

Why Is Paddling Still Allowed in Schools?

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Two Texas mothers set off a firestorm recently when they complained that a male assistant principal had severely paddled their daughters. One of the mothers pointed out that school policy required that officials of the same sex as the student do the paddling. Now the school board has responded — by dropping the rule requiring paddlers and students to be of the same sex.

In other words, the Springtown Independent School District decided to expand corporal punishment, a move in precisely the wrong direction. Education experts are in wide agreement that physical punishment in schools is ill-advised: it is unequally meted out, it can cause serious mental and physical harm, and it is not as effective as other kinds of discipline.

To residents of much of the U.S., beating schoolchildren sounds like a throwback to the nation's distant past. In New Jersey, corporal punishment has been illegal since 1867, and in many school districts it has not been heard of for decades. The campaign to ban corporal punishment hit its stride in the 1980s and '90s, when more than 20 states — including big ones like New York and California — adopted bans.

There are now just 19 states that allow corporal punishment in schools, but that still leaves a lot of students being paddled, hit or otherwise physically punished. In the 2005-06 school year, according to the Center for Effective Discipline, more than 223,000 students received corporal punishment. In Mississippi, the No. 1 state for corporal punishment, 7.5% of students were physically disciplined. In Arkansas and Alabama, 4.7% and 4.5% were, respectively.

Corporal punishment is not just a few raps on the knuckles with a ruler. It often means hitting a student on the bottom with a wooden paddle using considerable force. The mother of one of the Texas girls said that after her daughter was paddled, her bottom “almost looked like it had been burned and blistered, it was so bad....”

Corporal punishment has been linked to mental-health problems in children. Studies have found that children who receive physical punishment are more likely to experience depression, suicide and antisocial behavior. A Canadian study published this year found a connection between corporal punishment and alcohol and drug abuse.

The case in favor of corporal punishment is remarkably thin. Supporters often invoke the injunction “Spare the rod, spoil the child,” or simply point to the long tradition of paddling children and say they see no reason to stop now. But there is not a great deal of social-science evidence that paddling promotes better outcomes — and there is quite a bit that it does the reverse. Education experts say physical punishment instills a climate of fear in the classroom and is associated with students skipping class and dropping out of school.

There was a time when critics of corporal punishment hoped that the courts would block its use. But the Supreme Court dealt those hopes a serious blow in 1977, when it ruled in *Ingraham v. Wright* that in-school corporal punishment does not violate the 8th Amendment’s prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment.

The strongest force working against corporal punishment right now is a simple one: public opinion. Even among people who spank their children, having school

officials paddle students is not popular. In an ABC News poll, 72% of respondents opposed physical punishment in grade schools. Even in the South, where corporal punishment is most common, just 35% were in favor.

New state laws against corporal punishment keep coming. Ohio adopted a ban in 2009, and New Mexico adopted one in 2011. But even with this momentum, it could be many years before all states ban the practice. That is why Congress should enact a national ban on corporal punishment in schools, like the one that Representative Carolyn McCarthy of New York has proposed. Children in Mississippi and Arkansas — and Texas — should not continue to be beaten just because their states remain committed to a barbaric practice.

Name: _____

Date: _____

“Why Is Paddling Still Allowed in Schools?” Questions

1. Based upon what you read, which area of the country has the most corporal punishment? Which area has the least?
2. Write down one sentence from the article that shows which area has the least, or which area has the most. (Remember to surround it with quotes.)
3. Does the author show any bias either in favor of corporal punishment or in opposition to it?
4. Write down a sentence that shows bias in favor of or opposition to corporal punishment.
5. Should corporal punishment be allowed in public schools? Why or why not? Respond in a six to eight sentence **paragraph**. Be sure to back up your reasoning by referring to the article.