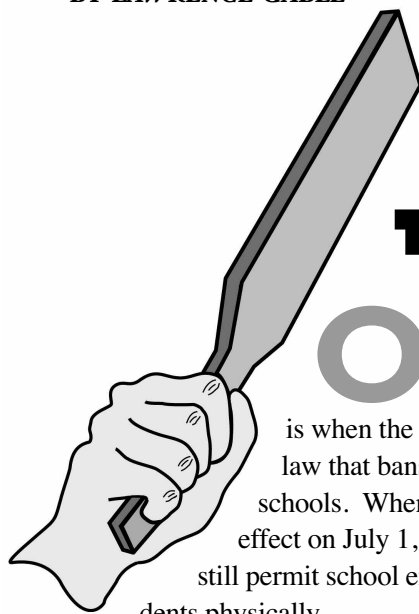


What's Happening

I N T H E U S A ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

VOL 18, NO 9 MAY 2011



NEW MEXICO PUTS DOWN THE PADDLE

On April 6 the schoolchildren of New Mexico got some good news. That is when the governor signed a new law that bans corporal punishment in schools. When New Mexico's law takes effect on July 1, it will leave 19 states that still permit school employees to punish students physically.

Corporal punishment was legal in every state in the U.S. for nearly 100 years. Then in 1867 New Jersey became the first state to abolish the practice. Another 100 years passed before the second state, Massachusetts, abolished it in 1971. In the 1970s three more states and the District of Columbia also did so. In 1977 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that school corporal punishment does not violate the U.S. Constitution.

There have been different forms of corporal punishment. Although teachers and principals used to strike children with a belt or open hand, now they do it mostly just with a wooden paddle. However, two human rights organizations found other examples from the 2006–07 school year. They found that school employees had used belts, a toy hammer, and a set of rulers taped together. The employees had caused bruises by pinching and grabbing children. They also had thrown children to the ground, slammed them against a wall and dragged them across the floor.

Before 1985 only five states had banned corporal punishment in schools. In many states the local school districts could choose whether to use it or not. Even so, three states actually prohibited their school districts from banning corporal punishment. One of them was Ohio, where in 1984 more than 68,000 students had received some form of corporal punishment.

Things began changing in Ohio in 1985. It passed a law that allowed local school districts to ban corporal punishment. A small district was the first to ban it, but within four years all but one of Ohio's largest dis-

tricts also had banned it. In 1990 Ohio also started requiring districts to report how many times they used it each year.

At that same time a small organization, the Center for Effective Discipline, began giving a "Top Hitter Award of Dishonor" to districts.

By 1993 about 100 districts in Ohio had banned it. Ohio also passed a law that allowed parents to forbid the use corporal punishment on their children. Five years later the state received reports of a total of 950 incidents, and by 2007–08 only 110. In 2009 it banned corporal punishment in schools completely. It was the last state before now to ban it.

School districts in New Mexico have been able to decide whether to use corporal punishment. Of the state's 89 districts, 36 had kept it. According to the governor's office, children received corporal punishment 705 times during the 2006–07 school year. When the governor signed the new law, she said that the decision to use corporal punishment should belong to parents.

Supporters of corporal punishment make several arguments for it. They like that the punishment is quick, which allows a student to return to class and continue learning. In their view it saves time for the staff at school, since they do not have to supervise detention within or outside the school day. Many adults insist that they turned out well in spite of having received corporal punishment as children. Finally, some believe in it because the Bible says not to "spare the rod" in discipline.

Opponents of corporal punishment make different arguments. They believe that children learn best in safe surroundings. They say that hitting children is a form of child abuse that damages children emotionally. They also argue that corporal punishment improves neither learning nor behavior at a school, and that it is given unfairly to minority children and students with disabilities. Some opponents feel that it should not be legal at home either.

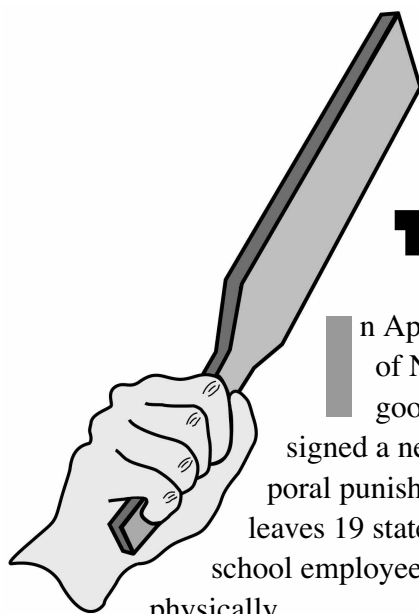
Misbehavior by children in schools will never go away. However, schools have a number of ways to correct and punish it. Now there are just fewer places in the U.S. where they can do it with a paddle.

