



Hitting Hurts – It is Time to End Corporal Punishment in Texas Schools

IDRA Testimony for House Bill 772, submitted by Morgan Craven, J.D., to the Texas House Committee on Youth Health and Safety, April 3, 2023

Dear Chair Thompson and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Morgan Craven, J.D., I am the national director of policy, advocacy, and community engagement at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

I am testifying in support of House Bill 772, a very important bill that would ban corporal punishment in Texas public schools. Thank you to this committee for hearing this bill and to Dr. Allen for making this important issue part of her life's work.

When Texas public school districts adopt corporal punishment policies, adults are able to spank, paddle, slap or hit children to discipline them. In the 2017-18 school year, 468 Texas public school districts reported having corporal punishment policies. Over 13,000 Texas kids were hit in their schools more than 21,000 times (OCR, 2020). This should be alarming to everyone.

Not only has corporal punishment been shown to be ineffective, and even counter-productive, as a discipline tool, it also causes harm to children and makes school environments less safe in nearly every way you could imagine

For example, research shows that corporal punishment can lead to serious physical injuries, long-lasting negative effects on children's mental health, aggressive and antisocial behavior in children, and is associated with lower academic achievement and higher rates of dropping out (Gershoff, et al., 2015; Greydanus, et al., 2003; Afifi, et al., 2012; MacKenzie, et al., 2012; APA, 2021).

These harms are felt most by the students against whom corporal punishment is disproportionately used, like Black children and children with disabilities (Craven & Sánchez, 2023).

Importantly, corporal punishment can also damage school cultures and climates. When adults hit children, they have more difficulty establishing positive relationships with students, a critical component of school safety. The practices models violence as a system of conflict resolution and can prevent schools from investing in evidence-based tools and strategies we know work to support kids and build up safe school climates.

The list of potential negative outcomes is long and far-reaching.

I know that you weigh many considerations in policymaking, including who should have the authority to make certain decisions, the cultural or community practices that influence what happens to children in schools, and even your own experiences.

But we cannot leave the decision to end corporal punishment in schools to anyone else anymore and we cannot allow a legacy of harm to persist in our schools.

The most critical consideration and the one that outweighs all others is the health and safety of children in their schools. There is no argument strong enough and no policy concern important enough that we should place it above the well-being of kids and above the very clear evidence that corporal punishment in schools is thoroughly and completely harmful to children and school climates.

We have a Texas law that promotes and models violence in schools, making them less safe. A law that allows adults to hit kids in school – some who are as young as 3 and 4 years old, babies, some who are teenage girls, many who have disabilities, a disproportionate number of whom are Black.

We can have all sorts of debates about what is appropriate for children to learn in schools, but learning violence cannot be an area where we disagree. One clear, easy way to reduce violence in schools, to accomplish the mission of this select committee, is to pass House Bill 772 and finally eliminate corporal punishment in Texas public schools.

For more information about the harms of corporal punishment in schools, please see IDRA's issue brief, *Hitting Hurts: The Case for Ending Corporal Punishment in Texas Schools* at <https://idra.news/HittingHurtsPDF> and IDRA's interactive corporal punishment maps at <https://idra.news/TxMapCorporalPunishment>.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. For more information, please contact Morgan Craven at morgan.craven@idra.org.

Resources

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MacKenzie, M.J., Nicklas, E., Waldfogel, J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2012). Corporal Punishment and Child Behavioral and Cognitive Outcomes through 5 Years-of-age: Evidence from a Contemporary Urban Birth Cohort Study. *Infant and Child Development*, 21(1): 3-33.

OCR. (2020). Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-2018. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/estimations/2017-2018>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by leading policy analyses and advocacy; dynamic teacher training and principal coaching; useful research, evaluation and frameworks for action; and innovative student, family and community engagement.