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Disability Rights NC Applauds Six Districts for Bans on Use of Prone Restraint

They are the only districts in NC to protect students from prone restraint, which can result in injury or death

Students with developmental disabilities, mental illness, or behavior problems who go to Asheville City, Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Cumberland County, Johnston County, Tyrrell County, and Transylvania County are safer this school year. These six districts are the only ones in North Carolina to have banned the use of prone restraint.

Prone restraint is when a student is held face-down on the floor, usually when he or she is having a behavioral crisis. The practice is widely condemned, as it poses a risk of severe injury or even death for the student. Organizations concerned with the well-being of children, especially children with disabilities, have long called for bans on prone restraint in schools.

An example of a prone restraint hold



“We are impressed and thankful that administrators of these districts have banned prone restraint,” said Kristine Sullivan, a senior attorney at Disability Rights North Carolina. “They are doing what administrators of the state’s larger districts—like Wake and Mecklenburg—have failed to do. By banning prone restraint, they are demonstrating that they prioritize student safety.”

Last year, Disability Rights NC investigated Johnston County and Cumberland County Schools after receiving complaints from parents about the use of prone restraint on students who have disabilities. Disability Rights NC is [the state’s Protection and Advocacy agency](#)—a designation that gives it broad powers to access places that serve people with disabilities and to launch investigations.

The investigations prompted the administrations of both districts to change their policies and ban the use of prone restraint. Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Asheville City, Tyrrell County, and Transylvania County were not under investigation, but administrators decided to implement a ban for the safety of their students.

“There are less dangerous ways to restrain a person who is having a crisis and is a

danger to himself or others,” Sullivan explained. “With proper training, staff in schools can make sure everyone, including the person in crisis, is safe. There is no excuse for using prone restraint in schools.”

Because of the serious risk posed by prone restraint, the NC Department of Health and Human Services banned its use in 2012 in all facilities that are run by or contract with the State to provide mental health, developmental disability, or substance use services. However, state lawmakers and education leaders have failed to implement a similar ban in schools.

According to [a report from the Autism National Committee](#) updated in December 2016, 33 states have laws that forbid the use of life-threatening restraints, such as prone restraint, on children with disabilities. Twenty-seven of those states extend that ban to all students.

In the Southeast, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Florida all ban prone restraint in schools, according to the report.

Disability Rights North Carolina is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Raleigh. Its team of attorneys, advocates, paralegals, and support staff provide advocacy and legal services at no charge for North Carolinians with disabilities to protect their civil rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal and state laws.