

For further details or to set up an interview with the author of the report, contact Barbara Duncan, Director of Communications, at (510) 267-1256.

PAI issues first investigation of restraint and seclusion of children with disabilities in California schools

Oakland, June 11 – A 10-year old boy with significant disabilities was bound to his wheelchair and left in the school van on two separate days. One school built a locked seclusion room where an 8-year old boy with psychiatric and developmental disabilities was routinely locked away. Other children were dragged by their teachers into seclusion areas and then barricaded from leaving.

These are some of the more serious complaints that in 2006 led PAI to open a full-scale investigation into the extent of dangerous and prohibited restraint and seclusion practices currently in effect in the California school system. “This investigation starkly revealed both the failure of school personnel to comply with existing regulations and the failure of current law to sufficiently regulate these dangerous practices,” stated Leslie Morrison, author of the report.

Attorney Morrison, head of PAI’s Investigations Unit, further explained that over the years, with insufficient training and oversight, the use of restraint and seclusion in primary and secondary California schools has become routine and is no longer reserved for situations posing imminent risk of harm.

The 61 page investigation report, entitled “Restraint & Seclusion in California Schools: A Failing Grade,” included extensive review of records; on-site inspections in a rural school district in the northeast part of the state, a Bay Area school district and a non-public school in the Los Angeles area; victim and witness interviews; and consultations with experts in restraint and seclusion.

Morrison and her investigations team made numerous recommendations for improvements that will bring the practices of schools-based behavioral restraint and seclusion in line with those applied in other settings. This includes prohibiting the use of seclusion; limiting the use of restraint to the most dire circumstances; ensuring compliance with state laws and regulations limiting the use of emergency interventions; and ensuring that school personnel proactively address serious student behavior problems through individual assessments.

The report can be downloaded from the organization’s website: <http://www.pai-ca.org/pubs/702301.htm> or <http://www.pai-ca.org/pubs/702301.pdf>. For print copies, contact PAI’s Oakland office at (510) 267-1200.