

Bob/Doug/Bill

March 21, 1975

Mr. Joe McKenna, Supervisor
Intermediate Unit Programs
Western State School and Hospital
333 Curry Hill Road
Canonsburg, Pa. 15317

Dear Joe,

I wish to record in this letter our objection to the type of punishment recently administered to Howard P [REDACTED], a student in your community-based classes.

We acknowledge the sound basis for: making a point about truancy to Howard and fellow students, achieving the positive results (no hooky) by this punishment, and distinguishing Howard's education for the day from other students at his punishment site. However, we feel the punishment is extreme and sets a precedent subject to considerable abuse.

By your own admission, the purpose for sending Howard to this specific unit for the punishment day was that it would be "unpleasant". Howard personally acknowledged that this was the result. If we accepted this type of punishment, we would question whether it was necessary to place Howard with individuals so much less able than he. At the very least, he should have been sent to a class with people closer to his ability level. The purpose of punishment should not be to degrade or scare an individual.

Given the history of excessive punishment to residents at Western State School and Hospital, we see the placement of an able individual on a unit with severely disabled individuals as a dangerous precedent.

Mr. Joe McKenna

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While it can be argued that in this case you made special provisions for him to do regular work and that the result was positive in your estimation, there are no guarantees that similar controls will be exercised in similar cases using the same type of punishment. The possibilities exist that the next person administering such punishment: will make it last for a week, will not make provisions for the student to do work on his own level, will not have the same "teaching" motives that you have expressed, will apply this method to an individual who cannot understand the punishment, will not consider the possible emotional reaction to such a placement. We hope this is the last punishment where an individual is placed in a unit with more severely disabled people as a punishment.

Finally, we are concerned that there are no guidelines for the administration of discipline to WSSH students in the Intermediate Unit Program. We urge you to create such guidelines in consultation with parents, advocates, and WSSH administration. We don't believe discipline can be administered without written discipline guidelines approved as policy by the Intermediate Unit or the State Department of Education. We would appreciate a copy of such guidelines as soon as they are drafted.

Sincerely,

Robert Nelkin
Associate Executive Director

RN:cp

CC: Parent Representatives
on Local Task Force