



Branciforte and Mission Hill Middle Schools – School-Wide Writing Prompt
Persuasive Essay - 8th grade, Spring 2012

Corporal punishment is as old as school, and many would say, a tradition that has worked well for centuries. On the other hand, many states have outlawed the practice, determining it to be cruel and ineffective. In schools where corporal punishment is still used today, the issue divides parents.

While many parents approve of spanking as a form of punishment, some groups like The Center for Effective Discipline have recommended a national ban on corporal punishment in schools. *Would you support a national ban on corporal punishment in public schools?* Defend your answer by giving the reasons why you agree or disagree with spanking in schools. Remember also to address arguments from the other side.

Spanking Lives On In Rural Florida Schools

by SARAH GONZALEZ – From National Public Radio, March 13, 2012

Spanking in school may seem like a relic of the past, but every day hundreds of students — from preschoolers to high school seniors — are still being paddled by teachers and principals. In parts of America, getting spanked at school with a wooden or fiberglass board is just part of being a misbehaving student.

"I been getting them since about first grade," says Lucas Mixon, now a junior at Holmes County High School in Bonifay, Fla. "It's just regular. They tell you to put your hands up on the desk and how many swats you're going to get."

Florida is one of 19 states, mostly in the South and Mountain West, that still allow public schools to paddle, according to the Center for Effective Discipline. Most Florida school districts have opted out of using corporal punishment, but almost every county in the state's rural North has policies that allow schools to paddle students.

In 2011, Democratic state Rep. Ari Porth sponsored a bill to ban school corporal punishment statewide. He says where students live should not determine whether they get spanked at school.

"When I heard that this practice still exists, I was mortified," Porth says. "No child should not feel completely safe when they go to school." But Porth's bill failed — it never even reached a committee in the Florida legislature.

That's just fine for parents like Bud Glover of Bonifay, a small town 15 miles from the Alabama border. It's a place where tradition is valued — and paddling is considered tradition. Holmes County High School Principal Eddie Dixson says paddling is used for minor offenses like back-talking or consistent tardiness. Students at the school are spanked only by Dixson or the assistant principal, and there is always a witness.

"I got my butt beat and I know what's right and wrong," he says. "And my children are going to know what's right and wrong."

Glover's feelings are shared by many parents in this part of Florida. "I think the problem with society is we quit paddling," he says.



The Sting Of The Paddle

Schools often use a wooden or fiberglass paddle for their spankings. There are no statewide regulations on what the paddles should look like, so each school district creates its own. The paddle at Holmes County High School looks like a short rowboat paddle. It's about 16 inches long, 5 inches wide and a 1/2 inch thick. You can't buy it at a store, so Holmes County High asks wood-shop students to make it for them.

Senior Cole Long has never made a paddle, but he's been on the receiving end of one. He says he's been paddled for things like, "throwing papers, throwing pencils, a couple times for cussing and then back-talking."

"I used to be a really wild child," he says.

States That Allow Corporal Punishment In Schools:

Alabama
Arizona
Arkansas
Colorado
Florida
Georgia
Idaho
Indiana
Kansas

Kentucky
South Carolina
Louisiana
Mississippi
Missouri
North Carolina
Oklahoma
Tennessee
Texas
Wyoming

Source: Center for Effective Discipline

A couple months ago, Long won \$7,200 at a bull-riding competition in Texas. But even to a bull rider, Long says, the paddle can sting depending on who's doing the spanking. "The assistant principal, he hurts," Long says. "I've had it plenty of times from him and he gives it to us a little more." Long says he thinks all schools should paddle students because the spankings teach discipline and respect — and much of the community agrees.

Padding Without Parental Consent

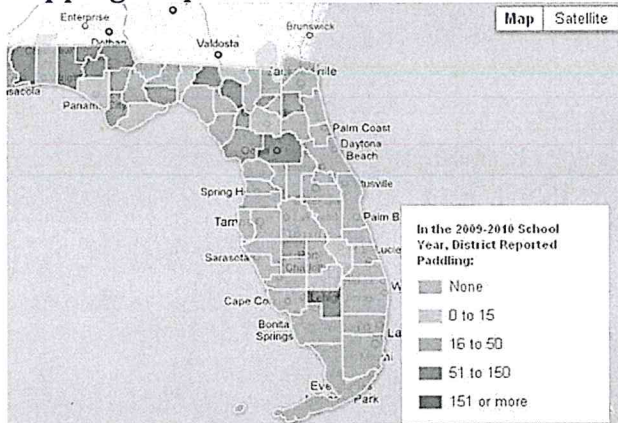
Every once in a while, parents like Tenika Jones of Levy County will object to their child getting paddled. Last year, the principal at Joyce Bullock Elementary sent home a waiver asking parents for permission to paddle students. Jones says she didn't sign it, but her son, Geirrea Bostick, was paddled anyway. He was 5 at the time and it was his second week of preschool. Gierrea says the principal spanked him twice for slapping another boy on the school bus. He says the principal first told him to take his jacket off. "Then [she] spank me on my booty," Gierrea says. "I cried all the way home. It was really hard."

Gierrea's mom says the paddling left welts on Gierrea's bottom, and she was outraged.

"If I would have hit my son how she hit him, I would have been in jail, I would have been on the news, I would have been messed up trying to get my children back," Jones says. "She whipped him up and to me that's child abuse."

Jones is in the process of suing the Levy County School District for paddling her son without her permission. But Robert Rush, an attorney at the law firm representing Jones says state law does not require schools to get parental consent.

Mapping Corporal Punishment In Florida



"If the school board and the principal specifically authorize corporal punishment, it can be administered lawfully against the parent's wishes," Rush says. According to Rush, the school principal sets the policy for paddling, and if the school acts in accordance with that policy it's very hard to sue.

"They're immune both civilly and criminally by law," he says.

But attorneys can argue excessive force was used. The school's principal, Jamie Handlin, and the school district would not comment for this story because they're in pre-litigation, but Handlin told the Williston Pioneer newspaper,

"Nothing was violated. I disciplined out of love, not anger," she said.

Does Paddling Solve The Problem?

Schools are the only public institution where hitting is allowed. It's not allowed in prisons, hospitals, mental institutions or the military.

According to the Center for Effective Discipline, the most recent statistics show that 223,190 American students received corporal punishment in 2006. In Florida alone, 3,661 students were spanked in 2010, according to the state's Department of Education.

But school corporal punishment in general has been on the decline. New Jersey was the first state to ban it in 1867. The next state, Massachusetts, didn't follow until more than 100 years later, when child protection laws started popping up and paddling students starting falling out of fashion. Most recently, New Mexico banned paddling just last year.

Deborah Sendek, a clinical child psychologist with the Center for Effective Discipline, says research on corporal punishment shows paddling does not deter students from misbehaving.

"What we tend to see is the students who are paddled are paddled repeatedly throughout the course of the academic year and the following year and the following year," Sendek says. "That's one of the things that tells us it's not effective."

Sendek says paddling can also have negative short- and long-term physical and psychological consequences.

"The rule in school may be that we only hit for certain things and we only hit with a paddle," Sendek says. "But if we have a culture where we believe it's OK to hit, then it can be generalized."

But supporters of school corporal punishment argue that paddling helps keeps kids in school, since the alternative would be suspending students with bad behavior.

Willie Williams, principal at Madison County Central Elementary and Middle School, agrees. The only problem is he can't bring himself to administer the punishment. And when others do it, he says he can't bear watch.
