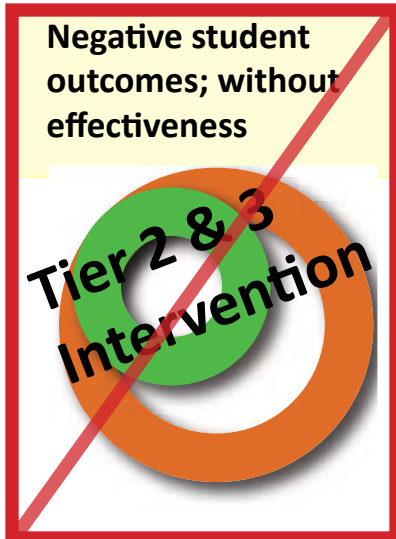


# Involuntary Transfer

## A Traditional Discipline Consequence

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Among the most severe consequence a student in school can receive is an expulsion, traditionally resulting in permanent removal from of the student from that school. Involuntary transfer is an alternative to expulsion, and is presumed to be typically used for students for whom previous less severe consequences have been ineffective.

### What is meant by involuntary transfer?

Involuntary transfer is a school disciplinary option to relocate a child from their current school to a different school as a consequence of a student's reoccurring negative behavior (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996; Bowditch, 1993; Jason et al., 1993). Students who do not improve their behavior in response to other consequences may receive an involuntary transfer to a new building. Although involuntary transfer may occur to an "Alternative School," or special program for students with or without disabilities who are suspended or expelled, this term is not usually used in that context (see the Briefs on Alternative Schools and Discipline Recovery for descriptions of these programs). Generally, involuntary or administrative transfer has meant transfer to another traditional school building.

School districts may use different terminology for this disciplinary method in their codes of conduct. For example, while Grand Island Public Schools (2013-2014), Fremont Public Schools (2013), and Chicago Public Schools (2012-2014) use "involuntary transfer"; Minneapolis Public Schools (n.d.) use "administrative transfer;" and Omaha Public Schools (2013) uses the term "reassignment." "Traditional disciplinary responses, including in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension and exclusion via administrative transfer or expulsions continue to be a part of the discipline repertoire of most schools" (McMorris et al., 2013, p. 4).

This relocation takes place regardless of the student's opinion of the transfer. Some school administrators find this method, although severe, to be a necessary end of the line decision for some of the students in their schools. As viewed by one inner-city school, involuntary or administrative transfer is "seen as an important resource for the discipline office. If they could build a sufficiently strong case, they could get rid of a trouble maker, even if he wanted to remain at the school" (Bowditch, 1993, p. 504). Involuntary transfer operates by simply moving the student, and his or her problem behavior, from one location to another. Exclusionary discipline including administrative transfers "can be quick, easy to implement, and may have low short-term costs, as well as help to maintain a secure school environment that is conducive to learning" (McMorris et al., 2013, p. 4).

Some schools where there is choice of schools to attend permitted for students and parents, an involuntary transfer can also mean that the student must now attend the school which the student would otherwise had to attend before making the choice to attend another school. This revocation of choice is essentially the same as an administrative transfer.



### **What do we know about involuntary transfer?**

The effects of involuntary transfer are largely unknown due to a lack of research on this subject. This could be because involuntary transfer has no specific corrective action for the unwanted behavior, and is solely a relocation of the student to a different school. A search of the academic literature, using the terms “involuntary transfer,” “academic transfer,” “school transfer,” and “involuntary school transfer of students” found no research on this topic. Some schools hide involuntary transfer cases within their student dropout statistics, which could contribute to the lack of research available (Bowditch, 1993).

There is, however, adequate research on general school transfer, typically due to families moving. These studies can be related to involuntary transfer on the basis of relocation of a

student from one school to another, despite the reason for relocation. A study by Coddington (1972), as cited by Jason et al. (1993), indicates that school transfers are very common and very stressful for children, whether voluntary or involuntary. The Coddington Life Events Recorder, which measures stressful life events for children, puts this into perspective. Changing schools is on par with the hospitalization of a parent for a serious illness or having a parent in jail for 30 days or less (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996, p. 3). This shows us that involuntary transfer is a very stressful occurrence, and should be avoided when possible.

Research indicates that a significant amount of stress is placed on a student when they transfer schools. This stress is carried into the new school environment where it has the ability to negatively affect the student academically and emotionally. Additionally, the problem behavior that was the reason for the involuntary transfer were not addressed. Following a school transfer, high-risk children identified as coming from a low socioeconomic background tended to show a decrease in grade point average so severe that these students are failing basic school subjects (C or below; Jason et. al, 1993). Low academic performance, negatively impacted by school transfer, is linked to a student’s self-esteem and view of themselves as adequate or a failure (Jason et al. 1993).



Therefore, involuntarily transferred students may become frustrated with having to deal with the stress of the transfer, poor academics, and low self-esteem while having poor behavior that was not corrected at their previous school. Transferred students may also be at risk for increased aggression towards peers (Jason et al., 1993). Collectively, these concerns demonstrate that transferred students, particularly low achieving students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, are at risk for further academic and behavioral difficulties.

In spite of the literature searches mentioned earlier, we were not able to identify any reports indicating how frequently involuntary transfer was employed, or whether there might be disproportionality by race or disability in the use of involuntary transfer as has been reported for the use of suspension or expulsion. Additionally, no research has been found on the relationship of involuntary transfer to student drop-out, academic performance, or other outcome variables. Nor were there data in the literature which could verify that this consequence was used for more serious offences such as aggressive behaviors or fighting. There simply is very little data or research about involuntary transfer.

### **What can be done to improve outcomes if involuntary transfer is deemed necessary?**

In situations where schools choose to use involuntary transfer, remedial efforts can be made by both schools involved to make the transfer as smooth and as beneficial as possible for the student. Students are presumed to be transferred due to repeated negative behavior; therefore, it is crucial for schools to implement a strategy to correct this behavior. It is essential for schools to create a transfer program that receives students directly into a structured school environment with the necessary support for academic, social, and behavioral success. One school created a buddy system that provided each transfer student with a same-sex buddy during orientation; the pair could discuss school rules, expectations, and feelings regarding the

transfer (Jason et al., 1993). Other options may include adding check-in/check-out programs, or behavior contracts at the new school. Since the receiving school staff are likely to know that an involuntarily transferred student had engaged in serious violations of the code of conduct, it would also be important to prevent a poor student reputation from leading to a self-fulfilling expectation of poor behavior at the new school.

Special needs students may require even more remedial efforts to succeed after a school transfer because of the increased difficulty these students have catching up academically to peers (Jason et al, 1993). If an involuntary transfer of a student to a new school must be made, it is important to provide support that promotes success throughout the transition.

### **Conclusion**

Due to the lack of research surrounding involuntary transfer, research of family initiated transfer provides additional insight to the effects that school transfer has on students. Although there was no research surrounding involuntary or administrative student transfer, parallel research of family initiated student transfer, typically because of a family moving their residence, showed mostly negative outcomes for such transfers. Involuntary transfer is not recommended due to the method's lack of behavioral correction and stressful effects it has on the student. However, if this method must be used, remedial efforts made by both schools involved are essential for student success.



**Involuntary transfer is a traditional disciplinary consequence which appears to have little value except to move behavior problems to another school. It is without evidence regarding effectiveness in changing student behavior and likely exacerbates negative student outcomes. No endorsement of its use should be implied in this Brief!**

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