Zero Tolerance, Zero Evidence

An Analysis of School Disciplinary Practice

By
Russell J. Skiba
Indiana Education Policy Center

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Abstract

Despite the controversies that it has created in school districts throughout the country, zero tolerance continues to be a widely used response to school disruption and violence. This paper explores the history, philosophy, and effectiveness of zero tolerance school disciplinary strategies. Growing out of Reagan-Bush era drug enforcement policy, zero tolerance discipline attempts to send a message by punishing both major and minor incidents severely. Analysis of a representative range of zero tolerance suspensions and expulsions suggests that controversial applications of the policy are not idiosyncratic, but may be inherent in zero tolerance philosophy. There is as yet little evidence that the strategies typically associated with zero tolerance contribute to improved student behavior or overall school safety. Research on the effectiveness of school security measures is extremely sparse, while data on suspension and expulsion raise serious concerns about both the equity and effectiveness of school exclusion as an educational intervention. Community reaction has led some districts to adopt alternatives to zero tolerance, stressing a graduated system matching offenses and consequences, and preventive strategies, including bullying prevention, early identification, and improved classroom management. Building a research base on these alternatives is critical, in order to assist schools in developing more effective, less intrusive methods for school discipline.

The Zero Tolerance, Zero Evidence:
An Analysis of School Disciplinary Practice

On September 17, 1999, an intense brawl between students rumored to have been members of rival gangs cleared the stands at a football game at Decatur High School in Decatur, Illinois. On October 1, the Decatur School Board accepted a recommendation from its superintendent that seven students, all of them black, be expelled from the school for two years. The decision sparked a local outcry that escalated dramatically with the involvement of the Reverend Jesse Jackson and Operation PUSH. Over a thousand protesters marched to the school on November 14, and two days later Rev. Jackson and several of his supporters were arrested. Despite an offer to reduce the expulsions to one year and enroll the students in an alternative school, Operation PUSH filed suit against the district on behalf of six of the students (the seventh had elected to drop out), alleging procedural improprieties, harsh punishments exceeding the offense, and racial bias. On January 11, 2000, in a decision posted on the Internet, Judge Robert McLoskey turned back that suit on all counts, ruling that the Decatur School Board was well within its rights when it expelled the students.

Despite the apparent vindication of the board's actions, the case has opened up an intense national dialogue on the practice of zero tolerance discipline. In many ways, the Decatur case provides a fitting example of the conflicting values and emotions that swirl around the topic. In the wake of Columbine and other shootings, there can be no doubt that schools and school boards have the right, indeed the responsibility, to take strong action to preserve the safety of students, staff, and parents on school grounds. On the other hand, two-year expulsions for a fistfight without weapons when weapons incidents in the same district received less severe punishments raise issues of fairness, and questions about the extent to which extreme consequences truly contribute to either school safety or the improvement of student behavior. Videotapes of the event showed clearly that seven students engaged in a rolling brawl that cleared the stands and placed innocent bystanders at-risk. Yet the fact that all of those expelled were black, members of a racial group overrepresented in suspension and expulsion not only in Decatur, but in cities and towns across the country, created the appearance of an injustice that could not be ignored.

The Decatur incident and similar stories throughout the country reflect the profound ambivalence inherent in school disciplinary practice of the last ten years. Ensconced as federal policy, at least one component of a zero tolerance approach is currently in place in over 80% of our nation's schools (Heaviside, Rowand, Williams, & Farris, 1998). Each new outbreak of violence seems to yield a collateral increase in get-tough discipline. In turn, each new cycle of tougher policy-increased use of school security measures and a dramatic surge in school suspensions and

expulsions-yields a new round of controversy and charges of civil rights violations.

This paper explores the history and ever-expanding use of zero tolerance in our nation's schools, and the effects and side-effects of the policy. The analyses explore the use of school security measures that are not mandated, but appear nevertheless to be part and parcel of the zero tolerance approach to school safety. In addition, the paper reviews the use of exclusionary discipline strategies-suspension and expulsion-that are central to zero tolerance policy. The paper concludes with a consideration of evidence concerning the effects and side-effects of current disciplinary practices in the schools. How well do such strategies appear to work in changing students' behavior or guaranteeing the safety of schools? Do the positive benefits of such approaches outweigh the negative side-effects of punishment?

History, Definition, and Prevalence of Zero Tolerance

It is difficult to find a written definition of the term zero tolerance; certainly the use and meaning of the term have evolved over time. Yet from its inception in federal drug policy of the 1980's, zero tolerance has been intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor. Zero tolerance first received national attention as the title of a program developed in 1986 by U.S. Attorney Peter Nunez in San Diego, impounding seagoing vessels carrying any amount of drugs. U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese highlighted the program as a national model in 1988, and ordered customs officials to seize the vehicles and property of anyone crossing the border with even trace amounts of drugs, and charge those individuals in federal court. The language of zero tolerance seemed to fire the public imagination and within months began to be applied to a broad range of issues, ranging from environmental pollution and trespassing to skateboarding, homelessness, and boom boxes.

Frightened by a seemingly overwhelming tide of violence, educators in the early 1990's were eager for a no-nonsense response to drugs, gangs, and weapons. Beginning in 1989, school districts in California, New York, and Kentucky mandated expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang-related activity. By 1993, zero tolerance policies had been adopted across the country, often broadened to include not only drugs and weapons, but also smoking and school disruption.

This tide swept zero tolerance into national policy when the Clinton Administration signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 into law. The law mandates a one year calendar expulsion for possession of a firearm, referral of law-violating students to the criminal or juvenile justice system, and the provision that state law must authorize the chief administrative officer of each local school district to modify such expulsions on a case-by-case basis. Originally, the bill covered only firearms, but more recent amendments have broadened the language of the bill to include any instrument that may be used as a weapon. The Jeffords Amendment to the Gun-Free Schools Act, and more recently the 1997 revisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, have attempted to bring special education legislation in line with federal zero tolerance policy. It is unclear, however, whether these amendments have resolved or merely fueled the controversy (see Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

Local school districts have broadened the mandate of zero tolerance beyond the federal mandates of weapons, to drugs and alcohol (Kumar, 1999), fighting (Petrillo, 1997), threats (Bursuk & Murphy, 1999) or swearing (Nancrede, 1998). Many school boards continue to toughen their disciplinary policies; some have begun to experiment with permanent expulsion from the system for some offenses ("Groups critical of no second chances", 1999). Others have begun to apply school suspensions, expulsions, or transfers to behaviors that occur outside of school (Seymour, 1999a). There is still considerable variation in local definition of zero tolerance: while some districts adhere to a zero tolerance philosophy of punishing both major and minor disruptions relatively equally, others have begun to define zero tolerance as a graduated system, with severity of consequence scaled in proportion to the seriousness of the offense.

