Zero Tolerance Or Zero Common Sense?

Apr. 23, 2003

Parents are laughing at the intolerance of the zero tolerance rules that have been instituted in so many public schools. Laughing, that is, unless it is their own sons who are victimized by policies that seem to lack common sense.
It's a serious matter when a good kid is expelled from school, suspended, or sent to a detention facility to take classes with real delinquents. Here are some recent examples of how the zero tolerance hatchet is wielded in public schools.

A first grader at Struthers Elementary school in Youngstown, OH, was suspended for ten days for taking a plastic knife home from the school cafeteria in his book bag. The six-year-old wasn't threatening anyone; he just wanted to show his mother he had learned how to spread butter on his bread.

A third grader at O'Rourke Elementary School in Mobile, AL, was given a five-day suspension for violating the substance abuse policy after classmates reported that he took a "purple pill." His offense was taking a multivitamin with his lunch.

At LaSalle Middle School in Greeley, CO, three 13-year-old boys were given one-year suspensions because one of the students brought to school a key chain from which dangled a 2-1/2-inch laser pointer. The school called it a "firearm facsimile" and sent one of the boys (a good student who had never before been in trouble) to an alternative program where he is taking classes with young criminals and juvenile delinquents in "anger management," "conflict resolution" and gangs.

Four kindergartners at Wilson Elementary School in Sayreville, NJ, were suspended for three days for playing a make-believe game of cops and robbers during recess, using their fingers as guns. This case is now before the Third Circuit Court of Appeals.

When seven 4th-grade boys (who had never previously been in trouble) at Dry Creek Elementary School in Colorado were discovered pointing "finger guns" at each other while playing a game of soldiers and aliens during recess, the principal found them in violation of the school's zero tolerance policy. After quizzing them about whether their parents owned guns, she required them to serve a one-week detention during lunchtime, sitting in the hall where they were teased and taunted by other students.

An eight-year-old at South Elementary school in Jonesboro, AR, was punished with detention for pointing a chicken strip at another student in the cafeteria while saying "pow, pow, pow."

A seven-year-old at the Edgewood Independent School District in San Antonio, TX, was banished for eleven days to an "alternative school" for troubled students when he was caught bringing a pocket knife to school. For three days, he was the only first grader at the facility among older students guilty of serious offenses.

A 12-year-old at Magoffin Middle School in El Paso stuck out his tongue at a girl who declined his invitation to be his girlfriend. School administrators called this sexual harassment and suspended him for three days.

When the Fred A. Anderson Elementary School in Bayboro, NC, held a Camouflage Day, a nine-year-old proudly came in his new duck-hunting outfit. His joy was smashed when the teacher discovered an empty shotgun shell in his pocket left over from a weekend outing with his father, and punished the straight-A kid with a five-day suspension.

In Hurst, Texas, a 16-year-old honor student was expelled from high school after a security guard found a butter knife in the bed of his pickup truck parked on the school grounds. The knife apparently fell out of a box of household items he and his father had transported the previous day from his grandmother's home to a local Goodwill store.

School officials claimed that the butter knife was a danger to other students and placed him in a disciplinary alternative school for five days.

Two eight-year-old boys who pointed paper guns at classmates in Irvington, NJ were charged with "making terrorist threats." A judge ultimately dismissed their case, but the incident may remain on court records until the boys are 18.

In a North Carolina pre-school called Kids Gym Schoolhouse, the state evaluator deducted five points from its high rating because plastic soldiers were found in the play area. The toys were said to "reflect stereotyping and violence and can be potentially dangerous if children use them to act out violent themes."

Zero tolerance is not protecting us from terrorists or criminals. It is making good kids disrespect school authorities.

Almost all zero tolerance rulings punish boys. Boys are also the victims of the current fad to eliminate recess and build new schools without playgrounds.

It's beginning to look as though these fads can't be mere stupidity. By banning games boys like to play and preventing them from running off their excess energy during recess, this nonsense may be part of the feminist agenda to try to make little boys behave like little girls.