CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, during the 1999-2000 school year, 342,048 children, or almost one percent of the total public school population, were hit as a form of disciplinary action at school.[1]

The United States is one of only *three* industrialized nations that still permit the use of corporal punishment in its public schools. Schools are the only American institution Where this practice is allowed. It has been banned in our correctional institutions, military settings and psychiatric facilities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has called for an end to corporal punishment worldwide.[2] More than 40 national organizations are in favor of banning corporal punishment in the United States including the American Academy of Pediatrics, The American Bar Association, The American Medical Association, The American Psychiatric Association, The American Psychological Association, The National Association of State Boards of Education, and the National Education Association. The national trend is to move away from the use of corporal punishment in schools. Currently, Missouri is one of 22 states in the United States that still allow the use of corporal punishment in their schools. [3]

The Use of Corporal Punishment in Missouri

- In the 1999-2000 school year, 9,223 public school students in Missouri were reported as having been hit for disciplinary purposes by teachers or administrators. This figure represented 1% of Missouri's students.[1]
- Missouri was ranked the tenth worst state in percent of students hit that year.[4]
- All other state supported institutions in Missouri that are involved in the care or custody of minors have banned the use of corporal punishment. The use of corporal punishment in schools represents a conflict in policies between the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services. For example, children currently in the care of Department of Social Services are protected from the use of corporal punishment by foster parents, yet they could receive corporal punishment when attending school.[5]
- Not all of Missouri's school districts permit the use of corporal punishment. Approximately 1/3 of Missouri school districts have banned corporal punishment in their schools. Those school districts currently enroll approximately 2/3 of Missouri's public school students.[5]

The Consequences of Corporal Punishment

- Corporal punishment is used disproportionately with poor, disabled, minority, and male children. For example, African American children represent 17% of the public school population, yet make up 39% of the children who receive corporal punishment. [3]
- Cases of child injuries have been documented as a result of this practice. In fact, the Division of Family Services in Missouri has banned this form of discipline due to the increase in the number of related physical abuse cases.[5,6]
- It has not been shown to be an effective form of discipline. In fact, schools that use corporal punishment have poorer academic achievement, more truancy, vandalism, student violence and higher drop out rates than schools that do not use corporal punishment.[4,7]
- Corporal punishment can result in humiliation, helplessness, lower self- esteem and depression in children. It can also result in feelings of anger and resentment and increased rates of violence and aggression in children.[2,6,7,8]
- It results in time consuming and costly litigation for school districts.[6]

Alternatives to Corporal Punishment in the Classroom

A long-standing argument in favor of corporal punishment has been that it is an effective form of discipline. However, while there is no research that shows corporal punishment reduces problem behaviors; research has shown that numerous other strategies *are* effective in preventing and reducing problem behaviors in the classroom.[7,8,9] These strategies have been demonstrated to reduce problem behaviors with all types of learners and with children exhibiting all types of behavioral concerns. These alternatives include:

- encouraging positive behaviors through modeling, social skills instruction, and reinforcement;
- establishing realistic rules and expectations for students and enforcing rules consistently;
- involving students and parents in problem solving about behaviors;
- teaching children conflict resolution and mediation skills;
- providing stimulating learning environments where all students' learning needs are met;
- utilizing school psychologists and counselors to address behavioral concerns; and,
- using deterrents to problem behaviors such as in-school, after-school and weekend detentions.[9]

Policy Recommendations

- ➢ **Corporal punishment should be banned from all public schools.**
  Research does not support the use of corporal punishment in schools. On the contrary, existing research indicates that it does not improve school district outcomes, and may have negative developmental consequences on children. Furthermore, leaders in the educational, medical, and mental health communities do not support the use of corporal punishment. Banning corporal punishment in Missouri would create a unified state policy, and bring Missouri in line with the national trend away from using corporal punishment.
- ➢ **Support teachers, administrators, and other school staff in gaining the skills necessary for working with challenging behaviors.** Teachers need high quality learning opportunities about: positive behavioral supports, stress management, teaching at-risk and difficult to teach students, and strategies for maintaining a high level of interest among their students.
- ➢ **Encourage school districts to adopt discipline policies that support the use of positive behavior management strategies in all their schools.** These policies should be characterized by strong leadership from school administrators, accountability by the school for providing positive behavioral supports, effective communication between schools and families, and linkages to other community supports and agencies when necessary.

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