Prevalence of Zero Tolerance

Since the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act, some form of zero tolerance policy appears to have

become the norm in public schools. Defining zero tolerance as a policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specified offenses,[1] the National Center on Education Statistics report, *Violence in America's Public Schools: 1996-1997* (Heaviside et al., 1998), found that 94% of all schools have zero tolerance policies for weapons or firearms, 87% for alcohol, while 79% report mandatory suspensions or expulsions for violence or tobacco. Less stringent security measures are more widely used than more stringent measures. Visitor sign-in was reported in the 1996-97 school year for 96% of schools, closed campus for most students during lunch by 80% of schools, controlled access to the building was reported in 53% of schools. Less widely used measures included the presence of police or law enforcement representatives on campus for an hour or more per week (10%), mandatory school uniforms (3%), random metal detector checks (3%), and daily use of metal detectors (1%).

The Controversy of Zero Tolerance

Zero tolerance policies purposely increase the intensity of consequences for all offenders. Yet the practice of punishing relatively minor incidents harshly has been consistently controversial. Almost from the inception of a national zero tolerance drug policy, the harsh punishments meted out for relatively minor infractions raised a host of civil rights concerns: The American Civil Liberties Union considered filing suit on behalf of those whose automobiles, boats, and even bicycles had been impounded with trace amounts of marijuana (Hansen, 1988). By 1990, the Customs Service boat impoundment program was quietly phased out after a Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute research vessel was seized for a marijuana cigarette found in a seaman's cabin.

Similar controversy has attended a host of suspensions and expulsions associated with zero tolerance for relatively trivial incidents in school settings. Skiba and Peterson (1999) presented some of the suspensions and expulsions that received media attention from the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994 until May, 1998, including school expulsions for reasons ranging from paper clips to minor fighting to organic cough drops. This review updates that analysis, looking at cases of suspension or expulsion due to zero tolerance reported in the national newspapers from May, 1998 to December, 1999.[2] The number of such cases appears, if anything, to be increasing, and a thorough description of all of those cases is certainly beyond the scope of this paper. The following is a representative sampling of such cases, in the categories of weapons, drugs, and other offenses.

Weapons

Consideration of zero tolerance tends to focus on the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 as its driving force. Yet, just as state and local zero tolerance policies predated federal law in this area, the following examples suggest that local practice often extends zero tolerance considerably beyond federal mandates. [3]

- October, 1999, Atlanta, Georgia: A 15 year old South Cobb High School sophomore found with an unloaded gun in his book bag was permanently expelled from the school district.

[1] Note that the definition of zero tolerance used in the NCES study is considerably different than the classic definition of zero tolerance. While the NCES study defines zero tolerance as the presence of any specified punishment for a specified behavior, more typical definitions have emphasized punishing a range of behaviors, both major and minor, equally severely. It is unclear how many districts would still qualify as zero tolerance if that term were limited in usage to those districts emphasizing a more inclusive definition of zero tolerance.

[2] The search was conducted using the Lexis-Nexus database entering the term zero tolerance under the category Major Newspapers, for dates ranging from May 1, 1998 to December 31, 1999.

[3] In the interest of readability, citations of newspaper articles in this section will be presented in footnotes. For each category, sources are cited in the order of the incidents presented. For weapons incidents, the sources for each incident are:

Stepp, D. R. (1999, October 12). Cobb expels student for packing gun. *Atlanta Constitution*, p. 3C.
Fitzpatrick, T, Lilly, R., & Houtz, J. (1998, October 6). Schools reverse toy-gun decision: Boy, 11, who was expelled is back at Whitman today. *Seattle Times*, p. B1.
Suspended 7th-grader receives invitation to rocketry workshop. (1999, March 23). Arizona Republic, p. B1.; see also Gintonio, J. (1999, March 19). Rocket builder's suspension sticks: Boy's dad vows to appeal decision. *Arizona Republic*, p. A29.
Ruth, D. (1999, June 7). Zero tolerance for zero tolerance. *Tampa Tribune*, p. 2.
Neuman, K. (1998, November 12). Deer Lakes apologizes to firefighters for toy ax ban. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, p. 3.

"That is the standard we have set in the past for anyone that has brought a weapon to school," said the district's associate superintendent. "It's extremely serious, dangerous for everybody involved." The youth was also charged in juvenile court with possession of a weapon.

- September, 1998, Seattle, Washington: A sixth-grader at Whitman Middle School in Seattle was expelled when a squirt gun, painted black and brown, fell out of his backpack in the lunchroom. Although the expulsion was upheld by a hearing officer, the Seattle School District reduced the expulsion to a suspension after the family's attorney cited state law requiring districts to provide a lesser punishment where toy weapons were not used with malice or in a threatening manner.
- February, 1999, Glendale, Arizona: Seventh-grade David Silverstein, inspired by the movie October Sky, brought a homemade rocket made from a potato chip canister to school. School officials, classifying the rocket as a weapon, suspended him for the remainder of the term. Later, David was invited as a special guest to Space Adventures' Annual Rocketry Workshop in Washington, D. C.
- May, 1999, Pensacola, Florida: When a sophomore loaned her nail clippers with an attached nail file to a friend, a teacher saw and confiscated the clippers. The girl, aspiring to be a doctor, was given a 10-day suspension and threatened with expulsion. Said the high school principal, "Life goes on. You learn from your mistakes. We are recommending expulsion."
- November, 1998, Deer Lakes, Pennsylvania: At Curtisville Elementary School, 5 year old Jordan Locke was suspended for wearing a 5-inch plastic ax as part of his firefighter's costume to a Halloween party in his classroom. After firefighters around the country contacted school officials complaining about the incident, school officials composed an "Open Letter to Firemen Across the Country" stating that they never intended to offend firefighters by referring to the ax as a weapon, but defending the zero tolerance policy against weapons as fair.

These incidents underscore two sources of controversy inherent in zero tolerance incidents. In the first incident, involving a shotgun in a backpack, there can be little doubt of the seriousness of the offense; as in Decatur, however, it is not the necessity of the expulsion, but rather its length that makes the incident newsworthy. Other incidents appear to cause controversy by defining as a weapon an object, such as nail clippers or a toy ax, that poses little real danger to others. Yet it should be noted that this apparent overextension is consistent with the philosophical intent of zero tolerance, treating both major and minor incidents with severity in order to set an example to others. Indeed, the apparent lengthening of expulsions over time may be related to the use of harsh punishment for less severe offenses. If a student is expelled for a year for an object (e.g., a nail-file) that is a weapon only through interpretation, districts may feel a need to distinguish truly dangerous incidents by extending punishment even further for actual weapons.

Drugs

Although there is no federal mandate of suspension or expulsion for drug-related offenses, the application of zero tolerance to drugs or alcohol has become quite common (Heaviside et al., 1998). Again, the gravity of the events varies considerably. [4]

- June, 1998, Brookline, Massachussetts: Nine seniors caught with alcohol on a bus going to their senior prom were barred by the principal from attending their graduation, and two were not allowed to compete in the state baseball playoffs. Citing tragic accidents caused by alcohol abuse, Brookline High School Headmaster Robert Weintraub stated, "Every time there's a serious incident, a violation of drugs, alcohol, or weapons, I have taken a very hard line, because it's important for kids to get

[4] Drugs and Alcohol citations: Abrahms, S. (1998, June 21). Discipline of 9 seniors is evaluated: Headmaster defends 'zero tolerance' stance. *Boston Globe*, p. 1.
Smith, A. C. (1998, November 14). Court casts doubt on 'zero tolerance' policy. *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 1B.
Gross, E.(1998, November 5). Teachers help suspended girl. *St. Petersburg Times*, p. 1B.
Student suspended for refusing to see nurse. (1999, February 13). *New York Times*, p. B6.

the message that if they do something that violates some of the fundamental rules we have here, they will be punished."

