

1 Running Title: Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment has been seen as an acceptable disciplinary means apparently since the days of Moses leading the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. In recent years, school policies have been scrutinized to the point where 28 of the 50 states have abolished the use of corporal punishments in schools (Ghering, 2004) and many school districts within the 22 remaining states have banned the use of corporal punishment despite a state-wide ban. Why do some educational stalwarts still uphold a policy that advocates physical violence? What are school districts to do in the face of such a social divide? Every day these questions burn hotter in the hearts and minds of parents, teachers, and administrators across the country. As we shall see, the reasons behind the advocacy of corporal punishment have their roots in the same soil as many other politically conservative ideals.

Corporal punishment is seen by some as an effective deterrent and reformer of misbehavior in the classroom and in schools. In a recent issue of NEA Today, eighth grade history teacher David Mason argues for the continued use of corporal punishment based on his 29 years of experience in a classroom despite the fact that when he began teaching he was "very opposed to corporal punishment." He continues:

Misbehaving children have come to believe no one can stop them. Each year, when I tell students that the state law allows spanking, they are incredulous. Their common taunt has become, "You can't touch me." Detention and suspension have no effect. Students carry these "punishments" as badges of honor in their negative peer group. In a perfect world, parents would teach their children how to behave at home. Unfortunately, that often doesn't happen. If the nation wants orderly schools and higher test scores, it must allow educators a big toolbox of discipline methods in which corporal punishment continues to be an option. The occasional spanking of a boy or girl for bad behavior provides an immediate, painful consequence that can convince them and their friends to pay attention. Even the threat of corporal punishment could be the one thing that keeps a boy or girl out of prison (Mason, 2005)

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A study done in 2002 by John Wilson also advocates the usage of corporal punishment based on six points. First is that corporal punishment is cheap and easy to administer. It requires no extra personnel to dispense and the only expense would be that of a paddle. Secondly, Wilson argues that corporal punishment is an effective deterrent, because the physical pain involved with paddling is enough to cause students to stop and think about their behavior before acting. If they know that the consequence for misbehavior involves physical punishment, according to Wilson, students not misbehave. Third, Wilson contends that it is an effective means of reform. The fear of physical pain deters the person from misbehaving and thus reforms the unruly student. Wilson's fourth point advocating corporal punishment is that the pain is adjustable depending on the offense. The negative consequence for one behavior may result in one lick; another may deserve three, depending on the severity of misbehavior. Punishing misbehavior on a sliding scale makes corporal punishment an appropriate punishment. Fifth, is that corporal punishment is a fair punishment to all, since we all have a similar dislike of pain. He contends that since nobody likes pain, pain used as a punishment for all is one that is fair for all. Finally, Wilson says that corporal punishment need not leave permanent damage, thereby making it a viable option for instilling discipline. Wilson argues that these six points are enough to make corporal punishment at the very least should be kept as a form of punishment.

In recent years, there has been a trend to pass laws banning the use of corporal punishment. However, the 1999 conviction of Michael Faye in Singapore for vandalism which resulted in his caning has brought the use of corporal punishment back to the legislative forefront in many places. Both citizens and lawmakers have begun to call for

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stricter punishments in schools, including corporal punishment. For example, former Alabama Governor Fob James, Jr. signed a law requiring school districts to support their teachers if the teacher is taken to court over corporal punishment. Also, Virginia has a state ban on corporal punishment, but circumvents the law by allowing teachers to use "reasonable and necessary" physical force to maintain order in the classroom and similarly requires districts to back teachers in the event of a lawsuit (Chmelynski, 1996).

Murtaugh Idaho school board chairman Stuart Tolman oversaw the reinstatement of corporal punishment in his school district. According to Tolman, the practice was adopted because a majority of parents were calling for more discipline in the schools. Students facing either detention or suspension have the option to choose paddling or the detention. Tolman says that suspensions merely give kids a vacation and that paddling students works in his school and discipline problems have almost disappeared (Chmelynski, 1996).

A similar situation recently occurred within the Memphis, Tennessee School District. Superintendent Carol Johnson wrote a column in the Memphis Commercial Appeal in which she advocated the abolition of corporal punishment. The citizens responded with letters to the editor explaining many of the beliefs that uphold corporal punishment as an acceptable practice (Ghering, 2004).

Tradition is one of the reasons why corporal punishment is still upheld. One Memphis school board member, Wanda Halbert, brought forth a resolution that would allow parents to decide whether or not to allow their child to be spanked. Her reasons were simple. "Having been born and raised in the South, it's a form of discipline that's been implemented in our homes for years. By removing the ability to institute corporal

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punishment, you're taking away another level of authority from adults. Our children are controlling too much of what happens in the schoolhouse already (Ghering, 2004)."

Kingsbury Middle School Assistant Principal John Roberts agrees with Halbert. He reinstated corporal punishment because parents were demanding it. According to Roberts, students are always given the choice of spanking or other forms of punishment, but 90 percent of black students in the school choose spanking over any other form of punishment. Seventy percent of white students and 50 percent of Hispanic students also chose paddling. Roberts claims that these numbers reflect the culture of the South because the kids were brought up with spanking as an acceptable punishment in their homes (Gehring, 2004).

In addition to tradition and culture, Irwin Hyman, director of the National Center for the Study of Corporal Punishment and Alternatives claims that strong religious beliefs in the South support the use of corporal punishment. Memphis school board member and local preacher Hubon Sandridge inadvertently supported Hyman's research during the school board's discussion of corporal punishment. Sandridge quoted several scriptures from the Bible concerning the proper method for disciplining children and said without the availability of corporal punishment in schools, behavioral problems would continue to worsen (Ghering, 2004).

Especially in the South, corporal punishment is still used as a means to deter, punish, and reform unruly students. For the most part, corporal punishment is seen as an appropriate, adequate, and appropriate measure to discipline children. Aside from the fact that many teachers, parents, and administrators feel that alternative means of discipline are ineffective, the reasons behind upholding a policy that involves the physical beating

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of a child by an adult have its roots in the culture and tradition of the South, as well as the deeply-held religious values of the Southern population. This combination of tradition and religion make it seem logical why the practice of corporal punishment has been upheld in the South.