

December 10, 2006

Principal Miriam M. Taylor  
Bulkeley High School  
300 Wethersfield Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06114

Dear Principal Taylor,

We are students at Trinity College who recently met with you to discuss our public policy project for our Child Development course, which investigates discipline in the form of zero tolerance in local Hartford public high schools. Because of the abundance of articles in the Hartford Courant regarding zero tolerance, we chose to focus on Bulkeley high school.

A trend of national public high schools has been the use of zero tolerance in terms of discipline policies. By 1993, zero tolerance applied to everything from the presence of weapons and drugs, to cursing and school disruptions. What began as a response to school shootings broadened to common misbehaviors. Suspensions and expulsions are being used too frequently and without deterring future misconduct. On the surface zero tolerance may appear to have solved the problem, but the heart of the problem is merely suppressed or ignored. Although the fines for cursing at Bulkeley have reduced the use of offensive language in school, it is not necessarily consistent with the behavior beyond school grounds. It appears that suspensions and expulsions are overused in schools to make disciplining easy for teachers but temporary in effect.

As a result of these policies, students removed from a school environment are neglected and are not receiving the necessary counseling, education and skills needed for improvement. Expelling a student merely exacerbates the problems causing the behavior. Studies have proven that students with behavior problems who are expelled are more likely to commit delinquent acts, carry a weapon, engage in sexual intercourse, use tobacco, alcohol, and mingle with deviant peers. An absence from school only causes the child to become behind in classes resulting in further frustration and distress and an increased probability of dropping out.

We feel that the zero tolerance policies applied to major offenses, which receive severe punishments, have also been generalized to minor offenses. For example, last year alone there was a reported 14,634 school suspensions, which is a significant increase from the 9,867 reported in 2004 (Hartford Courant, Frahm 2005). This figure includes all grades levels and all schools in the Hartford area. In addition, while the zero tolerant response to these offenses may be successful temporarily; long term results are not affected. We have determined that the zero tolerance approach to discipline as currently implemented, may not accomplish its intended goals.

We understand and applaud Bulkeley's efforts to improve discipline issues by developing a positive learning environment that encourages respect and responsibility. The program "Capturing Kids Hearts" provided for some of your staff is a successful way to encourage adults to personalize with students and promote respect. We feel however, that a more professional program should be instituted that educates teachers about alternative discipline techniques.

Therefore, we have included a proposed teacher workshop, that should be required for all teachers to attend at the beginning of the academic year, which we feel would provide the necessary skills for teachers in the classroom.

Thank you for taking the time to review and consider our proposal. Please contact us with any questions you may have.

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# Alternative Methods of Discipline 2-Day Teacher Workshop

## Day 1 (4 hours)

*Objective of Workshop:* The goal of this workshop is to educate teachers about alternative methods of discipline. The usage and ineffectiveness of zero tolerance policies will be evaluated and new techniques will be introduced. It is divided into 7 parts over a period of two days.

### Part I: **Guest Speaker** (1 hour)

Goals: -To empower teachers with skills to prepare students for successful living  
-To reduce discipline problems in the classroom by teaching self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and problem-solving skills

Jane Nelsen Ed.D, Lecture: *Positive Discipline in the Classroom.*

-a licensed counselor and has written extensively on the topic of positive discipline. Dr. Nelsen has successfully dealt with conflict between misbehaving children and authority figures.

### Part II: **“Defining Discipline”** (1 hour)

Goal: -Understand the difference between punishment and discipline.

- Handout and discussion (see attachment “Punishment Versus Discipline”)

#### Activity:

1. After the group members have reviewed handout, participants should define discipline and punishment in their own terms.
2. Counselors will provide teachers with numerous examples of incidents in which students have been affected by zero tolerance policies. The participants should then determine if the example represents the implementation of punishment or discipline.

*Example:* A student continuously disrupts the class by talking, therefore the teacher sends the student to the principal, who then expels the student. Is this discipline or punishment? Why is this one and not the other?

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What are the results of punishment? Long term and short term?
2. What are the positive and negative aspects of both punishment and discipline?
3. What are the similarities between punishment and zero tolerant policies?

~ ~ ~ ~ BREAK (30 minutes) ~ ~ ~ ~

**Part III: Behavior Issues in the Classroom** (1 hour and 30 minutes)

- Goals:
- To better understand the variability of students in the classroom.
  - Identifying and understanding students with such problems as: learning disabilities, ADD, ADHD, problems in the home, psychological problems or emotional problems.
  - Be made aware of their ability to utilize the school's resources such as the school psychologists, who are available to assist students with these problems.

(A school psychologist will be present to instruct teachers how to identify warning signs of previously mentioned problems)

**Day 2 (4 hours)**

**Part IV: Scenarios – How to Use Discipline** (2 hours)

Goal: -For teachers to practice potential situations when they must apply new discipline techniques they have acquired from the workshop.