- June, 1998, Pinellas County, Florida: In their last month of school, two high school seniors skipped school and smoked marijuana with friends in the morning. School officials were tipped off and expelled the boys upon their arrival some hours later. A federal appeals court ruled against the district, however, stating that, in the absence of any actual drug test, the school had not "even a scintilla of evidence" that the two teens were under the influence at school.
- October, 1998, East Lake, Florida: High school senior Jennifer Coonce took a sip of sangria at a luncheon with co-workers as part of a school-sponsored internship. When her parents called the high school to complain about minors being served alcohol, the district suspended her for the remainder of the semester. Jennifer, an honors student, was offered the opportunity to take her college placement classes at home, over the telephone.
- February, 1999, Ewing, New Jersey: When a freshman dozed off in his social studies class, his teacher became suspicious he was using drugs and asked him to visit the school nurse for a check of his pulse and blood pressure. When the boy refused, the principal suspended him, and refused to readmit him until he had submitted to a drug test. Although the boy submitted to the test, his father considered filing a lawsuit challenging the policy.

The range of seriousness of these incidents, as compared with the relative consistency of punishment, may offer some insight into why zero tolerance creates controversy. A fairly stiff punishment for serious drinking or drug abuse at school-sponsored events seems fitting, and may well serve to prevent more serious harm. In contrast, the long-term suspension of an honors student for a sip of sangria seems more likely to turn the offender into the perceived victim, as the St. Petersburg Times notes in an editorial:

> Zero tolerance policies are inherently unjust and irrational because they conflate harms. Accepting a cup of sangria for a good-bye toast is punished as severely as a student who gets drunk on school property....Bringing a butter knife to school to cut an apple for lunch carries the same expulsion as toting a loaded magnum. Those harms are not equivalent, and if they are punished with equal severity, the system looks both unfair and nonsensical ("Zero Sense", 1998, p. 16a).

Strictures against cruel and unusual punishment are fundamental to our legal system. It may well be that school punishments greatly out of proportion to the offense arouse controversy by violating basic perceptions of fairness inherent in our system of law, even when upheld by the courts.

Other Offenses

Finally, zero tolerance has been extended beyond weapons and drugs to fighting, unauthorized use of pagers or laser pointers, and sexual harassment (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Incidents reported in national newspapers since May, 1998 include: [5]

- February, 1999, Louisville, Kentucky: Two girls at Bernheim Middle School were expelled when they confessed to making a bomb threat that resulted in the evacuation of the school's 430 students. The girls were eligible to re-enter the district's public schools in January, 2000, but only after spending a semester in the district's day treatment program.
- February, 1999, Fairfax, Virginia: When a ninth-grader wrote a note to a classmate about her teacher stating, "I have a D. I'm grounded....I

[5] Other Offenses: Baldwin, P. (1999, February 24). Bomb threat ousts 2 from school system: It's county's first use of state law. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, p. 1n.
Masters, B. A. (1999, February 27). Teen suspended for note about teacher: Fairfax schools overreacted by calling comment a death threat, girl's parents say. *Washington Post*, p. B1.
Henderson, J. (1999, November 4). Halloween essay lands 13-year-old behind bars: Boy released after news media called. *Houston Chronicle*, p. 1A.
Berselli, B. (1999, February 28). Student apologizes for remark, returns: Sophomore's parents say 10-day suspension too severe a response. *Washington Post*, p. M3.

want to kill that [expletive]....I want to die," the principal of Lake Braddock Secondary School recommended expulsion. While the 15 year-old girl and her father claimed the school overreacted, the vice chairman of the Fairfax School Board defended the action: "People are more concerned than they were five or 10 years ago, and with good reason. Teachers have been attacked. Teachers have been threatened."

- November, 1999, Ponder, Texas: When a 13 year old wrote a Halloween story for class that involved getting high on Freon, opening fire on a suspected intruder, and finally shooting his teacher and several classmates, the boy was ordered held in a juvenile detention facility for ten days (released after 5 days). Denton County District Attorney noted that the decision was based on a review of records indicating that the boy had been "a persistent discipline problem for this school, and the administrators there were legitimately concerned."
- February, 1999, Waldorf, Maryland: A Westlake High School sophomore was suspended for 10 days when he announced in the school's morning announcements that his French teacher was not fluent in the language. The student and his parents claimed that the incident was intended as a joke and did not warrant such a punishment. School officials, however, deemed the comments a "verbal attack" against the teacher.

These cases seem to have at their heart a conflict between two fundamental rights: the right of free speech, and the right of schools to protect students and staff from real or perceived harm. An important lesson of recent school shooting incidents appears to be that schools may place themselves at risk by ignoring serious threats of violence. Indeed, in some recent cases, schools and school districts may have averted serious incidents by swift reaction to verbalized threats (Garrett, 1999). Yet the furor created by some of these incidents suggests that there may be limits on what a school can or should do to protect staff and students. Despite the current emphasis on the key use of early warning signs in ensuring school safety (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998), it may be some time before consensus emerges concerning what constitutes a threat, and the appropriate level of reaction to threats.

Summary

There is some tendency to assume that these suspensions or expulsions for trivial incidents are simply idiosyncratic or aberrations that occur in districts characterized by an overzealous administration. Yet the ubiquity of these "trivial incidents" across time and location suggests that the over-extension of school sanctions to minor misbehavior is not anomalous, but rather is inherent in the philosophy and application of zero tolerance. School disciplinary data at both the district (Skiba et al., 1997) and national (Heaviside et al., 1998) levels have shown that the serious infractions that are the primary target of zero tolerance (e.g., drugs, weapons, gangs) occur relatively infrequently. The most frequent disciplinary events with which schools wrestle are minor disruptive behaviors such as tardiness, class absence, disrespect, and noncompliance. A broad policy that seeks to punish both minor and major disciplinary events equally will, almost by definition, result in the punishment of a small percentage of serious infractions, and a much larger percentage of relatively minor misbehavior. We might expect then that the "trivial incidents" connected with zero tolerance will not abate, but may even accelerate as those policies continue to be extended by local districts.

