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U.S. Department of Justice
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dis-ci-pline (dys/ə-plīn), *n.*, *v.*, **-pline**
1. training to act in accordance with rule
disci line. 2. instruction and exercise



Pepperdine University's National School Safety Center is a partnership of the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. NSSC's goal is to promote safe schools free of drug traffic and abuse, gangs, weapons, vandalism and bullying; to encourage good discipline, attendance and community support; and to help ensure a quality education for all children.

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About the cover:

Discipline, or more accurately, the lack of, is identified as the root of many of our schools' problems. Only drugs in schools concern the public more. Illustration by Karen Watson.

CONTENTS



discipline (dīs/əplī)
1. training to act in acc

4 Student misconduct and intervention

By O.C. Moles 128472

8 Alternative schools for disruptive youth

NSSC Resource Paper 128473

12 Community service as alternative discipline

By Jackson Toby and Adam Scrupski 128474

18 Preparing schools for terrorist attacks

NSSC Report 128475

20 Student paddling still controversial

NSSC Resource Paper 128476

25 Courting school discipline policies

By Henry S. Lufler Jr. 128477

28 Student misbehavior and the law

By Bernard James 128478

Updates

2 NSSC Update

30 National Update

31 Legislative Update

32 Legal Update

33 Resource Update

Resources

16 NSSC Publications

17 NSSC Resource Papers and Display Posters

34 School Safety Subscriptions

35 'Principals of Leadership'

"A disciplined environment conducive to learning" is one of President Bush's educational goals for the '90s. Many questions remain, though, about how to best accomplish this.

Student misconduct and intervention

At their historic 1989 meeting in Charlottesville, Virginia, President Bush and the nation's governors agreed on six ambitious goals to improve American education during the next decade. One states: "By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning." Objectives under this goal would press for policies and programs to prevent drug and alcohol use and encourage working together with the community to make schools safe places for learning.

As the nation moves into the 1990s, it is worth reflecting on the current state of student discipline and strategies that might move schools closer to this national goal. How serious a problem is student misbehavior? Is it getting better or worse? What disciplinary actions are commonly taken, and are they administered fairly? What promising strategies exist to help schools reduce discipline problems and school crime? The most broadly representative research and promising practices in school systems will be used to explore these questions.

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Current levels of misconduct

It is hard to get a precise fix on the extent of the problem nationwide, but expressions of concern come from various quarters. When the public was asked what are the biggest problems facing their local schools, Gallup poll respondents have cited discipline most often almost every year back to the early 1970s. Since 1986, discipline has been second to use of illegal drugs, itself a discipline-related problem (Elam, 1990). When respondents were asked what discipline meant to them, more than half said obeying rules and regulations (Gallup, 1982). The public appears to have a broad view of discipline rather than focusing exclusively on serious incidents such as vandalism, violence and theft.

From the pupil perspective, upwards of one in four students in secondary grades report being afraid for their personal safety in school. More students are fearful in junior high than in senior high schools, according to national data (Gallup, 1985). School staff also are apprehensive. Eleven percent of urban school teachers in a national survey mentioned fear of student reprisal as a major impediment to maintaining order in their schools. In suburban and rural areas across the country, only a few teachers had a similar fear (3 percent and 5 percent respectively). Almost a third of all teachers in this survey said they seriously considered leaving

teaching because of student misbehavior (Center for Education Statistics, 1987).

Thus, many citizens, students and teachers express deep concerns about the level of student misconduct. The fear generated by this misconduct may lead educators and students to avoid certain parts of the school, including classrooms, which greatly detracts from the business of teaching and learning. But concern and fear are rather indirect indicators of the problem, and one might ask how serious is the student misconduct itself. Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive, *current* answer to this question, since the last multifaceted national survey, the *Safe School Study*, was conducted in 1976 (National Institute of Education, 1978).

