

Phased Guiding Questions For Principals to Address Informal Removals

Phase 1: Groundwork

In this phase, guided by the principal, the school leadership team undertakes a data-driven analysis of the school's use of informal removals. They assess patterns and frequencies, scrutinizing who is affected most and why. This stage sets the foundation by fostering a deep understanding of the current situation, focusing on factors such as demographics and decision-making processes. A wide range of perspectives should be sought to ensure a comprehensive overview.

- What do our student data indicate about instances and patterns of informal removal use in our school? Is there data on how often informal removals are used in place of more formal disciplinary actions like suspension? If so, what does this data indicate?
- What data do we regularly review to determine why students are being subjected to informal removals and how often it occurs? How frequently do we review informal removal data, and who is responsible for reviewing it?
- What discrepancies, if any, exist in the rates of informal removals among different demographics within the school (grade level, disability category, race, ethnicity, gender, special education status, etc.)?
- Can you describe the process by which informal removals happen in your school? Who makes a decision to informally remove a child? How, when, and why?
- How did you come to your understanding of the responses to these questions? Whose perspectives and voices informed your understanding, and how did you ensure a diverse range of voices were included?

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Phase 2: Process Examination and Communication

This phase involves scrutinizing the communication process associated with informal removals among teachers, administrators, parents, and students. It also focuses on how these groups perceive and understand the use of informal removals. This stage promotes transparency and mutual understanding, and explores the possibility of improving communication protocols, with a view to improving overall effectiveness and inclusivity.

- How is information on instances of informal removals communicated between teachers, administrators, and parents/caregivers? How can this communication be improved?
- What is the process for communicating with parents or caregivers when a student is removed informally, and how is their input and feedback incorporated into future decisions?
- How and how often do we survey students, parents, and teachers on their perceptions of informal removals? What do students and parents report about the use of informal removals?
- Are classroom behavior expectations and school-wide disciplinary policies clearly communicated to students and families? How do we know?
- How did you come to your understanding of the responses to these questions? Whose perspectives and voices informed your understanding, and how did you ensure a diverse range of voices were included?

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Phase 3: Support and Alternatives

During this phase, the focus is on providing better support to students likely to be subjected to informal removals, including consideration of special education services where appropriate. This stage involves critical examination of preventive evidence-based strategies and possible unconscious biases. Principals also evaluate professional development opportunities for staff and partnerships with external support services to better manage and reduce informal removals.

- How can we provide better support for students who data indicates are most likely to be subjected to informal removals? What unconscious biases might be at play, and how can they be addressed? What preventive strategies are being employed in the school to reduce the necessity for informal removals?
- For students with a pattern of being subjected to informal removals, have child find referrals for special education been considered (if they're in general education), or an IEP team meeting (if they are already receiving special education services), or a 504 meeting and a child find referrals for special education (if they are a student with a 504)?
- What professional development, coaching, and support is provided to staff to help them manage classroom behavior and understand the requirement to document disciplinary removals?
- What systems are in place for returning students into the classroom following an informal removal, and how is their transition back into the classroom environment supported?
- Does the school have partnerships with external organizations (counseling services, mental health services, etc.) to support students with a pattern of informal removals?
- How did you come to your understanding of the responses to these questions? Whose perspectives and voices informed your understanding, and how did you ensure a diverse range of voices were included?

Phase 4: Evaluation and Future Planning

The final phase involves evaluating the impact of informal removals on students' academic performance and well-being, and how this data can be used for school improvement strategies. The phase involves identifying obstacles to reducing informal removals, setting policy or practice change priorities, and determining metrics for evaluating progress. A commitment to public accountability and transparency about progress is central to this stage.

- How are the effects of informal removals on academic performance and student well-being being tracked and evaluated?
- How are we using data on informal removals to inform our school improvement plans or strategies? How will reducing reliance on informal removals be incorporated into the school's broader goals or strategic plans?
- What obstacles do we face in limiting our use of informal removals and how can we address them?
- What should our priorities be for policy or practice changes to reduce reliance on informal removals over the next 3-6 months?
- What metrics will we use to determine if our changes are having the intended effect?
- How will progress on limiting informal removals be communicated publicly to demonstrate our commitment to improvement and accountability?
- How did you come to your understanding of the responses to these questions? Whose perspectives and voices informed your understanding, and how did you ensure a diverse range of voices were included?