



End Corporal Punishment in Mississippi Schools

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Mississippi students face the highest rates of **corporal punishment** in the nation, with devastating implications for equity and student well-being. While most Mississippians agree that corporal punishment in schools is cruel and inappropriate, biases against Black American and gender-expansive students (those whose gender identity or expression does not conform to traditional norms) persist, reinforcing unjust disciplinary practices. Policymakers must take immediate action to ban corporal punishment in Mississippi and at the federal level while also investing in equitable disciplinary methods to safeguard all children.

The Persistent Problem of Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment—physical discipline like paddling—is still legal in 22 states, with Mississippi leading the nation in frequency. In Mississippi, 9% of public school students experienced corporal punishment, disproportionately affecting **Black American children and gender-expansive students**. Over 43% of Black American girls subjected to corporal punishment nationally are from Mississippi schools, underscoring profound racial disparities.

Corporal punishment in schools has been extensively studied, with research consistently indicating its detrimental long-term effects on students' behavioral, psychological, and academic outcomes.

The Long-Term Harms of Corporal Punishment

Studies have shown that corporal punishment is positively associated with an increase in behaviors such as aggression and antisocial conduct. A **review of many studies** revealed that school corporal punishment (SCP) is linked to behavior problems in children, both externally acting out and internal emotional distress. Additionally, **physical punishment may** legitimize violence for children in interpersonal relationships, leading them to mimic aggressive behaviors.

The mental health implications are just as troubling. The use of physical punishment has been linked to various mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. **Research indicates that** children subjected to corporal punishment are at a higher risk for developing mental health problems, such as depressive symptoms and diminished moral internalization. Many also carry the **psychological scars for years**, grappling with feelings of humiliation, powerlessness, and emotional pain.

Corporal punishment negatively affects cognitive development and academic performance. **Research has found** that physical punishment is associated with lower intellectual achievement and reduced school performance. Additionally, corporal punishment can lead to lower educational achievement and increased school dropout rates.

Beyond psychological and academic consequences, corporal punishment poses physical health risks.

Reported medical complications include abrasions, severe muscle injury, extensive hematomas, and other injuries highlight the very real bodily harm corporal punishment can inflict. In some cases, these injuries may prevent students from returning to school for extended periods, disrupting their education even further.

The evidence is clear: corporal punishment in schools not only fails to improve student behavior, but also risks long-term damage to their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. To foster healthier school environments, educators must turn to alternative approaches—ones rooted in respect, empathy, and positive reinforcement.

Implicit Bias Drives Disparities

Groundbreaking research using original survey data reveals **implicit racial and gender biases** significantly shape public perceptions of corporal punishment's appropriateness. An online experiment involving Mississippi residents indicated biases explicitly target Black American gender-expansive students, who were unjustly viewed as more deserving of harsh physical punishment compared to White American cisgender peers.

Racial Threat Theory explains this troubling phenomenon: as minority populations grow, dominant groups increasingly resort to punitive discipline to maintain social control, disproportionately affecting Black and gender-expansive children. Findings indicate that participants rated the physical punishment as significantly more appropriate when the student was a Black American gender expansive child. However, the majority of participants viewed corporal punishment negatively, perceiving it as an inappropriate response to misbehavior. This contradiction shows that public opinion is nuanced and complex. The majority of participants viewed corporal punishment negatively, but still think that some students deserve to be beaten at school.

Public Opinion vs. Policy Contradiction

Interestingly, the majority of Mississippi residents disapprove of corporal punishment, labeling it as "cruel," "abusive," and "inappropriate." For example, **most Mississippians felt that corporal punishment was an inappropriate response to student misbehavior and agreed or strongly agreed that corporal punishment should no longer be allowed in Mississippi schools.** Yet, when students belong to marginalized groups, bias often overrides public disapproval, leading to the silent acceptance of harmful practices. Even as public opinion pushes for change, these biases weaken protective reforms for marginalized students and help maintain an unjust status quo.

While there have been legislative efforts to ban corporal punishment in the state, these bills have failed to be passed, despite growing public disapproval of the practice. The resistance to reform speaks to the entrenched cultural and systemic biases that continue to support corporal punishment, particularly when it disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Without action from lawmakers, the harmful practice remains deeply embedded in Mississippi's educational system, continuing to harm students and hinder their potential for success.

Policy Recommendations for Immediate Action

Mississippi policymakers can decisively improve educational equity and student welfare through the following actions:

- **Enact Immediate Statewide Bans** on corporal punishment in all schools, aligning Mississippi with [national and international best practices](#).
- **Mandate Training on Implicit Bias:** Require comprehensive professional development for all school personnel focusing explicitly on anti-Black and anti-gender-expansive biases.
- **Implement Restorative Justice Programs:** Replace physical discipline with [restorative justice practices](#), which focus on repairing harm, rebuilding relationships, and fostering accountability without resorting to punitive measures. Restorative justice has proven to improve student behavior, academic outcomes, and school climate. It's critical that access to these restorative practices is equitable across student populations.
- **Increase Transparency and Accountability:** Require annual public reporting on school discipline practices, disaggregated by race and gender identity, to monitor equity and effectiveness.

Ending corporal punishment in Mississippi is not only an ethical imperative but also a strategic investment in the state's educational and social future. Mississippi can and must do better by its students—especially those who face the greatest risks of harm. Policymakers must listen to clear public opposition, confront biases head-on, and adopt restorative approaches to ensure safe, equitable learning environments for all students

For further reading and detailed evidence, please see the full research article: Templeton, D. (2025). [The U.S. public disapproves of corporal punishment in schools for some kids more than others: evidence from an online experiment on \(school\) criminalization.](#)