

PAUSE FOR SAFETY (STUDENT EXCLUSION) - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: What is Student Exclusion?

Answer: A Student Exclusion is a pause for safety when students cannot be kept safe by other means and where progressive discipline is not an appropriate response. A student exclusion is a non-disciplinary tool used to mitigate risk to student safety in schools. If a student is causing or contributing to a safety risk for other students and disciplinary action is not appropriate, a student exclusion may be considered. The Education Act requires that all risks to student safety are mitigated.

The goal of a student exclusion is to quickly and consultatively determine how the situation at school can be made safer, so that all students can continue to learn at school. A re-entry plan for the affected student(s) is established collaboratively during, or as a result of, a case conference. During an exclusion period, students who are are provided with any class work and support they may need while they are away from school.

Student Exclusion is **NOT**:

- disciplinary nor punitive
- a suspension or an expulsion from school
- an instructional strategy
- a de-escalation strategy
- a form of modified day pursuant to an Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- a de facto change in placement, without an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) statement of decision
- an early dismissal with parent/guardian consent
- a temporary school absence with parent consent

Question: When is a Student Exclusion Necessary?

Answer: If a student is causing or contributing to a safety risk for other students and disciplinary action is not appropriate upon assessment of mitigating and other factors, an exclusion would be necessary. The goal of a student exclusion is to quickly and consultatively determine how the situation at school can be made safer so that all students experience an environment supportive of their best learning opportunities and experiences.. Mostly, students are excluded when their developmental stage does not allow them to control a behaviour and/or foresee the consequences of a behaviour that poses a risk to student safety. Modification to the learning conditions or modifications to the strategies and resources employed are needed to mitigate any unacceptable risks to the safety of themselves or other students.

Question: Can you give me an example of an exclusion?

Answer: A student may exhibit physical aggression causing bodily harm requiring medical attention. If the student does not have the capacity to change their behaviour within the conditions in the school or classroom then the principal may consider an exclusion rather than a suspension or expulsion. The student may have an special education identification that requires accommodation and without the learning conditions or supports being modified they may not have the capacity to change their response to a trigger or stimula. If their response poses a safety risk to themselves or others then the principal would consider an exclusion instead of a suspension or expulsion and engage in planning to change the conditions or supports to allow the student to experience school and learning in a safe way.

Question: Does an exclusion include EDP?

Answer: When a student is excluded it will include their programming in before and after school activities, extra-curricular activities, athletic, arts, or other activities or programming off school property, including co-operative education placements, and attendance in Extended Day programming that is run by the school board.

Question: Why do you have to use the word “Exclusion”; the word is triggering and sounds like a rejection?

Answer: We heard the community concerns about the word and replaced the word Student Exclusion with “A Pause for Safety” to reflect the feedback. However, we still need to reference the word “Exclusion” in our policy and notification to families as the Ministry of Education requires recording this type of pause for safety in The Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) as an Exclusion.

Question: It is easy to see how an exclusion could be in the best interests of the students who may be at risk of harm as a result of unsafe behaviour, but how could an exclusion be in the best interest of an excluded student?

Answer: It is possible that the unsafe behaviour that needs to be addressed through exclusion is self-harming behaviour, in which case it is easy to see the benefit to the student of exclusion to put in place strategies, plans, and resources designed to prevent future unsafe behaviour. However, with all unsafe behaviours it is important to recognize that while a student may not have the ability to control their behaviours and/or foresee the consequences of those behaviours, that doesn't mean they aren't negatively impacted by those behaviours. An exclusion allows the time needed to put in place strategies, plans, and resources designed to prevent future unsafe behaviour and therefore may benefit the student by preventing the impact of future incidents.

Question: Are students of all ages (JK-Adult) subject to the Exclusion Policy?

