

Corporal Punishment (CP) Does NOT Belong in Kentucky Public Schools

KEY INFORMATION

In KY, school CP has historically been experienced disproportionately by boys, students with disabilities, students on free and reduced lunch, and students from south central and far eastern counties.

CP is ineffective. Decades worth of research demonstrates that CP is not effective at improving children's behavior; rather, children become more aggressive and disruptive over time the more frequently they experience corporal punishment.

School CP causes injury. Corporal punishment typically involves a "paddle" which is a wooden board, often 2-2.5ft in length, 3-5 in wide, and ½ in thick. The use of such an implement means that CP often results in injuries: bruises, cuts, welts, and even broken bones. In one study, almost 1 in 4 young adults who received school CP reported a bruise or other injury resulted. If an adult hit another adult with such a board, it would be considered assault and the board would be considered a weapon.

School CP causes trauma. Children who experience school CP report feeling angry, embarrassed and afraid. Witnessing or hearing CP of other students can also be traumatic for other children. The KDE recently acknowledged that school CP is not viewable via a trauma-informed lens as required by 158.4416. The KDE recently outlined policies to reduce the trauma inflicted on students via school CP by disallowing its use on school children who are homeless or have an IEP. The KDE also requires counseling to try to mitigate the trauma inflicted by school CP. Given the KDE now requires counseling in the setting of school CP to try to "undo" the harm and prohibits the practice for certain groups of students, why wouldn't we want to protect ALL of KY kids from this harmful, trauma-inflicting practice?

Kentucky is one of 19 states to permit school CP as a form of discipline. This is despite clear and compelling evidence corporal punishment causes injury, is ineffective in promoting positive student behavior, interferes with student learning, is used disproportionately, and creates a negative school climate. Students must be safe and free from physical and emotional harm in schools. A supportive school environment is critical for effective teaching and learning.

Relevant Statutes

1. KRS 503.110 (1982) permits the use of corporal punishment by teachers for the purpose of maintaining classroom discipline.
2. KRS 158.4416 (2019) requires KDE to provide resources related to trauma-informed discipline and requires districts to adopt trauma-informed discipline policies.
3. KRS 158.444 requires KBE to promulgate regulations related to student discipline.
4. KRS 156.160(1)(h) requires KBE to promulgate regulations related to student welfare.



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School CP interferes with learning. Children who experience corporal punishment have lower academic achievement than their peers including lower GPAs and lower performance on achievement tests. Given recent decline in student achievement related to the pandemic, KY kids cannot withstand any other factors negatively impacting learning and academic performance.

Schools throughout KY (and the country) are successfully maintaining school discipline through positive, non-corporal punishment methods. Rigorous evaluation of school wide approach to improving school climate known as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) is effective in promoting student academic achievement, improving attendance, increasing prosocial student behavior, and enhancing mental health. In KY, 152 districts do not permit CP, 19 districts are permissive or unclear about CP policy.

COVID-19 pandemic has elucidated the critical importance of supportive school environments for effective teaching and learning. The pandemic has upended the lives of students and their families across KY, leading to isolation, anxiety, stress, and trauma. Such stress and trauma may manifest in challenging behaviors when children do not know how to ask for help. School personnel can play a crucial role in supporting children in time of crisis, but only if children trust that their schools are safe environments that will protect them from additional trauma.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the American Medical Association, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Bar Association and multiple other professional organizations have policy statements calling for an end of school corporal punishment. Even our own Kentucky Department of Education has suggested the KY legislature end corporal punishment in KY schools.
2. (Former) HB 119 should be passed through the Senate and to the House to become state law.
3. School districts should implement discipline policies that emphasize positive discipline methods. Ongoing fostering of positive school climates and improving discipline practices through evidence-based training and ongoing professional development for educators and support staff is critical.

Resources:

Gershoff, E. T., Sattler, K. M. P., & Holden, G. W. (2019). School corporal punishment and its associations with achievement and adjustment. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 63, 1-8. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2019.05.004

Gershoff ET, Font SA. Corporal Punishment in U.S. Public Schools: Prevalence, Disparities in Use, and Status in State and Federal Policy. *Soc Policy Rep*. 2016;30:1.

Gershoff ET. School corporal punishment in global perspective: prevalence, outcomes, and efforts at intervention. *Psychol Health Med*. 2017;22(sup1):224-239. doi:10.1080/13548506.2016.1271955

Heekes, S. L. et al. (in press). A systematic review of corporal punishment in schools: Global prevalence and correlates. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*.



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