

Corporal Punishment in Wyoming Public Schools

An Executive Summary



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“An Analysis of Wyoming Public School Administrators’ Perceptions on the Use of Corporal Punishment in Wyoming Public Schools.”

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Background

Wyoming is one of 19 states where corporal punishment is still legal in public schools. ***Prior*** to this study, of the 48 public school districts: 22 prohibited it in school board policy; 16 did not mention it at all, and ***ten permitted its use***. ***After*** this study, and after personally contacting the ten school districts still allowing corporal punishment, only ***two school districts still allow its use as per policy***. Incidents of corporal punishment are reported to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). Reports are not provided every year, and the most recent report is from 2017-2018. Wyoming has reported zero incidents of corporal punishment since 2012; a trend that holds true for the vast majority of the 19 states where corporal punishment is still protected by statute (<https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>). The total number of incidents reported in the United States since 2012 is as follows: **166,807** (2012), **106,055** (2014), **92,479** (2016), and **69,492** (2018) which is nearly a 60% drop in reported incidents from just six years earlier in 2012.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine ***the views of Wyoming public school administrators regarding the legality, use, and likely effectiveness of corporal punishment as a disciplinary practice in Wyoming public schools***. In addition, considering the rarity of corporal punishment in Wyoming public schools, feedback was gathered on the effectiveness of alternative school-wide behavior management practices currently being implemented in their schools.

Methodology

A survey was emailed to all building level administrators (principals and assistant principals), and in the smallest school districts with just one administrator, to the K-12 superintendent. One hundred eleven administrators completed the survey, a return rate of 41% which is considered statistically very strong.

Results

Fifty-nine percent of the administrators identified as male, 37% as female, and 4% did not respond to the gender demographic question. Eighty-five percent reported they were principals, 9% assistant principals, 2% superintendents, and 4% declined to identify their position. Forty-six percent of the administrators were working in an elementary school, 40% at the secondary level, and 9% in a K-12 setting.

Nearly 90% of the administrators either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the item, “I believe corporal punishment should remain legal in Wyoming public schools.” Also, the administrators overwhelmingly agreed that it’s use would not be an effective disciplinary practice in their schools. Arguably just as important, 93% of respondents either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the item, “I believe the disciplinary practices being used at our school work well for most students.” Perhaps

the consistent views of the administrators were best represented by one who commented, *“Pretty hard to teach ‘keep your hands to yourself’ if we are not doing so when it comes to discipline. Modeling appropriate responses to behavior, including discipline, in my opinion, is how we best deter inappropriate responses to behavior”*

Implications for Future Practice

This landmark study offered a resounding answer to whether Wyoming public school administrators believe there is still a place for the legal protection, and use, of corporal punishment in their schools. The answer is quite emphatically, “No!”

Consider this, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), the administrators scored a 3.98 to the statement *“I would not accept an administration job at a school that required me to administer corporal punishment.”* Similarly, to the statement, *“If corporal punishment is to be used at all I believe it is best left up to individual families within the confines of their own home”* the administrators scored a 3.83; again, nearly unanimous. The findings are clear, Wyoming public school administrators believe there is simply not a justifiable reason to paddle other people’s kids in a public school. That doesn’t pass the common sense test in 2022.

It is time for the Wyoming Legislature to take a long overdue look at the legal protection afforded to corporal punishment in its public schools. The research at this point, and the statements from over 40 leading child development associations, is overwhelmingly against the practice. The fact that Wyoming administrators, those entrusted with office level discipline, are not using corporal punishment in their schools is not a fluke. Quite simply, as respected professionals, they know better, and so they doing better. Wyoming public schools are *watching* and *waiting* for the legislators to do the right thing.



Get Involved

If you agree that corporal punishment should not be legal in Wyoming public schools, contact me at jjones8811@gmail.com. As a principal in a Wyoming public school, I'm leading an effort to stop the legal protection of corporal punishment in our public schools. But what about local control? There is no place more "local" than your own home and that is where corporal punishment should remain, not at school!

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