Answer: Yes, students of all ages are subject to the exclusion policy. While age is a clear factor in a student's capacity to control or modify their behaviour and/or foresee the consequences of their behaviour, other factors such as a student's developmental level, mental health challenges, etc. may indicate that exclusion would be a more appropriate choice than suspension/expulsion to address safety concerns related to student behaviour.

Question: Will this policy be used to exclude students who are not vaccinated against COVID-19 or who do not comply with masking requirements?

This policy will not be used to exclude students with respect to masking requirements nor vaccine status. It should be noted that Public Health Authorities do have the authority to issue a school suspension to a student who has not been vaccinated to Public Health standards (unless they have been exempted from vaccination), however the list of required vaccinations does not currently include COVID 19.

This policy was developed as an outcome of feedback shared during the revision of the safe schools policies which commenced in the spring of 2018.

Question: I received a request to pick up my child from school, is this an exclusion?

Answer: It depends. The school will be clear on the reason why the student needs to leave the school. Reasons could include, but are not limited to, suspected concussion, code of conduct infractions, or a Student Exclusion. If it is a student exclusion there will be communication, including a letter to outline the decision to exclude and the steps for safe re-entry.

Question: Are you using Student Exclusion to discipline my child?

Answer: No. An exclusion is merely a pause from school for safety reasons. It is not disciplinary in nature and it is different from suspensions and expulsions.

Question: How will I be informed of the exclusion of my child from school?

Answer: School principals communicate with the parent/guardian/adult student about the decision to exclude and then follow up with the formal letter confirming the Student Exclusion, outlining the steps or conditions for re-entry, and informing of the right to appeal the decision to the Board.

Question: What happens during an exclusion?

Answer: The school reviews its safety documents and available supports, and revise them as needed. Parents/guardians/adult students might get asked to seek external expertise from community partners in order to meet the re-entry requirements. Meanwhile and for the duration of the Student Exclusion, the school provides the student with school work. When the steps for re-entry are met, a re-entry meeting is convened to discuss returning to school.

Question: How long are Student Exclusions?

Answer: For most exclusions, developing a plan and facilitating re-entry takes 2-3 days. For exclusions that extend beyond 3 days, re-entry plans are developed in consultation with the parents/guardians and the student (if appropriate), who are encouraged to include input from community partners and supports or the school may offer to do so on their behalf. We do not set a predetermined number of days for exclusions but rather work to expedite a safe return to school for the student, minimizing the time of the exclusion period.

Question: My child was excluded from their online synchronous learning, could they be provided an opportunity for asynchronous learning during their exclusion?

Answer: Online access to the asynchronous learning resources and activities may be offered.

Question: My child was excluded from their school, could they access online learning during their exclusion?

Answer: Online access to the asynchronous learning resources and activities may be offered. Access to learning during the exclusion may include enrolling in an elearning course.

Question: If a laptop/ internet access is an issue for a student under an Exclusion, will the school ensure that the student is provided with a laptop and a hotspot?

Answer:

Question: My child was excluded from their school, could they be designated to another school?

Answer: No. School Redesignation is different from Student Exclusion. School Redesignation may happen as an outcome of a progressive discipline response such as a suspension.

Question: How do you develop the re-entry plan? And who is involved in this process?

Answer: A re-entry plan for the affected student is established collaboratively during, or as a result of, a case conference between the principal, the parents/guardians, a Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) and community partners involved in the case. Re-entry plans may include:

- Changes to resources, strategies and supports employed and accessed
- Changes to tiered interventions and strategies based on feedback from professionals with relevant clinical expertise
- Changes to the learning program such as the academic expectations and learning goals
- Changes to the daily schedule such as access to resources for sensory diet, limiting the number of transitions or assigning specific staff support at key times or for key learning of skills.
- Changes to or development of a safety plan and behaviour management plan, if appropriate

Question: Will my child's Exclusion Letter or other related documents be stored in their Ontario Student Records (OSR)?

Answer: Not the exclusion letter. Safety Plans, Behaviour Management Plans along with IEPs (where they exist) are stored in the OSR.