

Zero tolerance: how much is too much? essay sample

[Law](#), [Criminology](#)



“Zero Tolerance” was first established in 1994 after the Gun-Free Act of 1994. This act stated that fire arms and weapons were not permissible on school property. The zero tolerance policy came into play to back the Gun-Free Act saying that any student that was on school property with a weapon and committing violent acts would be punished by suspension or expulsion. The policy grew into any student that had drugs on school grounds would also face a mandated predetermined consequence. Some districts zero policies have grown over the years making other behaviors have a predetermined punishment. The zero tolerance policies were established to protect all students’ safety. While many would agree that creating a safe and conducive to learning environment for students, there has been controversy around zero tolerance policies and how it is affecting the students. Pros

Promoting Safer School Environments

The school environment should be a place where students are in a safe climate without threats so that the student can focus on learning. Zero tolerance policies do not tolerate harmful or dangerous behaviors and the universal punishments must be applied to ensure the students remain in a safe environment regardless of the situation. In an article addressing whether zero tolerance was making schools safer, McCollum (2004) claims that according to the National School Safety Center, zero tolerance for weapons on school grounds has produced results. All students, whether it is a first time offender or repeat offender, are given the same punishment for violating a zero tolerance rule because of the saying it is better to veer on the safe side then not. Consistency of School Discipline

Before Zero Tolerance Policies were enforced districts across the country established punishments for disciplinary issues and those punishments didn't always match-up with other schools. Therefore, students in some areas where held to a different standard than others and the crimes that were committed in schools were on the rise. Through the passing of zero tolerance policies and the mandated punishments that were established, school discipline across the country showed consistency and a clear disciplinary message was sent to students. Consistency is essential to be able to successfully implement behavioral management (Lane, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004). The idea is that when students know the consequences of their actions it will help detour them from committing the infraction. Putting Parents at Ease

When a parent puts their child on a bus or drops them off at the front door of the school, they are entrusting the staff at that school to help protect their child. Based on Walker's (2009) research, parents have reported that they feel like their children are not in jeopardy with the schools enforcing a zero tolerance policy. When a child's safety is at stake, parents and community members are in favor for increased disciplinary action. Cons

One size fits all

The one-size-fits-all policy for zero tolerance makes the punishment for bringing a plastic knife to school the same as bringing a gun. While all of the actions under zero tolerance are serious and do need actions to prevent students from committing these behaviors, not every case is going to be the same and if you are using common sense the punishment might not need to

be the same. There have been many cases reported of situations, and most of them are students with a disability, in which the student doesn't fully understand that the actions or words they are using would be violating zero tolerance policies (Chen, 2014). Chen highlighted a few of these cases, and one of them was a junior high student that was required to write a Halloween story. The story line the student chose was one where a character shot students in the school. This student was arrested and spent six days in jail before he was released because there was no proof of a crime committed. While the student's story might not have been appropriate, this problem could have possibly been taken care of at the school level with a conference between the student, principal, counselor, teacher and parent(s).

[Link to Not Achieving Students](#)

The punishment for violating zero tolerance policies are generally out of school suspension. In the Time Magazine, Carr (2011) reported that the number of suspensions have more than doubled over the last three decades due to schools using suspensions as a default punishment for zero tolerance. Not only has the number of suspensions increased, but this number could be linked to students having to repeat grades due to the student's absence in the academic environment. While some schools have make-up policies where students can make-up work, being absent from school always detrimental to the learning process. Many of the suspension cases students are absent for five to ten days at a time, and during that time the material that is covered is going to be up to the student to make the time to learn the missed material. Can the Teacher Handle It

Teachers spend many hours with their students and getting to know them. There are many times that students do things because they don't fully comprehend the consequences of their actions. During this time teachers could intervene with the student and discuss with the child what they have done, because they have built a relationship with that student. With zero tolerance policies this can't happen, because the incident would need to be reported to the administrator and the administrator's hands are tied to the punishment that has been established for that action. The communication between the teacher and student could and probably would be more effective in preventing future behavior issues (Morin, 2014). Personal Position

This is a very touchy subject and one that I have really considered from a parent and teacher stand point. I do believe that schools these days do have to enforce a zero tolerance policy due to previous crimes that have been committed in schools that are harmful to students. It is unfortunate that some students are punished for behaviors that they don't understand, but in order to identify any threats that could happen I feel that schools need to treat all violations under zero tolerance as a possible threat. While this might seem harsh and like students have little rights, the teachers and administration are responsible for the safety of all students and it is better to eliminate any possible threats. I also feel like the consistency with the zero tolerance policies sets up clear limitations for the students and they are informed of the punishment that they would face if they violated a zero tolerance rule. In my opinion this helps decrease the number of violations

because the consequences have been established. Like many things it is hard to establish a policy that everyone agrees with, but when the safety of a child is in jeopardy I would rather be proactive than reactive.

References

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