Corporal Punishment in Schools

Currently nineteen states permit corporal punishment in schools, while thirty-one states plus Washington, D.C. have banned the practice. Schools are the only public, tax-payer funded institution that allows legal physical punishment; it is illegal in prisons, the military, child care programs and mental health facilities. It is illegal to hit an animal, but many school personnel are provided with immunity in the instance of physical punishment.

Use of Corporal Punishment in Schools
During the 2005-2006 school year over 223,000 students experienced corporal punishment while at school. During that year over 5,000 Missouri students were physically punished at school, 6 percent of Missouri school students. Missouri ranks as the ninth worst state for percentage of students physically punished by school staff. Currently, the use of corporal punishment in Missouri is determined by individual school districts.

Consequences of Corporal Punishment
- Students of minority and disability status, males, students living in rural areas and in poverty are disproportionately paddled.
- While only 14 percent of students have disabilities, students with disabilities account for 19 percent of the students receiving corporal punishment.
- Further, although African-American students comprise just 17 percent of all students in the United States, they experience 36 percent of the instances of corporal punishment in the U.S.
- Of the students who are paddled, nearly 20,000 seek medical attention as a result of the punishment.
- Students who receive corporal punishment are more likely to drop out of school. High school drop outs cost U.S. taxpayers 8 billion dollars each year in public services.
- Corporal punishment has negative effects on children’s self-esteem and behavioral and emotional adjustment. Furthermore, it was found that high levels of corporal punishment were associated with high levels of conduct problems; demonstrating that physical punishment may actually lead to more severe behavioral issues.

Alternatives to Corporal Punishment
By increasing the quality and strength of activities in the classroom, an ecological approach to classroom management will effectively reduce instances of classroom misbehavior.

Social-Emotional Learning fosters the connection between students and staff while teaching approaches to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making.
Similar to authoritative parenting style, Authoritative School Discipline both provides structure and support to students.\(^8\) Structure and support in school discipline positively affects school safety, bullying, student victimization and relationships between students and staff.

School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) is a system that clearly communicates and teaches rules and rewards students for following the rules.\(^7\) Additionally SWPBS utilized behavioral interventions based on functions of the problem behaviors when needed. SWPBS has been shown to decrease aggression, office discipline referrals and suspensions.\(^9\) Increases in appropriate social behavior and student academic outcomes have come as a result of implementation of SWPBS. An evaluation of a 2 year initiative of SWPBS in 28 New Hampshire schools revealed a reduction of over 6,000 office discipline referrals and over 1000 suspensions.\(^10\) In addition, the reduction of time spent on discipline resulted in teachers gaining nearly 900 days of teaching and students gaining nearly 2000 days of learning over a two year period.

**Policy Recommendations**

**Corporal Punishment should be banned in all public schools.** Research indicates the negative consequences of corporal punishment and there is no evidence of positive outcomes for students receiving corporal punishment.

**School districts should adopt positive school discipline policies.** Positive school discipline policies can increase student outcomes and create a positive school climate for students and staff. These policies will also provide alternatives to physical punishment.

**School personnel should be trained in alternative methods to handle inappropriate student behavior.** Training in alternative methods will provide school personnel with the skills to avoid corporal punishment in response to inappropriate behavior.

**References**


(Clare, A., 2011)