In response, the number of lawsuits filed by parents in such incidents also appears to be increasing. The ruling of Judge Robert McLoskey against the defendants in the Decatur expulsion case is not unusual; in general, courts have tended to side with school districts in reviewing such cases, giving relatively broad leeway to district administrators in their interpretation of school disciplinary policy (Zirkel, 1998). Yet the courts have also begun to limit school district power in certain cases. In a case in Pennsylvania involving the expulsion of a 13 year old for using a Swiss Army knife as a nail-file, the court ruled against a school district's mandatory expulsion policy because it allowed no exceptions (Lee, 1999). In Costa Mesa, California, the 90 day suspension of a high school senior for a pipe found in his car by police officials off campus was overruled in court, since the action did not allow the student his due process right to present his side of the story

(Carney, 1998). Thus far, such decisions appear to be based primarily on procedural grounds, for violations of district policy or state law, or for a failure to provide opportunities for required due process.

What seems to differentiate the most visible of these cases is the unwillingness on the part of school boards and administrators to back down, regardless of parent or community pressure. Policymakers in these high profile incidents often claim that their "hands are tied," that they have little or no room for flexibility in the administration of district policy. It should be noted, however, that this intractability represents a local interpretation of zero tolerance that may go beyond the federal zero tolerance policy. Indeed, by requiring local districts to have in place a procedure allowing for case-by-case review, the Gun-Free Schools Act seems to mandate some degree of flexibility in the implementation of zero tolerance.

Reaction to these events leaves communities highly divided. On the one hand, proponents of zero tolerance argue that allowing flexibility in the administration of consequences will reduce the potency of school discipline, giving the message to potential violators that schools are "not really serious" about enforcement. Others have countered that when the punishment fails to fit the crime, students are learning nothing about justice, and much about what they must do subvert rules and policies. But while these individual cases highlight the values conflicts inherent in the zero tolerance debate, a more fundamental question may concern the outcomes and effects of that policy. To what extent have the disciplinary practices associated with zero tolerance led to increased school safety or improved student behavior?

How Effective is Zero Tolerance?

It has been more than ten years since school districts first began adopting zero tolerance policies, and over five years since the strategy was made national policy by the Gun-Free Schools Act. Given the current climate of educational accountability, one would expect some data to have emerged concerning the effects and effectiveness of zero tolerance approaches. The following sections provide a review of available literature for the school security measures often associated with a zero tolerance approach, followed by a similar review of the literature concerning suspension and expulsion.

Effectiveness of School Security Measures

Judgement concerning the effectiveness of school security measures may depend to a certain extent on the sources of data being considered. A number of school districts that have adopted school security measures or comprehensive zero tolerance policies have testified to the efficacy of such approaches (see e.g., Burke & Herbert, 1996; Holmes & Murrell, 1995; Schreiner, 1996). It should be noted, however, that these reports are not objective evaluations, but rather program descriptions, often designed to showcase district efforts. The absence of an outside evaluator, coupled with a lack of information regarding the methodology, typically makes it impossible to judge the accuracy of these reports.

Aside from school district testimonials, there appear to be very few empirical evaluations of the efficacy of school security measures. In an attempt to review the efficacy of those measures, Skiba and Peterson (in press) conducted an extensive electronic literature search for published empirical evaluations of school security measures. Across both the ERIC and PsycInfo data bases, only four data-based evaluations of any school security measures were published in scholarly journals between 1988 and 1999. In contrast, there appears to be a considerably more extensive data base supporting the use of preventive measures. The same search located 35 data-based published articles using the term *conflict resolution*, and over 130 journal articles using the search term *classroom behavior management*.

For the present review, that search was updated, adding a search of the Sociological Abstracts and Criminal Justice Abstract data bases from 1988 to 1999. The terms *metal detector*, *locker search*, *surveillance or video camera*, and *school uniforms* were entered for each data base. Finally, the terms *zero tolerance* and *school security* were also entered to identify evaluations that may have cut across strategies. Across more than ten years of implementation, a search of four major data bases yielded only six empirical evaluations across all five categories of security measures. No published empirical evaluations were located for either locker searches or video surveillance cameras.

Among the handful of investigations of school security technology, the general quality of the reporting tended to be insufficient for allow firm conclusions about whether security technology can be effective. With some notable exceptions (e.g., Behling, 1994), all the published security technology studies were brief summaries of a quasi-experimental evaluation, omitting significant details about the characteristics of the population, implementation of the intervention, and statistical analyses performed. Without such data, there is no way of knowing whether any positive effects reported in the study were due to the security strategies themselves, or to characteristics of the schools, students, or other interventions. With this caveat, a brief review of the available data in each area of school security follows.

Metal Detectors

In the climate of fear created by dramatic incidents of school violence, school administrators have begun a consideration of metal detectors as a method for deterring weapon-carrying in schools. There are two types of metal detectors: Hand held metal detectors used for random sweeps of students, and fixed metal detectors, designed to scan all students as they enter school (Mackey, 1997). Advocates of such technology argue that metal detectors may keep weapons out of schools, thus making it less likely that conflicts will escalate into deadly violence. Opponents of metal detector technology argue that such systems are not cost effective, and that they may actually fail to prevent incidents, such as the shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in which the violence is perpetrated outside the building, but on school grounds.

There appear to be no published investigations of the efficacy of fixed metal detectors placed in school entrances, and one of random weekly sweeps with hand-held metal detectors. Ginsberg and Loffredo (1993) compared self-reported rates of threats, physical fighting, or weapons-carrying for students in schools with and without hand-held metal detectors in the New York Public Schools. Students in schools using hand-held metal detectors reported a lower likelihood of carrying weapons at school or to and from school. No differences were found between schools with and without metal detectors in the frequency of reported threats or physical fights. The results should be viewed with caution, however, since few details of the survey or analyses were provided in the report, and there were no controls for other interventions that may have been implemented during the time period of the study.

Locker Search

The literature on educational law has produced a fairly substantial dialogue about the circumstances under which locker searches are and are not legal (see e.g., Majestic, Blumberg, & Dowling, 1995). Yet there appear to be no empirical data regarding whether such searches are effective in either finding weapons or in reducing school violence. A search of the ERIC, Criminal Justice, PsycInfo, and Sociological Abstracts data bases produced no published evaluative reports on the efficacy of locker searches either for identifying weapons or reducing violence or disruption.

School Surveillance Cameras

Surveillance cameras have been recommended as a method of monitoring whether students are bringing weapons with them into school (Felder, 1997), as well as a method for deterring vandalism (Lebowitz, 1997). In the wake of the Columbine High School mass shooting, the presence of video surveillance cameras allowed the post-hoc review of the grisly details of the shooting, but clearly did not contribute to the prevention of violence. In order for surveillance cameras to be effective, it may well be necessary to hire staff to monitor the video received from those cameras, an additional expense for those schools choosing to use video cameras. In the four data-bases searched, there were no published evaluations of the use of video surveillance in school settings, with or without the presence of additional staff to monitor the video feed.

School Uniforms

The presence of school uniforms has been a favored response of the Clinton Administration in its approach to school violence (Smith & Levin, 1997). Advocates of school uniforms argue that school uniforms reduce problems associated with gangs, by making gang clothing nonexistent in schools, while reducing the fear of students who must travel through different gang territories (with associated differences in gang colors) on their way to school (Cohn,1996). Others emphasize the contribution school uniforms

make toward increasing school pride and affiliation, and establishing a calm, businesslike school climate (Loesch, 1995). Finally, it has been suggested that school uniforms, especially if the policy is flexibly implemented, may prove more affordable to parents than the designer clothing often favored by adolescent students (Holloman, 1995).

