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### Zero Tolerance Policies In Schools

Despite their serious flaws, zero tolerance policies are implemented across schools in the United States. Policies like these were put into action in hopes to improve safety but did not prove effective in decreasing misbehavior or violence. In fact, there are many negative examples of the zero tolerance approach being used. There are multiple superior alternatives, and it is critical districts review these. The problems that were meant to be solved using this policy were not corrected, so action must be taken in order to ensure that schools are safer by replacing the policy with alternatives.

Zero tolerance policies were meant to make schools securer, but did not increase safety whatsoever. In the past, serious issues led schools to look for a effective method in controlling behavior. They decided to use the zero tolerance policy to prevent those problems. According to the article “Zero Tolerance Policies”, it was used in the 1980s to prevent the use of drugs. It applies to many other things now including violence, bullying, weapons, etc.. The American Psychological Association says zero tolerance is (qtd. in Zero Tolerance Policies), “a philosophy or policy that mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context.” Although it was meant to solve issues involving violence and drugs, it did not help. David S. Mitchell from Washington University of

Law claims, “To date, the legal challenges to zero tolerance policies on a variety of different grounds have proven to be unsuccessful.” He also stated, “And yet, while there does not appear to be a valid constitutional claim, it does not mean that zero tolerance policies do not have a long-term and devastating impact on the individual student's current and future life outcomes.” Thus, it is pointless to continue using the policy, and it is about time to find a better one.

Many students have experienced the flaws of the zero tolerance approach. One specific example of this is a middle school student receiving a suspension for something extremely minor. According to Jean Klasovsky from TED, the child was suspended for having a water gun during recess. Schools take things like that too seriously; the worst that should have happened is earning detention. She also said some students were suspended for more than a week for skipping class. Sending for skipping class will not inspire them to show up. Many defenders of the zero tolerance policy claim it ensures everyone is equal. However, it does the exact opposite. According to the article “Zero Tolerance”, “One study, issued by the Advancement Project in 2000, suggested that zero tolerance, while supposedly a neutral policy, was applied disproportionately to students of color.” The zero tolerance method in schools can target certain individuals. Therefore, not only does this policy apply to very strange offenses like skipping class and using water guns, it also fails to treat everyone equally.

There are many excellent and effective alternatives to zero tolerance policies. One of those alternatives is called restorative justice. Schools that use restorative justice try to solve the issues that cause the poor behavior of their students, rather than just sending them home, right back to their problems. According to Jean Klasovsky, a lecturer on TED, Chicago Public Schools have restorative justice rooms. In these rooms, all students receive the help they need, including

counseling and talking circles. She also said schools with restorative justice have better attendance and test scores. Another alternative is to simply have clearer and more specific rules. David S. Mitchell, from the Washington University of Law, said the zero tolerance policy is way too broad, and it is confusing to figure out what is considered against the rules. According to Mr. Berg, the principal of Farmington Senior High School, the school does not use the zero tolerance policy, because it is unfair and does not look at individual situations. However, the school does have a handbook on their website (“Handbook for Student Management”). That handbook is referenced when deciding consequences for students, and not all the consequences result in suspension. As one may see, the zero tolerance approach is not the best in schools, and there are many alternatives that will increase better behavior.

Zero tolerance has caused more problems than benefits. The policy was implemented to deter negative behavior, but failed to do so. There have been many strange and unfair examples of the zero tolerance method being used in schools. When compared to the alternatives, such as restorative justice, the zero tolerance approach is inferior. It is about time schools replace zero tolerance policies in order to make schools a safer environment for students.

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