



## Corporal Punishment in Schools

*Currently nineteen states permit corporal punishment in schools, while thirty-one states plus Washington, D.C. have banned the practice<sup>1</sup>. 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<sup>2</sup>. It is illegal to hit an animal, but many school personnel are provided with immunity in the instance of physical punishment.<sup>2,3</sup>*

### Use of Corporal Punishment in Schools

During the 2005-2006 school year over 223,000 students experienced corporal punishment while at school<sup>1</sup>. During that year over 5,000 Missouri students were physically punished at school, .6 percent of Missouri school students<sup>1</sup>. Missouri ranks as the ninth worst state for percentage of students physically punished by school staff<sup>1</sup>. Currently, the use of corporal punishment in Missouri is determined by individual school districts<sup>4</sup>.

### Consequences of Corporal Punishment

- § Students of minority and disability status, males, students living in rural areas and in poverty are disproportionately paddled.<sup>1,3,5</sup>
- § While only 14 percent of students have disabilities, students with disabilities account for 19 percent of the students receiving corporal punishment.<sup>3</sup>
- § 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.<sup>1</sup>
- § Of the students who are paddled, nearly 20,000 seek medical attention as a result of the punishment.<sup>2</sup>
- § Students who receive corporal punishment are more likely to drop out of school<sup>2</sup>. High school drop outs cost U.S. taxpayers 8 billion dollars each year in public services.<sup>2</sup>
- § Corporal punishment has negative effects on children's self-esteem and behavioral and emotional adjustment.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup>

Similar to authoritative parenting style, Authoritative School Discipline both provides structure and support to students.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.

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