There appears to be somewhat more research support for school uniforms than other security measures. The Long Beach Unified School District has informally reported decreases in occurrences of fighting, assaults, robberies, vandalism and weapons possession as a result of its district-wide implementation of a school uniform policy (Cohn, 1996), but there have also been more formal studies of the effects of school uniforms. Murray (1997) studied the impact of a district-wide school uniform policy on school climate in two middle schools in North Carolina. He reported higher student ratings of the quality of school climate in schools with a uniform policy on seven of ten dimensions surveyed.

Support for the hypothesis that school uniforms contribute to a more businesslike school environment was provided in an experimental study by Behling (1994). Two hundred and seventy sophomores and 20 teachers were asked to rate their perceptions of behavior, student achievement, and academic potential of students pictured as wearing different styles of dress. Both students and teachers tended to rate students in uniform, whether formal or more casual, as better behaved, more academically successful, and more likely to succeed academically. The authors suggest that uniform clothing can induce a halo effect that may induce a more positive image of school climate. Other survey research, however, suggests that teachers, but not students, believe that school uniforms have a positive influence on school safety (Sher, 1996; Stanley, 1996).

Thus, the research on school uniforms is somewhat stronger than other measures typically associated with a zero tolerance approach, though by no means comprehensive. Teachers and administrators clearly believe that uniforms contribute to school safety by creating a calmer and more businesslike school atmosphere, although it is unclear whether students share these beliefs. As yet, however, there are insufficient data to assess the extent to which these beliefs will translate into decreases in school disruption and violence.

Overall Effectiveness of School Security Measures

In addition to these reports on specific security measures, there are a limited number of more comprehensive investigations. These broad scale studies appear to raise troubling questions about the effectiveness of school security measures.

The most comprehensive data on school security approaches used as a component of zero tolerance appear to be the National Center on Education Statistics study of school violence (Heaviside, et al., 1998). The NCES survey asked principals to identify which of a number of possible components of a zero tolerance strategy (e.g., metal detectors, security guards, school uniforms) were employed at their school. Of schools with no reported crime, only 5% of principals reported moderate or stringent security measures; in contrast, 39% of schools with serious violent crimes reported using moderate to stringent security.

More sophisticated analysis of national data-bases has yielded evidence of a similar relationship between reliance on physical security and increased risk of school violence. Mayer and Leone (1999) reanalyzed data from the 1995 School Crime Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, comprised of 9,854 interviews of students aged 12 to 19 throughout the United States. Students were interviewed regarding their personal knowledge and experience with violence, their perceptions of school rules, and their fear of being victimized. Results of structural modeling analyses suggested that reliance on rules was more effective in reducing school violence than were school security measures. Perceived enforcement and awareness of school rules was associated with decreased student reports of school violence. In contrast, school security measures, whether person-based or technology-based, were associated with increased reports of school violence. Increased reliance on strategies such as security guards, metal detectors, and locker searches tended to be associated with greater student experience with violence, and greater student fear of violence.

From one perspective, the relationships between school violence and increased use of security measures are unsurprising. Unsafe schools might well be expected to employ more extreme measures. Yet these data might also be interpreted as providing no

support for the hypothesis that security measures increase school safety: in both of these studies, schools that rely more heavily on school security measures continue to be less safe than those without such policies. Together with the notable absence of data evaluating the effectiveness of any individual security measure, these findings strongly suggest that there is as yet no solid evidence that such measures contribute to a safer school environment. The next section turns to a consideration of the data for strategies even more central to zero tolerance discipline: suspension and expulsion.

Suspension and Expulsion: The Cornerstone of Zero Tolerance

The use of school exclusion, suspension and expulsion, is a cornerstone of zero tolerance policy: one-year expulsions are written into federal and state regulations regarding zero tolerance. Applications of zero tolerance have dramatically increased school suspension and expulsion in school districts throughout the country (Civil Rights Project, 1999; Cummins, 1998; Seymour, 1999b).

What do we know of the effects and side-effects of school suspension and expulsion? In contrast to the paucity of research regarding school security measures, there has been a fairly substantial body of research that has emerged in recent years regarding school exclusion. In at least one area, the use of suspension with minority students, a sizable research base has produced consistent findings for over 25 years. In general, these data may raise troubling questions concerning the consistency, fairness, and effectiveness of school suspension and expulsion as disciplinary tools.

How are Suspension and Expulsion Used?

One would expect that suspension and expulsion, as more severe consequences, would tend to be reserved for more serious infractions. Yet zero tolerance policies that seek to punish all behaviors severely may to some extent have erased the notion of a graduated set of consequences geared to the severity of behavior. How frequently are suspension and expulsion used, and in response to what behaviors?

While more controversial, school expulsion appears to be used relatively infrequently as compared to other disciplinary options (Sinclair, 1999). In one of the few studies examining school expulsion, Morrison and D'Incau (1997) reported that expulsion appears to be reserved for incidents of moderate to high severity, although there is some doubt as to whether students who are expelled are always those who are the most troublesome or dangerous. Zero tolerance policies, mandating expulsion for certain types of events, have apparently led to the expulsion of many children and youth who would be considered "good students."

Suspension, in contrast, is among the most widely used disciplinary techniques (Bowditch, 1993; Mansfield & Farris, 1992; Rose, 1988; Skiba et al., 1997; Uchitelle, Bartz, & Hillman, 1989). In one midwestern city, one third of all referrals to the office resulted in a one to five day suspension, and 21% of all enrolled students were suspended at least once during the school year (Skiba et al., 1997). Suspension appears to be used with greater frequency in urban areas than in suburban or rural areas (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; Wu et al., 1982).

As might be expected with such high rates of usage, school suspension is not always reserved for serious or dangerous behaviors. Fights or physical aggression among students are consistently found to be among the most common reasons for suspension (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Imich, 1994; Menacker, Hurwitz, & Weldon, 1994; Skiba et al., 1997). Yet school suspension is also commonly used for a number of relatively minor offenses, such as disobedience and disrespect (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Cooley, 1995; Skiba et al., 1997), attendance problems (Kaeser, 1979; Morgan D'Atrio et al., 1996), and general classroom disruption (Imich, 1994; Massachussetts Advocacy Center, 1986; Morgan D'Atrio et al., 1996). In fact, students are suspended for the most serious offenses (drugs, weapons, vandalism, assaults on teachers) relatively infrequently (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Kaeser, 1979).

Consistency and Fairness of School Discipline

Common sense notions of justice demand that punishments in school or society be administered fairly and consistently. While it is not unreasonable that discipline policies will vary somewhat from school to school, in general, it is reasonable to ex-

pect that students will be disciplined in response to their behavior, not because of idiosyncratic characteristics of their school or classroom.

