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## IT'S TIME TO END CORPORAL PUNISHMENT



In 19 states, educators are allowed to inflict physical punishment on children in schools. “Corporal Punishment” is generally understood to include the physical paddling or spanking of a child by a school official for the purposes of discipline, control, and sometimes even humiliation. The practice is surprisingly widespread.

During 2017-2018, at least 69,000 children were subjected to physical paddling or spanking nationally. A total of 22 states (some of which have a state statute or regulation *prohibiting* corporal punishment) and the District of Columbia reported at least one instance of corporal punishment during the 2017-2018 year. That inconsistency between law and practice points to the vulnerability of children to a physically abusive act that professional associations have long opposed.

This is also a significant racial justice issue because corporal punishment disproportionately impacts Black students, who are 15% of K-12 enrollment but are 37% of the children subjected to corporal punishment. During 2017-2018 (the most recent year for which data are available), states with the highest rates of corporal punishment against Black students included Illinois (where Black students were 73% of students receiving corporal punishment, despite being 16.8% of state enrollment, and also where corporal punishment is technically prohibited), Mississippi (62.9%), Louisiana (61.4%), and Georgia (52.3%).

With 20,309 recorded instances of corporal punishment during 2017-2018, Mississippi leads the nation in the number of K-12 children subjected to physical punishment, accounting for nearly 30% of all instances nationally. An intersectional justice issue, 73% of girls struck in Mississippi were Black. Additionally, nearly 20% of children subjected to corporal punishment were those with disabilities served under IDEA.

Child-rights advocates are working to end this practice. In this month's *NEPC Talks Education*, NEPC Researcher Christopher Saldaña interviews three of these advocates: Morgan Craven, National Director of Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement for IDRA

(Intercultural Development Research Association), [Ellen Reddy](#), executive director of the Nollie Jenkins Family Center (NJFC), and [Kameisha Smith](#), the youth programs coordinator at NJFC. Together, they discuss the use of corporal punishment in schools and the efforts to abolish these violent disciplinary practices. Reddy and Smith describe how they have encountered students with bruises on their buttocks, hands, and back from corporal punishment. They also describe how students are subjected to verbal abuse that leaves them emotionally traumatized.

Reddy points to the immorality and terror of the practice for children, especially children of color and children with disabilities. She explains that corporal punishment is intertwined with the legacies of racism and white supremacy in the United States. For instance, she notes that corporal punishment is more likely to be used in schools where surrounding communities have a history of lynching Black Americans. Craven mentions research showing the deleterious effects of corporal punishment on individual and school-level student outcomes, student emotional and social well-being, and school climate. She explains that no researcher has found corporal punishment to be beneficial for children.

[National and state coalitions](#) are advocating for federal and state legislation to outlaw corporal punishment in schools and support schools in using research-based alternatives. For example, the [Protecting Our Students in Schools Act \(S. 2029\)](#) is a federal [proposal](#) that prohibits the use of corporal punishment in any school in receipt of federal funds, provides a right of action to the families of children who experience corporal punishment, and allocates grants to schools seeking to implement research-based strategies to discipline and school safety.

A recent brief from the [Federal School Discipline and Climate Coalition](#) reviews the harms of corporal punishment (focusing on Mississippi) and outlines recommendations for changing policy and practice. Immediate federal intervention is critical to ending corporal punishment. April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 was the International Day to #EndCorporalPunishment, a day around which Reddy and coalition allies have organized a variety of actions that can be taken to support abolishing corporal punishment, including signing this [petition](#) to eliminate corporal punishment in Mississippi.

For more information about alternatives to exclusionary discipline, see NEPC resources [Restorative Justice in Education](#), [Law and Order in School and Society](#), and [Equity Centered Alternatives](#).

## NEPC Resources on Discipline Policy

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