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In April the schoolchildren of New Mexico got some good news. The governor signed a new law that bans corporal punishment in schools. That leaves 19 states that still permit school employees to punish students physically.

Corporal punishment was legal in every state for 100 years. Then in 1867 New Jersey became the first state to ban it. Another 100 years passed before the second state, Massachusetts, banned it in 1971. In the 1970s three more states and the District of Columbia did so too. The U.S. Supreme Court also ruled that it is legal under the U.S. Constitution.

There have been different forms of corporal punishment. Teachers and principals used to strike children with a belt or open hand. Now they mostly just use a wooden paddle. However, reports from the 2006–07 school year include other examples. They had struck children with belts and some rulers taped together. They had pinched and grabbed children, thrown them down and slammed them against a wall.

Before 1985 only five states had banned corporal punishment in schools. In many states the local school districts could choose to use it or not. Even so, three states actually prohibited their school districts from banning corporal punishment. One of them was Ohio, where in 1984 more than 68,000 students had received some form of corporal punishment.

Things began changing in Ohio in 1985. It allowed local school districts to ban corporal

punishment. Within four years all but one of Ohio's largest districts also had banned it. In 1990 Ohio also started requiring districts to

report how many times they used it each year. When those numbers became public, they embarrassed some districts.

By 1993 many districts in Ohio had banned it. Then Ohio also let parents forbid districts from using it on their children. Five years later there were only 950 incidents, and by 2007–08 only 110. In 2009 it banned corporal punishment in schools completely. It was the last state before now to ban it.

School districts in New Mexico have been able to choose corporal punishment. Only 36 of New Mexico's school districts have been using it though. When the governor signed the new law, she said that the decision to use corporal punishment should belong to parents.

Supporters of corporal punishment make several arguments for it. They like that a paddling allows a student to return to class immediately. They say it saves time for the staff at school, since they do not have to supervise detention. Many adults who got paddled in school insist that they turned out well. Finally, some believe in it because the Bible says not to "spare the rod" in discipline.

Opponents of corporal punishment make different arguments. They believe that children learn best in safe surroundings. They say that hitting children damages them emotionally. They also argue that it does not improve learning or behavior at a school, and that disabled and minority children get paddled more often than others.

Misbehavior by children in schools will never go away. However, schools have a number of ways to correct and punish it. Now there are just fewer places in the U.S. where they can do it with a paddle.

Background Information

The 19 states where corporal punishment is still allowed: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wyoming.

Texas is currently considering banning corporal punishment in schools. According to People Opposed to Paddling Students, at least 27 of nearly 1,000 school districts in Texas still use corporal punishment.

The states that banned corporal punishment in schools in the 1970s were Hawaii (1971), Maine (1975) and Rhode Island (1977). The District of Columbia also banned it in 1977.

The Supreme Court ruling in 1977 that upheld corporal punishment was called *Ingraham v. Wright*.

A bill to end the use of corporal punishment in schools was introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives in June 2010.

The two other states that, along with Ohio, prohibited local school boards from banning corporal punishment in 1985 were Florida and North Carolina.

Bexley City Schools was the first district in Ohio to ban corporal punishment.

About 10 percent of the students who receive corporal punishment end up seeking medical treatment.

Studies show that students who receive corporal punishment are more likely than others to engage in aggressive behavior, become depressed and lose respect for authority.

The two human rights organizations were the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Human Rights Watch. Their report cited federal records of 223,190 cases of corporal punishment in schools in 2006–07.

Human Rights Watch has reported to the U.S. Congress that children in some states receive greater protections against corporal punishment in detention facilities than they do in their public schools.

More than 100 countries have banned corporal punishment in schools. Twenty-nine have banned it at home too.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Pre-reading:

- Describe some of the ways that teachers and administrators at your school handle students who misbehave.

Comprehension:

- Trace the steps that Ohio took that led to its ban on corporal punishment in schools.

Beyond the Text:

- Do students consider a suspension a kind of holiday from school?
- Do you think that hitting is a way for a parent to solve a problem with a child?
- Name some consequences that parents place on children as a way of punishing or changing bad behavior.

Vocabulary (*advanced article only)

Article-specific: corporal; to abolish*; paddle; bruise*; effective*; to forbid; incident; “spare the rod”; opponent

High-use: to ban; to take effect*; legal; to violate*; to prohibit; to supervise; to insist; abuse*; emotionally

Sources

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CA Curricular Standards (4–12)

English-Language Arts

Reading 1.0 Vocabulary Development

2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

Writing 1.0 Writing Strategies

2.0 Writing Applications

ELD—Intermediate and Advanced

Reading Vocabulary Development/Comprehension

Writing Strategies and Applications

Listening and Speaking