There can be little doubt that certain students are at a much greater risk for office referral and school suspension, and account for a disproportionate share of disciplinary effort. Wu et al. (1982) reported that students who were suspended were more likely to endorse statements indicating an antisocial attitude. Students who engage in harassment, bullying, or violent behavior appear to be at greater risk of future disciplinary action (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Some students clearly account for a disproportionate share of disciplinary effort; in one study in 19 middle schools in a large midwestern urban district, 6% of students were responsible for 44% of all referrals to the office (Skiba et al., 1997).

Yet school disciplinary actions cannot be accounted for solely in terms of student behaviors, but are also a function of classroom and school characteristics. Skiba et al. (1997) reported that, in one middle school, two thirds of all disciplinary referrals came from 25% of the school's teachers. School factors also strongly influence rates of suspension. In multivariate analyses of factors predicting suspension, Wu and colleagues (1982) found that school suspension rate was associated with a number of school and district characteristics, including teacher attitudes, administrative centralization, quality of school governance, teacher perception of student achievement, and racial makeup of the school. Together, these school characteristics explained a greater proportion of the variance in school suspension than student attitudes and behavior, prompting the investigators to conclude:

> One could argue from this finding that if students are interested in reducing their chances of being suspended, they will be better off by transferring to a school with a lower suspension rate than by improving their attitudes or reducing their misbehavior (Wu et al., 1982, pp. 255-256).

Racial Fairness in School Punishments

The suit brought by the Reverend Jesse Jackson and Operation PUSH on behalf of seven African-American students expelled for two years by the Decatur Public Schools represents the most publicized incident to date involving racial disproportionality in school discipline. Yet minority over-representation in school punishments is by no means a new issue. Both racial and economic biases in school suspension and expulsion have been studied extensively for over 25 years, with highly consistent results.

Disproportionality Due to Socioeconomic Status

Studies of school suspension have consistently documented over-representation of low-income students in the use of that consequence (Brantlinger, 1991; Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982). Brantlinger (1991) reported that both high- and low-income adolescents felt that disciplinary practices were unfairly weighted against poor students. While high-income students were more likely to receive more mild and moderate consequences (e.g., teacher lecture, moving desk), low-income students reported receiving more severe consequences, sometimes delivered in a less-than-professional manner (e.g., scorned in front of class, made to stand in hall all day, personal belongings searched).

Racial Disproportionality in Discipline

Of even greater concern is the overrepresentation of minorities, especially African-American students, in the use of punitive school discipline. In one of the earliest statistical studies of minority overrepresentation in school discipline, the Children's Defense Fund (1975), using Office for Civil Rights (OCR) data, found rates of suspension for black students that were between two and three times higher than suspension rates for white students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. While 29 states suspended over 5 percent of their total black enrollment, only four states suspended over 5 percent of white students.

Since that report, racial disproportionality in the use of school suspension has been a highly consistent finding (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Glackman et al., 1978; Kaeser, 1979; Lietz & Gregory, 1978; Masssachussetts Advocacy Center, 1986; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba et al., 1997; Taylor & Foster, 1986; Thornton & Trent, 1988; Wu et al., 1982). Black students are also exposed more frequently to more punitive disciplinary strategies, such as corporal punishment (Gregory, 1995; Shaw & Braden, 1990), and

receive fewer mild disciplinary sanctions when referred for an infraction (McFadden et al., 1992). In a report on Tennessee schools' zero tolerance polices for 1997 (Tailor & Detch, 1998), the Tennessee Office of Education Accountability found overrepresentation of African American students in zero tolerance-related expulsions in the state's urban school systems. In the most recent study of racial disproportionality in discipline, the Applied Research Center of Oakland, California reported higher than expected rates of suspension and expulsion for black students in all 15 major American cities studied (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000).

One possible explanation of racial overrepresentation in school suspension is that overuse of suspension for black students is not racial bias per se, but is rather a corollary of the documented disproportionality in discipline for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Yet race appears to make a contribution to disciplinary outcome independent of socioeconomic status. Controlling for socioeconomic status, Wu et al. (1982) reported that nonwhite students still received significantly higher rates of suspension than white students in all locales except rural senior high schools.

There is, of course, the possibility that the higher rates of school exclusion and punishment for African-American students are due to correspondingly high rates of disruptive behavior. In such a case, disproportionality in suspension or other punishments would not represent racial bias, but a relatively appropriate response to disproportionate misbehavior. Yet investigations of student behavior, race, and discipline have found no evidence that African Americans misbehave at a significantly higher rate (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Wu et al., 1982). If anything, available research suggests that black students tend to receive harsher punishments than white students, and that those harsher consequences may be administered for less severe offenses (McFadden et al., 1992; Shaw & Braden, 1992). In an analysis of the reasons middle school students in one urban district were referred to the office, white students were more often referred for vandalism, smoking, endangerment, obscene language, and drugs and alcohol. In contrast, black students were more often referred to the school office for loitering, disrespect, excessive noise, threats, and a catch-all category called conduct interference (Skiba, 1998). Thus, far from engaging in higher levels of disruptive behavior, African-American students appear to be at risk for receiving a range of more severe consequences for less serious behavior.

These results are consistent with suggestions that cultural discontinuities may place African-American students, especially African-American male adolescents, at a disadvantage in many secondary schools. Townsend (2000) suggests that many teachers, especially those of European-American origin, may be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable with the more active and boisterous style of interaction that characterizes African American males. Fear may also play a role in contributing to over-referral. Teachers who are prone to accepting stereotypes of adolescent African-American males as threatening or dangerous may react more quickly to relatively minor threats to authority, especially if such fear is paired with a misunderstanding of cultural norms of social interaction.

Whatever the reason, racial disparities in school exclusion are not lost on students of color. Sheets (1996) interviewed students and teachers in an urban high school concerning their perceptions of school discipline. Both European-American and ethnically diverse students perceived sources of racism in the application of discipline. But while European American students perceived racial discrimination in discipline as unintentional or unconscious, students of color saw it as conscious and deliberate, arguing that teachers often apply classroom rules and guidelines arbitrarily to exercise control, or to remove students they dislike. In particular, African American students felt that contextual variables, such as a lack of respect, differences in communication styles, disinterest on the part of teachers, and "being purposefully pushed to the edge where they were expected and encouraged to be hostile" (Sheets, p. 175) were the primary causes of many disciplinary conflicts.

Suspension and Expulsion: How Effective?

In 1999, the U. S. Department of Education released its *Report on State Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act: School Year 1997-98* (Sinclair, 1999). The report focused on expulsions of students in 50 states and territories for bringing a weapon to school (the report did not include data on expulsions of students for offenses other than weapons). Of the 3,390 weapons-related expulsions reported for the 1997-98 school year, 61% were for handguns,

7% for rifles, and 32% for "other firearms; " the majority of reported expulsions (57%) occurred at the high school level. The number of reported expulsions for weapons showed an apparent decrease, from 5,724 in 1996-97 to 3,930 in 1997-98. The report cautions that the decrease may be due to differences in reporting across the two years, but also suggests that several states felt that "students were getting the message that they were not to bring firearms to school and that, as a result, fewer students were expelled for this offense" (Sinclair, 1999, p. 4).

