

Corporal Punishment in North Carolina Public Schools:

Down, But Not Quite Out

Laila A. Bell | laila@ncchild.org



North Carolina

DATA HIGHLIGHTS¹

- Corporal punishment was administered in 12 local districts a total of 404 times during the 2011-12 school year. Three of those districts have since banned the practice.
- Fifty-eight percent of corporal punishment was administered to American Indian students.
- Almost 30 percent of corporal punishment was administered to students younger than age seven.
- Students with disabilities received 29 percent of all corporal punishment.
- Eighteen percent of corporal punishment was administered to girls.

AN INEFFECTIVE PRACTICE

All children deserve safe, nurturing classrooms which promote deep inquiry, exploration and respectful social interactions. Regrettably, far too many children in North Carolina attend school in districts where the use of corporal punishment endangers their academic progress and threatens to inject fear and anxiety into their learning environments. Studies have shown corporal punishment is an ineffective approach to student discipline that can create long-term, damaging effects on the learning and development of children who are hit, as well as the learning of their peers.²

Advances in brain science have provided new insight into how children learn. When children are taught in supportive environments they thrive, rapidly forging connections and skills that empower them to succeed in school and in life. Exposure to violence, anxiety or heightened levels of stress—like the physical pain caused by corporal punishment—can alter the architecture of children’s developing

brains, reducing their academic outcomes, promoting fear and mistrust in the classroom and, ultimately, causing them to disengage from school.³

Just three decades ago, most school districts in North Carolina allowed physical pain as an acceptable form of discipline. A sea change has since occurred. In March, the North Carolina State Board of Education voted to oppose the use of corporal punishment in public schools. Even in districts that continue to allow the practice, the use of corporal punishment has declined by more than half since the 2010-11 school year. Today, only nine out of 115 local school districts use spanking to discipline their students.

To keep North Carolina moving forward we must ensure that *every* student in the state has access to classrooms that are safe, nurturing, and conducive to academic success—*regardless of where they live*. This means eliminating the unnecessary barriers to learning created by corporal punishment, and implementing effective approaches to discipline that promote positive school climates.⁴

DISTRICTS THAT USE CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

The use of corporal punishment in North Carolina public schools declined 55 percent since the 2010-11 school year. In the 2011-12 school year, 12 school districts administered corporal punishment a total of 404 times to 296 students. One in five of those students (66 children) were hit two or more times during the school year.



ActionforChildren

NorthCarolina

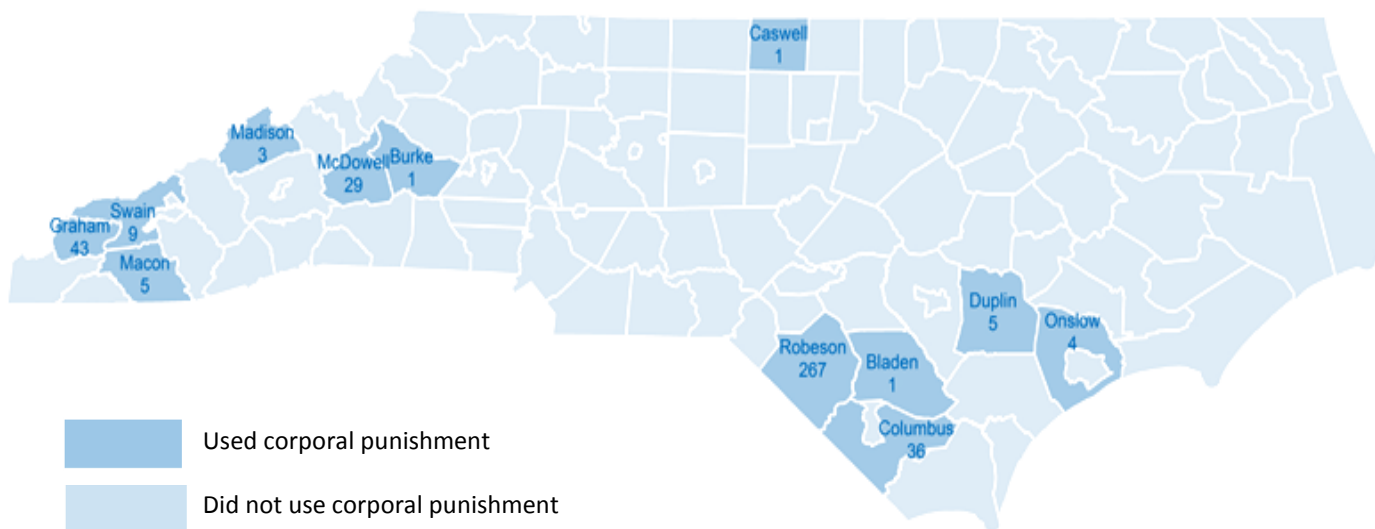


@nckidscount

Your support makes our work possible. To donate to Action for Children, visit www.ncchild.org/donate.