Some more recent information comes from a 1985 national survey of secondary school principals. Among other disciplinary matters, they were asked about students caught selling drugs, major thefts from students (items worth more than \$10), and offenses reported to the police by school authorities (Center for Statistics, 1986). Few students were caught selling drugs — only 2 per 1,000 students in the previous school year. This rate did not differ much between junior high and senior high schools, but more were caught in urban than rural schools. Both thefts and law violations occurred more often than drug selling, with about

one infraction per 100 students. More thefts were reported in senior highs than in junior high schools, and more in small than large schools. Urban schools reported more law violations to the police than did rural schools.

For the 1986-87 school year, public school teachers at all grade levels nationwide were surveyed regarding their perspectives on school discipline (Center for Education Statistics, 1987). Among major infractions, the following had been observed personally or reported to them within the previous month:

- physical fights among students (42 percent of teachers);
- student intentionally damaged property (33 percent);
- item over \$10 stolen from the teacher or a student (23 percent);
- student seemed under the influence of drugs or alcohol (22 percent);
- student threatened the teacher (5 percent); and
- student displayed or used a weapon (5 percent).

All of these infractions were more common in urban than suburban or rural schools, although sometimes the differences were small. Most occurred a little more often in middle schools or junior high schools than in elementary or senior high schools, but drug and alcohol problems were much more common in senior high schools.

Teachers also were asked if they had personally been threatened by or physically attacked by a student from their school. In the past 12 months, 8 percent reported being threatened and 2 percent reported being attacked, although the latter could range from being kicked in anger by a first-grader to a more deliberate and debilitating attack by an older student. More threats occurred in urban than in suburban or rural schools.

Different time periods are involved in these questions, and the ability to recall events in a 12-month period may be somewhat imprecise. Some questions also asked teachers to serve as observers in addition to reporting their own per-

sonal experience. Because the questions are not entirely comparable, it is hard to conclude which kinds of incidents are more prevalent. While personal theft was much more commonly reported at school in the *Safe School Study* and the ongoing National Crime Surveys (NCS) than robbery or assault, more teachers observed or had reported student fights than reported personal thefts in the 1987 teacher survey. However, physical fights among students are not necessarily the same as assaults. They are voluntary contests, and the instigator may be difficult to determine. Moreover, fights are highly public and may be more widely reported than losses due to theft. What is clear is that more incidents of most kinds occur in urban than in suburban or rural schools.

Trends in school incidents

A question of great importance for public policy is whether school crime and student misconduct are increasing or decreasing. Unfortunately, no periodic national data are available to provide a definitive answer. Pieces of the puzzle can, however, be assembled from various sources.

Nationwide teacher opinion polls conducted by the National Education Association (NEA) in 1979-81 showed that about 5 percent of teachers in each of these years reported being physically attacked by a student within the past 12 months (Moles, 1987). To a similar question in 1987, only 2 percent of teachers reported having been attacked (Center for Education Statistics, 1987). Another indicator of a declining problem is teachers' evaluations of the extent to which student behavior interferes with teaching. When NEA polls for 1980-82 are compared to the 1987 teacher survey, a downward trend is evident. In each of the earlier years, about 50 percent of teachers were concerned to a great or moderate extent about student behavior, and only 40 percent were similarly concerned in the more recent period.

Related information can be gleaned from the National Crime Surveys con-

ducted annually since 1973 by the U.S. Department of Justice. The NCS goes directly to households and asks residents about crimes against them. With special tabulations for the experiences of respondents 12-19 years old who are attending school, it has been possible to plot trends in theft, robbery and assault — the most common interpersonal crimes — from 1973 to 1988. Contrary to the notion of a progressive worsening of the school crime problem, all these offenses against students remained essentially level or declined during the 16 years. Assaults showed little change, robberies went down in more recent times, and thefts showed a long-term marked decline (Moles, 1987).

Another source of information is the statistics compiled by school officials. While these data are filtered through various levels of the educational bureaucracy, they shed light on some offenses, such as drug use and vandalism, where asking about personal victimization is not appropriate or unlikely to yield fully candid answers. Since the 1985-86 school year, all school districts in California have been required to report various school crimes. Through 1988-89, there was a 2 percent overall reduction in school crime, although middle-school grades registered a 5 percent increase. Drug and alcohol abuse showed a dramatic decrease of 43 percent. Property crime, theft from students and sex offenses also dropped. However, California schools have had an increase in rates for weapons possession offenses and assault against students and staff during the four-year period (Kneedler, 1990).