Even accepting the veracity of the data, however, it remains very much unclear what increases or decreases in recovered weapons or expulsions mean in terms of evaluating overall school safety. Reports on zero tolerance programs have cited both increases (Crosby, 1994b) and decreases (Barzewski, 1997; Ginsberg & Loffredo, 1993) in weapons confiscation and expulsion as evidence of effectiveness. Trends in school expulsion represent an especially ambiguous measure. Although sometimes cited as evidence that a school or a district is "cracking down" on disruptive students, increased expulsion within a school or school district may well be indicative of a negative trend in school safety. Ultimately, increases or decreases in weapons confiscation or expulsion are meaningful measures of safety only if paired with direct measures of violence, disruption, or student misbehavior.

Unfortunately, there appears to be little evidence, direct or indirect, supporting the effectiveness of suspension or expulsion for improving student behavior or contributing to overall school safety. While there appear to be no investigations that have directly studied the effects of school exclusion on student behavior or school safety in general, indirect data suggest that suspension may be ineffective for those students most often targeted for disciplinary consequences. Studies of school suspension have consistently found that up to 40% of school suspensions are due to repeat offenders (Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Massachussetts Advocacy Center, 1986), suggesting that this segment of the school population is decidedly not "getting the message." Indeed, Tobin et al. (1996) found that, for some students, suspension is primarily a predictor of further suspension, prompting the authors to conclude that for these students "suspension functions as a reinforcer...rather than as a punisher" (p. 91).

Long-term outcomes associated with suspension appear to be even less reassuring. Analysis of data from the national High School and Beyond survey revealed that 31% of sophomores who dropped out of school had been suspended, as compared to a suspension rate of only 10% for their peers who had stayed in school (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986). In a similar re-analysis reported by Wehlage and Rutter (1986), discipline emerged as part of a constellation of factors, along with poor academics and low SES, predicting school dropout. Among these variables, prior engagement with school discipline was among the strongest predictors of dropout.

Indeed, the relationship between school suspension and school dropout may not be entirely accidental. Ethnographic field studies of school discipline have noted that disciplinarians in troubled urban schools often view their role in large measure as dealing with persistent "troublemakers" who challenge the institution's authority (Bowditch, 1993). Over time, as such students develop a reputation, disciplinary contacts afford administrators the opportunity to rid the school of its most troublesome students:

> In this high school, the practice of cleansing the school of 'bad kids' was quite widely acknowledged and equally appreciated by administrators, teachers, and counselors. Criticisms of the practice were voiced rarely, quietly, and confidentially behind closed doors. (Fine, 1986, p. 403)

In such a context, suspension often becomes a "pushout" tool to encourage low-achieving students and those viewed as "troublemakers" to leave school before graduation.

Research from the field of developmental psychopathology may shed additional light on the relationship between suspension and school dropout. Throughout the elementary school years, students at-risk for developing antisocial behavior exhibit disruptive behavior and social and academic deficits that leave them increasingly alienated from teachers and peers (Patterson, 1992). By middle school, these youngsters become less interested in school and begin to seek the company of other antisocial peers. At the same time, their families often fail to monitor their whereabouts, allowing more unsupervised time on the streets (Ramsey, Walker,

Shinn, & O'Neill, 1989). For an adolescent at-risk for antisocial behavior then, it seems unlikely that school suspension will successfully impact behavior. Rather, suspension may simply accelerate the course of delinquency by providing a troubled youth with little parental supervision more opportunities to socialize with deviant peers. As one student put it:

> When they suspend you, you get in more trouble, cuz you're out in the street...And that's what happened to me once. I got into trouble one day cause there was a party and they arrested everybody in that party...I got in trouble more than I get in trouble at school, because I got arrested and everything. (Thorson, 1996, p. 9)

In summary, school suspension and expulsion appear to be effective primarily in removing unwanted students from school. For troublesome or at-risk students, the most well-documented outcome of suspension appears to be further suspension, and eventually school dropout.

There may well be unanticipated social costs to this spiral of school exclusion. Research in the field of juvenile delinquency suggests that the strength of the school social bond is an important predictor in explaining delinquency (Jenkins, 1997). From a developmental standpoint, one might well question the wisdom of school disciplinary strategies that are expressly intended to break that bond with troublesome students.

Unintended Consequences of Punishment: Student Behavioral and Emotional Reactions

As noted, student perceptions of the effectiveness of various school disciplinary actions are often significantly at odds with the perceptions of teachers and administrators. While school personnel see school disruption as primarily a student choice and discipline as a reaction to that choice, students, especially at-risk students, often see confrontational classroom management or school disciplinary strategies as playing a significant role in escalating student misbehavior. Gottredson (1989) reported that students viewed most disciplinary problems as resulting from rules that were unjust or unfairly applied. In particular, students who are already at-risk for disruption may see confrontational discipline as a challenge to escalate their behavior. As one student interviewed by Thorson (1996) while in detention put it:

> I figure if I'm going to get in trouble, I'm gonna annoy him as much as I can. I'm already going to get in trouble, he deserve it, if he gonna keep singling me out, so I get on his nerves!...If you know you're already getting in trouble, why shut up?" (p. 6).

Shores, Gunter, & Jack (1993) argue that this counter-reaction to coercive disciplinary or behavior management strategies may be fairly typical, and suggest that punishment-based approaches to school discipline may escalate rather than deter school disruption.

Beyond resentment and counter-coercion among students, there is some evidence that the more intrusive school security measures, such as strip searches or the use of undercover agents in schools, have the potential for creating short- or even long-term emotional damage among students. Case studies of students who had been subjected to such practices suggest that reactions of anger and acting-out are not uncommon. In some cases, extreme school disciplinary procedures such as strip search have produced stress symptoms serious enough to warrant a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (Hyman & Perone, 1998).

Many of these unintended effects on students may simply reflect the consistent findings of operant psychology that the application of punishment is unpredictable, and unlikely to lead to the learning of new behavior (Council for Exceptional Children, 1991; Skinner, 1953). A host of serious side-effects have been documented in the professional literature on punishment (Axelrod & Apsche, 1983; MacMillan, Forness, & Trumball, 1973; Wood & Braaten, 1983), including escape and counter-aggression, habituation to progressively stiffer consequences, and reinforcement of the punishing agent. Unless carefully monitored and accompanied by positive consequences or alternative goals, the application of harsh consequences appears to be as likely to lead to escape or counter-aggression as to meaningful alternative behavior (Axelrod & Apsche, 1983). The appropriate application of consequences at opportune moments is certainly one tool for teaching students that actions have consequences in a lawful society. Yet it is clear that the school punish-

ments that are central to zero tolerance policies have not been studied enough to determine whether they yield benefits sufficient to outweigh the well-documented and troubling side-effects of punishment procedures.