Figure 1. Most School Districts Have Abandoned the Use of Corporal Punishment*

Corporal Punishment by School District, 2011-12



Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011-12 Consolidated Data Report.



* Three school districts listed above (Columbus, Burke and Duplin Counties) banned the use of corporal punishment mid-year.

More than half of all corporal punishment administered in the state occurred in Robeson County (66 percent). In fact, Robeson County used corporal punishment more often than the eleven other districts that allowed students to be hit *combined*.⁵ In two school districts—Swain and Onslow Counties—the use of corporal punishment increased slightly during the 2011-12 school year. In all other school districts, the use of corporal punishment declined by more than half.

Two districts that used corporal punishment during the 2011-12 school year—Madison and Caswell Counties—had no reported cases in 2010-11.⁶

SPANKING STUDENTS FOR AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

More than one-third of all corporal punishment (38 percent) was administered to correct disruptive

student behavior, a broad category which includes a range of minor offenses like talking in hallways, violating the student dress code or simply being late to class.

Perhaps one of the more glaring paradoxes of corporal punishment is the use of spanking to discipline violent or aggressive student behavior (81—sum of the “Aggressive Behavior” and “Fighting or Affray” categories). **One in five uses of corporal punishment in North Carolina was administered in response to offenses where students hit or intimidated others.**

The notion that physical punishment curbs violent behavior among children has been widely discredited. In fact, studies show corporal punishment produces the *opposite* effect, teaching students that violence is an acceptable way to settle disagreements and resolve their frustrations.⁷

Table 1. Corporal Punishment by Infraction, 2011-12

Disruptive Behavior	154
Fighting and Aggression*	81
Inappropriate Language	33
Bus Misbehavior	27
Disrespect of Staff	24

*Sum of fighting or affray (16) and aggressive behavior (65).

GENDER AND RACE DISPARITIES

National disparities in the application of corporal punishment have been well documented.⁸ The addition of corporal punishment data to the Department of Public Instruction’s *Consolidated Annual Report* in 2010-11 created new information which quantifies the disparate impact of spanking in North Carolina public schools.

All student groups were hit less often in 2011-12 than during the previous school year. American Indian students, who comprise less than 2 percent of the student population, accounted for 58 percent of all corporal punishment administered in the state. Previous analysis conducted by Action for Children found the disproportionate spanking of American Indian students resulted from large disparities in Robeson County where American Indian students comprise 48 percent of the student enrollment, but receive 81 percent of the corporal punishment.

Male students received 82 percent of all corporal punishment in 2011-12.

