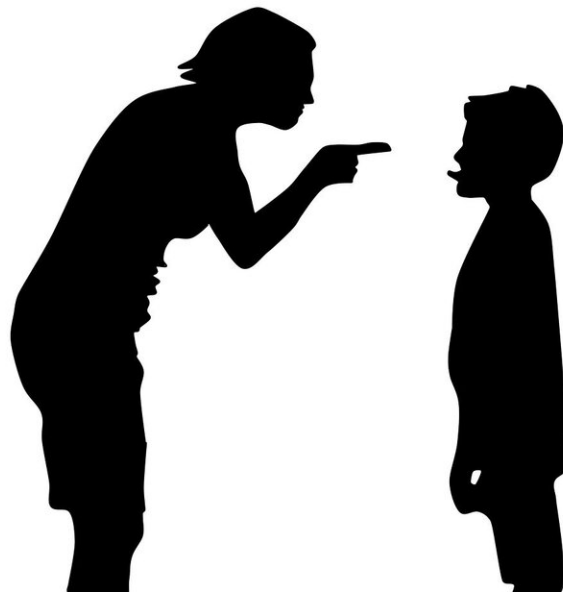


Video shows students still get paddled in US schools

May 21 2021, by F. Chris Curran



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The image of a teacher paddling or spanking a student at school may seem to belong in a history book—as archaic a practice as the dunce cap. However, for thousands of students across America each year, the use of corporal punishment for violating school rules is still [a routine part of their education](#).

Surprising to many, [corporal punishment](#) in schools remains [legal in 19](#)

[states nationwide](#). In the 2015-2016 [school year](#), [more than 92,000](#) public school students were paddled or spanked at the hands of school personnel, with most of these incidents [concentrated in fewer than 10 states, mostly in the South](#).

Corporal [punishment](#) has again captured national attention following the release of a video in May 2021 of a [Florida principal paddling a young girl](#). The video, secretly captured by the student's mother, shows the principal striking the student with a wooden paddle in response to her damaging a computer. While a violation of district policy, the principal's actions were deemed legal by both the [local sheriff's office](#) and [the state attorney's office](#).

Many who have viewed the video have questioned how this practice remains legal and in use in the United States. As an [educational researcher who studies school discipline](#)—and as a former teacher who has seen other teachers use this practice—I have found that the answer to this question is complex.

Deference to local decision-making

In 1977, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in [Ingraham v. Wright](#) that corporal punishment in schools is constitutional, establishing a federal standard for its continued legal use.

While corporal punishment [remains legal in 19 states](#), there [have been efforts](#) in [some of those states](#) to ban the practice. In May of 2021, [Louisiana considered such a bill](#).

However, these efforts have not been able to get much traction. Louisiana's bill [failed to pass in the House](#), with critics pointing to a preference for local school districts to make the decision. In fact, the last state ban [occurred in 2011](#), when [New Mexico outlawed the practice](#).

Research that I have conducted with others shows this [deference to local school districts is common](#). In [our 2018 study](#) on corporal punishment, we found that [state bans generally come after local school district bans](#) or reductions in use.

For example, Rhode Island [enacted a state ban on corporal punishment in 2002](#), even though the practice had not been used in the state [since 1977 because of local decisions](#). In North Carolina, the practice has been [eliminated by all districts in the state](#) since 2019, but a subsequent bill to formalize this ban at the state level [failed to advance to law](#).

For many local leaders and educators, the continued use of corporal punishment [reflects shared community norms](#) and a belief that the practice is beneficial to maintaining order in schools. For many state policymakers, there is a [general belief](#) that such decisions should be made at the local level. Unfortunately, research suggests that this deference to local decisions to use corporal punishment is harmful for students.

The harm of corporal punishment

Though studies of the impact of corporal punishment in schools are limited, [those that exist](#) suggest the practice [harms students' academic performance](#) and future behavior. Such negative outcomes have also been linked with corporal punishment use in the home by parents.

The burden of these negative impacts is disproportionately experienced by students of color and boys. Black students are [two to three times as likely](#) as their white peers to experience corporal punishment, and boys make up [about 80%](#) of those subjected to the practice.

Based on such evidence, many [national](#) and [international organizations](#) recommend against the use of corporal punishment in schools. Former

acting Secretary of Education John B. King called explicitly for U.S. schools to [cease the practice](#). Despite this, the U.S. has not joined the over [100 countries worldwide that ban corporal punishment](#) in schools.

Seeking alternatives

For many educators, the appeal of corporal punishment may be its efficiency. It can be quickly administered by a teacher or principal with limited commitment of time or institutional resources. Though unproductive in the long term, it may result in compliance in the short term.

It is important, then, for discussions about bans on corporal punishment to include alternatives. In fact, not doing so may result in schools trading corporal punishment for other [negative disciplinary practices like suspension](#).

In my [own research](#), my colleague and I found that when school districts serving large proportions of Black or Hispanic students decrease or stop using corporal punishment, suspension rates tend to increase. In contrast, suspension rates decreased in districts with more white students.

Given the negative effects of corporal punishment and the risk that bans alone could lead to increased suspensions in schools with more minority students, how should educators and policymakers approach the issue?

There are alternative approaches to corporal punishment and suspension that offer promise for eliminating the practice of paddling students while also ensuring that students remain in school to learn. [Restorative practices](#) and [positive behavior interventions](#) are such examples. These approaches focus on addressing student trauma, building relationships and rewarding positive behavior.

For example, rather than being paddled, students who damage [school property](#) might [discuss their behavior with adults and other students involved](#) and then [contribute to repairing the property](#).

A focus on building a [strong school climate](#)—characterized by supportive relationships between teachers and students as well as engaging instructional practice—also holds promise for improved [student](#) behavior without corporal punishment.

Ultimately, gaining local support for corporal punishment bans may be easier if schools know more effective alternatives are available.

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