Activity:

1. Break into groups of 10.
2. Assign the roles of either the teacher or student in a scenario (refer to example below).
3. Provide teachers with an issue of misbehavior and possible solutions.
4. Teachers can choose which solution they feel is most appropriate. (Other participants not involved in the scenario can critique the outcome)
5. After the scenario is acted out, the actual outcome of the situation should be discussed.

Materials: Example situations should be gathered and written into a basic dialogue by school counselors. Situations which teachers have previously experienced may be offered and used as examples.

*Example of scenario:*

1) A student regularly is reprimanded for not cooperating, failing to complete assignments, talking during class, etc. The student exhibits anger and decides to leave the classroom to “blow to off steam.” When the student returns, the teacher sends the student to the principal’s office and the student is suspended. After several offenses the student is expelled from school grounds.

-Is this discipline or punishment?

-What lesson does this teach the student, if any?

-With the knowledge you have acquired from Day 3, what is a more effective solution to this situation? Is expulsion the most effective solution? Will expulsion change the student’s future behavior in a similar situation?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ BREAK (15 minutes) ~ ~ ~ ~

**Part V: How to Successfully Utilize Discipline Policies of Bulkeley High School** (1.5 hours)

Goal: -Review the school’s “Code of Discipline” and compare to previous discussions of

punishment.

Discussion: Staff should be asked to define zero-tolerance in their own terms and discuss the variability of their responses. Behaviors that require zero tolerance and those that may not should be discussed. Other applications of zero tolerance policies other than for educational purposes should be compared to its use in schools today.

Part VI: **Video:** *Resolving Conflicts Together* (14 minutes)

Provided by the *Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management*

Goal: -For teachers to see success stories and techniques learned from a comprehensive conflict management program

- After watching video break teachers into small groups to discuss questions

Discussion Questions:

1. What worked and what didn't?
2. How would the situations shown differ from those occurring in Bulkeley High School?

Part VII: **Conclusion:** Hand out additional resources and discuss contacts

## Resource Guide

### Articles

Zero Tolerance, Zero Evidence: An Analysis of School Disciplinary Practice. Russell Skiba. Indiana Education Policy Center, August 2000. Available online:

<http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/publication.html>

- This article thoroughly discusses the development of zero tolerance in terms of disciplinary action, while examining the response and effectiveness of its policies.

Peterson, P. *The Dark Side of Zero Tolerance: Can Punishment Lead to Safe Schools?* Phi Delta Kappan, Jan. 1999. Available online:

<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kski9901.htm>

- This article provides not only a good overview of the issues surrounding zero tolerance but also presents rarely found statistics and lists examples of incidents.

### Website

*End Zero Tolerance*. (2006). Retrieved December 7, 2006, from

<http://www.jlc.org/EZT/>

- This site includes articles of zero tolerance in national news. It also provides information on the legal aspect of zero tolerance.

### Contacts:

Jane Nelson, Ed.D

For lecture information:

Call: 1-800-456-7770

Visit: <http://posdis.org/workshops/pdc.html>

Jane is a licensed counselor and has written extensively on the topic of positive discipline. Dr. Nelsen has successfully dealt with conflict between misbehaving children and authority figures.

## **HANDOUT: Punishment Versus Discipline** <sup>1</sup>

### **Punishment**

1. • Expresses power of an authority; causes pain to the recipient; based on retribution or revenge; concerned with actions in the past.
2. • Arbitrary--probably applied inconsistently and unconditionally; does not accept or acknowledge exceptions or mitigating circumstances.
3. • Imposed by an authority with responsibility assumed by the one administering the punishment and responsibility avoided by the one receiving the punishment.
4. • Closes options for the punished individual, who must pay for a behavior that has already occurred.
5. • As a teaching strategy, usually reinforces a failure identity. Essentially negative and short-term, without sustained personal involvement of either teacher or learner.
6. • Characterized by open or concealed anger; easy and expedient; a poor model of expectations.
7. • Focuses on strategies intended to control behavior of learner; rarely results in positive changes in behavior; may increase subversiveness or result in temporary suppression of behavior; at best, produces compliance.

### **Discipline**

1. • Based on logical or natural consequences that embody the reality of a social order (rules that one must learn and accept to function productively in society); concerned with actions in the present.
2. • Consistent; accepts that the behaving individual is doing the best he or she can do for now.
3. • Comes from within, with responsibility assumed by the disciplined individual who desires that responsibility; presumes that conscience is internal.
4. • Opens options for the individual, who can choose new behavior.
5. • As a teaching strategy, is active and involves close, sustained, personal involvement of both teacher and learner; emphasizes the development of more successful behavior.
6. • Friendly and supportive; provides a model of quality behavior.
7. • Usually results in a change in behavior that is more successful, acceptable, and responsible; develops capacity for self-evaluation of behavior.

<sup>1</sup> Crawford, D., and R. Bodine. 1996. Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Juvenile Justice Settings. Program Report of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, US Department of Justice and Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, US Department of Education, p. 42.