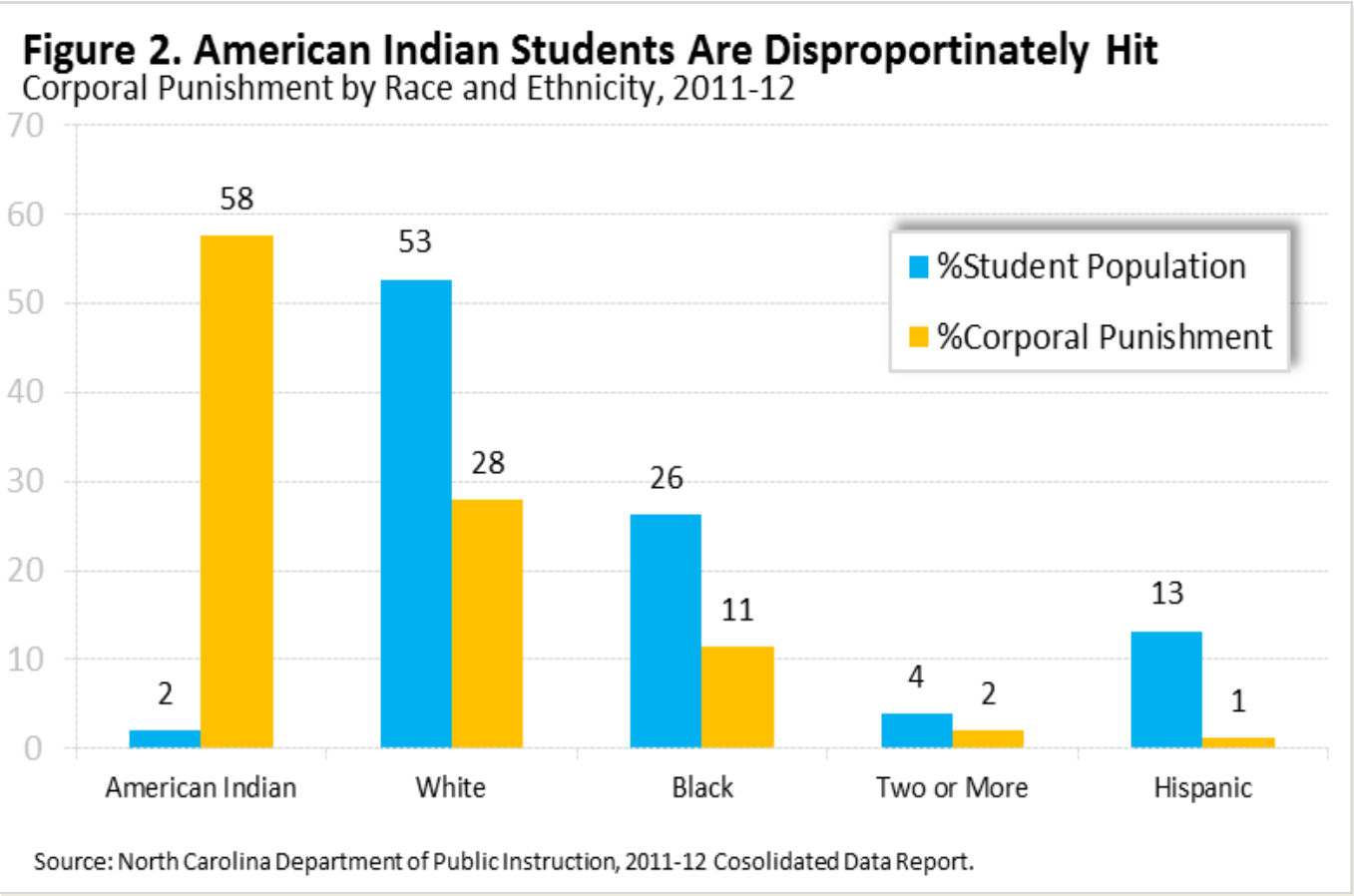
SPANKING OUR MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Two out of every three uses of corporal punishment (67 percent) was administered to elementary school students. Third grade students, typically 7- or 8-year-old children, received the brunt of hitting in public schools, accounting for 91 out of the 404 uses of corporal punishment.

Students with disabilities, who represent just 12 percent of the student population, received 29 percent of all corporal punishment.

A FINAL WORD ON CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Much has changed since the early years of Action for Children’s work to eliminate the use of corporal punishment in North Carolina public schools. School districts are now required to file annual reports to the State Board of Education on the number of times physical punishment was administered in their schools. Parents are able to exercise a greater degree of freedom and opt their children out of corporal punishment. And after prolonged silence on the issue, the North Carolina State Board of Education has come out firmly against the use of physical pain to address student misbehavior. These advances are all important markers of progress toward a time when all children across the state will be able to learn in stable, supportive classrooms. And yet, every year local school boards continue to fail to eliminate corporal punishment will expose hundreds of children to the harmful long-term consequences of spanking in their schools.



Note: Excludes Asian and Pacific Islander students who had zero reported incidents of corporal punishment during the 2011-12 school year.

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise specified all data are from the 2011-2012 Consolidated Report, available online at: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2011-12/consolidated-report.pdf#page=105>.
2. McGill University (2011). Spare the rod and develop the child [Press Release]. Retrieved from <http://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/spare-rod-and-develop-child-176105>.
3. Ibid.
4. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011-2012 Average Daily Membership.
5. Please note the student enrollment in these districts.
6. Five school districts that previously reported hitting students did not use corporal punishment in 2011-2012: Nash/Rocky Mount, Wilkes, Gaston, Mitchell and Lenoir County Schools
7. Greydanus, D (2010). Corporal Punishment in Schools and its Effect on Academic Success. Available online at http://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/04.15.10_greydandus.pdf.
8. Action for Children North Carolina (2011). Corporal Punishment in the Public Schools: A Practice on the Decline. Available online at: <http://www.ncchild.org/publication-or-research-type/corporal-punishment-public-schools-practice-decline-2011>.



Action for Children North Carolina is a non-partisan, non-profit child advocacy organization dedicated to educating and engaging all people across the state to ensure that children in North Carolina are healthy, safe, well-educated and have every opportunity for success.

