

It's time to toss the trash!

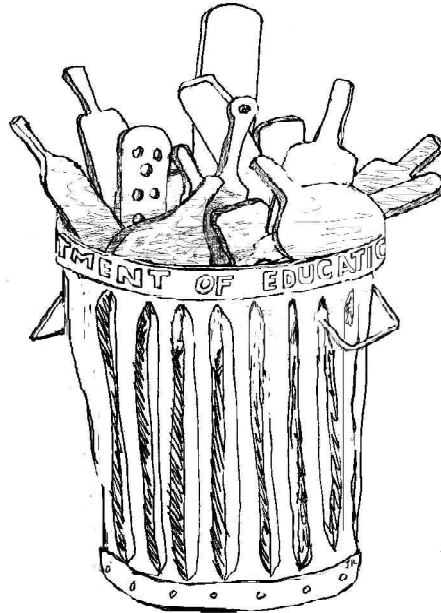
Our wholehearted admiration

and support goes to teachers who strive to serve children's best interests. They are the true professionals of the field. Our concern here, however, is with others who fall far short of that standard – specifically the ones who, under the banner of discipline, batter students on their pelvic area. Such teachers are mainly found in a cluster of 20 states near the Gulf of Mexico. (Not coincidentally, a map of the top ten pupil-beating states is almost identical to a map of the top ten lynching states. Seven states show up on both maps.) In those places, corporal punishment or “paddling,” as it is known, is part of established educational policy, and paddlers have full protection of the law. It should be noted that where paddling occurs, other abusive practices are inevitably swept along with it.

When educators hit students, they set the worst possible example for the general population. The United States stands alone among first world nations in authorizing this kind of child abuse.

We believe it's time for educational policy makers to establish a higher standard for teacher conduct, and to draw a clear line between what's okay and what's not. Assaulting a human being with a board is clearly not okay! The only lesson it teaches is that violence works for the person who is bigger and stronger. That's not the lesson we should be teaching our children.

Children should not come to school feeling frightened by teachers. School should be a place that makes them feel welcome and safe, not one that provokes resentment and a desire to escape. Teachers should model the kind of behavior they expect. They should earn respect by showing respect. Given better examples, children will perform better and behave better. The old adage “As ye sow, so shall ye reap” was never more true than in the classroom, and nobody should be surprised that the most punitive schools tend to be hotbeds of bullying and have high dropout rates.



One aspect of the corporal punishment debate is typically excluded from the discussion: the sexual side.

Medical science has long recognized and documented in great detail how being struck on the buttocks can stimulate sexual feelings. Children are especially susceptible.

The tragic consequence for many children who have been punished by paddling or spanking is that they form a connection between pain, humiliation and sexual arousal that endures for the rest of their lives.

In *Slaughter of the Innocents* (1971), Canadian scientist David Bakan writes, “...The buttocks are the locus for the induction of pain in a child. We are familiar with the argument that it is a safe ‘locus’ for spanking. However, the anal region is also the major erotic region at precisely the time the child is likely to be beaten there. Thus it is aptly chosen to achieve the result of deranged sexuality in adulthood...” Would any professional teacher, or any responsible adult knowingly do this to a child?

Apparently some people experience a profound need to dominate a defenseless victim, including the need to inflict humiliation, fear and pain by beating. This compulsion surely has its origin in their own experience of cruel treatment at some critical stage of their early development. Such people are known to seek employment in paddling schools because those places give them free rein to indulge this perverse appetite.

In an apparent attempt to guard against the appearance of impropriety, many paddling schools require paddling to be done in the presence of a witness. But no one has ever explained what the witness is supposed to be watching out for, and there is nothing to prevent the paddler and the witness from being accomplices in an act of sexual battery. Team paddling only protects the adult perpetrators and their employer, not the child. For the child, who is a non-consenting, unequal party in the act, stimulation of the buttocks, painful or otherwise, is also sexual. It's a felony when done to an unwilling adult.

In light of these dangers, why is child beating legal? Why is it even applauded and encouraged in some circles?

The answer isn't complicated. People who hit children find affirmation in the fact that many others also do it. “After all,” they reason, “if everyone, including teachers, is doing it, what can be so wrong?” This mutual reinforcement among child abusers calms doubts and soothes troubled consciences.

It's time the teaching profession became part of the first line of defense in protecting children from such mistreatment. All teachers should protest in a single voice against this outrageous custom, and lawmakers should be lining up to co-sponsor legislation to block the legal loophole that allows assault and battery of the young.

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