Conclusions

It is important to note that these analyses are in no way intended as a criticism of school administrators faced with complex and serious choices in responding to school violence. The brutal events that overtook suburban and rural schools in the late '90's have shattered the common belief that school violence is solely an urban problem, confined to bad neighborhoods and dysfunctional families in the inner-city (Prothrow-Stith & Weissman,1991). Teachers, administrators and parents were, in the space of days and weeks, forced to the anxiety-charged realization that "it can happen here." Unprepared for serious violence, yet under intense pressure to do something, it is unsurprising that administrators choose remedies, such as zero tolerance and security technology, that they perceive as fast-acting. There are few who would disagree with the proposition that schools must take all possible actions to demonstrate their seriousness in deterring violence. Indeed, it is hard to argue with the stated goal of zero tolerance: to send a message that certain behaviors are simply not acceptable in school.

It is not the goals of zero tolerance, however, but more often the methods of its implementation that create controversy in schools and communities. There are few newspaper editorials condemning schools and school boards for expelling a student who carried a knife to school for the sole purpose of attacking another student. But the classic zero tolerance strategy of punishing minor or even trivial events severely, or dramatically extending the length of school suspension or expulsion, has led to cries of injustice across the country.

Inevitably, harsher punishments pit proponents of a strong zero tolerance stance against civil rights advocates. It is not surprising that organizations from both ends of the political spectrum-the American Civil Liberties Union and the conservative Rutherford Institute-have focused on civil rights concerns in defending students caught in the "web of zero tolerance" (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997). Inevitably, plaintiffs against school districts claim their rights were violated by standard policies that allow for little or no flexibility in implementation. Defenders of the policies point to the larger threat posed by serious violence in our nation's schools, suggesting that civil rights violations may be an unfortunate but necessary compromise to ensure the safety of school environments.

Unfortunately, however, this latter argument is made somewhat moot by the almost complete lack of documentation linking zero tolerance with improved school safety. Despite more than ten years of implementation, there have been only a handful of studies evaluating the outcomes of security measures. Of these, only school uniform research appears to have enough support to be considered even promising in contributing to perceptions of safer school environments. The most extensive studies (Heaviside et al., 1998; Mayer & Leone, 1999) suggest a negative relationship between school security measures and school safety. At this point in time, there is little or no evidence supporting assertions that school security technology can contribute to the reduction of school violence.

Data on the centerpiece of zero tolerance approaches, suspension and expulsion, are both more extensive and less supportive. Analysis of school referral data confirms the perceptions of school personnel that a relatively small proportion of students may be responsible for much of the disruption and violence in a given school. Yet the contribution of student behavior to suspension or expulsion decisions is swamped by inconsistencies in administration at both the classroom and school level. More importantly for at-risk students, the most consistently documented outcome of suspension and expulsion appears to be further suspension and expulsion, and perhaps school dropout. These relationships are especially troubling in light of the highly consistent overuse of punishment for African-American students, an overrepresentation that cannot be explained away by behavior or the effects of poverty.

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1984), accountability of instruction has become a national priority. State minimum competency tests, designed to ensure academic accountability, have become almost universal. In such a context, national

support for a school disciplinary policy that has provided so little evidence of effectiveness is, at the very least, surprising. Without accountability data for evaluating school discipline, there is no assurance that the extensive national commitment of time and resources to zero tolerance strategies has in any way paid off. Indeed, there is the danger that reliance upon the more complex and costly of these measures may drain resources from potentially more effective long-term solutions.

Recent public reaction to school safety and school disciplinary issues may suggest that the public is no longer comfortable with a forced choice between school safety and civil rights. In recent media accounts, parental and community reaction to zero tolerance appears to fall into two divergent and equally vocal responses. In North Hollywood, California, 500 parents packed the auditorium of Grant High School to demand reassurance from the school board concerning the safety of their children in the wake of a lunchroom brawl between Latino and Armenian students (Blankstein, 1999). Meanwhile, in Hartford, Wisconsin, 550 parents and community members crowded a meeting of their school board to voice their opposition to zero tolerance policies mandating expulsion for drug and alcohol offenses. Said one parent, "To me, expulsion is not sharing responsibility. It's getting rid of the problem." (Davis, 1999, p. 1). Together, these incidents suggest that the community is seeking school disciplinary strategies that can ensure school safety without sacrificing civil rights. In response to these pressures, some districts have begun to replace strict one-size-fits-all models with more graduated systems of discipline in which severe consequences are reserved for the most serious offenses, while less serious offenses are met with more moderate responses.

To differentiate the approach from zero tolerance, these graduated response alternatives might well be termed an *early response* model of school discipline (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). This perspective shares with zero tolerance the philosophical stance that minor disruption will, if left unattended, predict more serious disruption and violence. In contrast to zero tolerance, however, an early response model relies upon a graduated system of consequences that encourages a more moderate response to less serious behavior. The models differ also in their goals. While zero tolerance intends to set an example for potential wrongdoers through harsh punishment, the goal of early response is to ensure that minor incidents are defused before escalating into more serious offenses, and in the long-term, to teach all students appropriate alternatives to disruption and violence for resolving personal and interpersonal problems. Toward that end, alternatives to zero tolerance shift the temporal locus of disciplinary effort from reaction to comprehensive preventive efforts. Professional opinion (APA, 1993; Dwyer et al., 1998; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Walker et al., 1996) has begun to coalesce around a primary prevention model of school violence prevention emphasizing simultaneous intervention at each of three levels: creating a more positive school climate, attending to early warning signs, and effectively responding to disruption and violence with a broad array of strategies.

Yet consensus at the level of scholarly discourse in no way guarantees either an immediate or long-term shift in school practice. Faced with a choice between established but unproven practice and promising but emergent interventions for addressing school violence, many school disciplinarians may be reluctant to part with the sole tool they are familiar with, whether or not that tool is truly effective. Regardless of its actual value in maintaining order, the idea of zero tolerance is powerfully symbolic, reassuring staff, students and the community that something is being done (Noguera, 1995). Until school administrators become convinced of the efficacy and the feasibility of alternatives to suspension and expulsion, there is little likelihood that there will be a wholesale abandonment of exclusionary discipline. Research on effective preventive alternatives such as bullying prevention, conflict resolution/peer mediation, improved classroom behavior management, and early identification and intervention is thus critical in order to assist schools in developing sound alternatives to exclusionary discipline.

The dilemma of zero tolerance is profound and serious. One can in no way question the motives or sincerity of those who have drawn a battle line against violence in the schools. Yet however well-meaning those policies have been, the pages of national newspapers have been littered with the wreckage of young lives changed, perhaps irrevocably, by policies whose primary aim is to send a message to more serious offenders. Nor has it been substantiated that the antisocial and violent youth

who are the intended targets of zero tolerance have in any way received its message. The tragic violence that has befallen both urban and rural schools makes it incumbent upon educators to explore all available means to protect the safety of students and teachers. Yet faced with an almost complete lack of evidence that zero tolerance is among the strategies capable of accomplishing that objective, one can only hope for the development and application of more effective, less intrusive alternatives for preserving the safety of our nation's schools.

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