From these various sources, it would appear that the overall school crime and student misconduct picture, including substance abuse at school, is improving. However, the recent increase in assaults and possession of knives, explosives, guns and other weapons in California schools could reflect a more widespread increase in these serious offenses. Similar data are needed on a national basis to track levels and possible changes in these areas of high public concern.

Common disciplinary actions

A large number of actions may be taken by school personnel to inhibit, punish or correct student misconduct. These may range from teacher reprimands or detaining students to expulsion or referral to an alternative school.

The Duval County Public Schools (Jacksonville, Florida) has divided such distinctions into three classes of offenses with different consequences for each (Sang, 1990). Class I infractions are minor acts, including class disruption, tardiness and harassment of others. Teachers generally handle these situations. Class II offenses include defiance of authority, fighting and petty theft. Detention, in-school suspension or work assignments usually are given; and parents are contacted. Class III violations involve alcohol, drugs, weapons, assault, robbery, grand theft and other serious offenses. A conference with parents or guardians is attempted to help the principal decide on the appropriate disciplinary actions, such as suspension, referral to a special program, or expulsion. Students are oriented to the code in assemblies, in certain classes, and via their personal copies. Students are tested on their knowledge of the code, and those who fail are given individual attention.

Perhaps the most discussed and debated disciplinary action is suspension. From the national perspective, secondary school principals report an average of 10 suspensions during a school year for every 100 students, with more suspensions in urban schools, small schools and those with more low-income students. About the same overall average number of in-school suspensions occur, but urban and suburban schools have similar rates, and the differences by family income are not large (Center for Statistics, 1986). Thus, in-school alternatives to suspension seem to be used more generally across locations and with less regard to the social background of the student.

The question of fairness in disciplinary actions is important in suspension

because it may result in a serious loss of instructional time and leave children of employed parents unsupervised. The *Safe School Study* found that a firm and fair disciplinary policy was closely related to low levels of school crime.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights regularly surveys a sample of elementary and secondary schools in the nation. Based on calculations from the 1986 survey, black students were suspended at a rate more than twice that for whites. Similar disparities extend back to surveys in the early 1970s (Williams, 1989). Junious Williams, an authority on this issue, suggests that schools and school districts examine the kinds of offenses for which students are suspended to see whether they differ across student ethnic groups and between schools. Williams also notes that in-school suspension programs often are used for attendance problems, smoking and drug use, and he asserts that white students are more likely to exhibit these forms of misconduct (Williams, 1989). On the other hand, insubordination and defiance, which often are grounds for suspension, are difficult to define and subject to much individual interpretation where racial bias may enter.

Another aspect of fairness in suspension is that students receive at least an informal hearing in which they are not presumed guilty and have a chance to tell their side of the story. In *Goss v. Lopez*, the U.S. Supreme Court established such a constitutional right, and very few principals find this procedure a large burden (Center for Statistics, 1986b). In his article in this edition of *School Safety*, Henry Lufler explores the role of legal commentators who argued that the courts would further restrict the actions of education professionals, and that they would suffer from many lawsuits, neither of which happened. Thus, open-minded procedures do not imply a heavy burden or risk on schools. Instead, fair and consistent treatment of alleged offenders helps preserve respect for the system of discipline in the school and serves the end

of justice for all students.

Promising strategies

Suspension is only one of many possible strategies, and as Jackson Toby and Adam Scrupski point out in their article in this edition of *School Safety*, there is very little research on its effects on subsequent student behavior. Where in-school suspension programs once promised to reduce use of suspension, they note, more recent studies show its use for less serious acts, high student recidivism, and no decrease in regular suspensions. Thus, it is wise to step back and take a broader view of the range of strategies with the most promise.

