraint in writing within one school working day
- Include date, time, duration, and staff involved
- Describe the events leading to restraint and alternatives attempted
- Note the type of restraint used and student's behavior during restraint
- Document any injuries to student or staff
- Maintain records according to district policy and state law

Parent Notification Requirements

- Make reasonable efforts to verbally notify parent on the day of restraint
- Provide written notification within three school working days
- Written report must include all required documentation elements
- Parents have the right to request a meeting to discuss the incident
- Maintain open, respectful communication with families

Administrator Responsibilities

- Ensure all staff receive annual restraint training
- Review and approve all restraint reports
- Monitor patterns and frequency of restraint use
- Convene meetings with parents when requested
- Provide support and follow-up for students and staff
- Report data to DESE as required