It may be useful to distinguish strategies the teacher can employ in contrast to those involving school administrators or those requiring coordination with other agencies in the community. These three kinds of strategies are presented in a recent collection of research and practice review papers. At the classroom level, a number of management techniques have been studied extensively. One longtime student of this process, Doyle (1990), argues that order is determined more by the way teachers organize academic work and the system of classroom activities than by the way teachers react to misbehavior. For instance, when work is routine and familiar to students, classroom activity is typically well-ordered. Studies show that the first few days of school are important in establishing this routine. Rules and procedures need to be clearly explained and classes should be monitored closely to stop inappropriate behavior promptly.

Packaged approaches to classroom management developed in recent years include Gordon's Teacher Effectiveness Training, Glasser's Reality Therapy and Canter's Assertive Discipline. These systems are widely used for in-service teacher education. Emmer and Aussiker (1990) have reviewed many studies on the effects of these approaches. They found some evidence of positive effects on teacher attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and behaviors, with Teacher Effective-

ness Training the most convincing. There were fewer studies of student behavior, and effects were smaller or mixed in each of the three programs.

Various weaknesses in the studies were noted. Thus, more well-designed research on long-term student behavior change, which includes attention to the implementation of the program and effects of its major components, is much needed. Emmer and Aussiker (1990) conclude that training in such programs should be seen as a supplement to a more comprehensive approach to discipline and classroom management.

At the school level as well as in the classroom, well-organized ideas about causes of the discipline problem are important to guide action. Such a model should be consistent with prior research and guide the selection and implementation of strategies. This process must in turn be sensitive to local circumstances.

The organizational development approach incorporates this perspective. It aims to enhance the school's problem-solving capacity and planning processes by improving internal communication and cooperation to benefit all students. Gottfredson (1990) has used the organizational development method to help schools develop appropriate discipline strategies. Educators and researchers work together to evaluate school programs and improve them. Her work led to changes in various interventions, including classroom management and instruction, a system to notify parents frequently about classroom behavior, and new school rules and a disciplinary referral system for school staff in an inner-city junior high school. Teacher morale improved, as did two of three measures of disorder, and the students' sense of belonging to the school.

There is evidence in Gottfredson's work and elsewhere that more active participation by students not just in classwork but also in planning their own education increases student commitment to school and lessens involvement with delinquent peers.

In this vein, the Los Angeles Unified

School District sponsors a conflict resolution training program that trains students at all grade levels to deal with disputes occurring anywhere on school grounds. These conflict managers help students identify and express their concerns and reach their own resolutions of interpersonal conflicts.

At the level of school-community coordination, perhaps the most important agency for present purposes is law enforcement. When student misconduct is serious enough that a law may have been broken, the involvement of police is always a consideration. More preventive forms of coordination include police liaisons stationed in the school, police as school security officers, and police teaching classes, including those on drug abuse prevention. In one such course in the District of Columbia designed to help youth make better law-related decisions, younger students (12-14) gained in knowledge of the law and police duties and attitudes toward the police, but older students' gains were not significant (Rubel, 1990).

The School Management and Resource Team program combines several features: profiling of school incidents, school action teams, and coordination between education and criminal justice professionals. The model was tested initially in more than 40 secondary schools in three sites. This evaluation found that interagency coordination addressed a strong need for responding better to serious and repeat offenders. Interagency groups made significant progress toward joint activities and strengthened informal relationships. The overall program was found to reduce disciplinary infractions (Rubel, 1990).

Making progress

Viewing the national goal of safe, disciplined and drug-free schools, it appears that despite widespread apprehension, there has been some progress in recent years toward less school crime and student misconduct. Nevertheless, these problems persist and generally are more severe in urban schools where weapons

possession cases may be increasing.

A number of disciplinary strategies have been reviewed. There is no one best strategy, and changes will not come overnight. Each strategy must be considered in relation to local circumstances. Some familiar strategies lack strong evidence that they change student behavior, and more research is needed, especially on the long-term effects of such strategies.

What is important is that disciplinary strategies and procedures be developed in collaboration with school staff and students, be consonant with current research, provide a comprehensive approach to the issue at hand, and be administered fairly and consistently. □

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