The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Lack of Discipline in Schools is the Problem

By John and Andy Schlafly

November 21, 2023

Students are not showing up in public school today, as attendance is no longer desired by parents. Many public schools have become places of indoctrination by the Left, or downright dangerous to attend.

No one can continue to blame this on Covid-19, when schools shut down. Absenteeism is severe long after the pandemic subsided, as in Nevada where more than a third of the students are chronically absent.

Only 42% of American adults are reportedly satisfied with schools, a 20-year low. Disillusionment with costly higher education is increasing and that may have a spillover effect on attitudes toward secondary education too.

This disappearance of students in classrooms is not merely a few teenagers skipping out for some fun, which is not new. Elementary students who need to be learning fundamental skills during that period of their life are not being taken to school.

Just five years ago only 7% of elementary public schools had chronic absenteeism by 30% of students. But in 2021-22, the percentage of the elementary public schools having chronic absenteeism shot up to 38%.

Last month the *New York Times* reported that the schools run by the Department of Defense for about 66,000 children of service members have been doing better than public schools in all 50 states, as measured by the widely followed National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam. Most of these schools are on American military bases.

The Department of Defense Education Activity schools were first in our nation on the NAEP reading and math assessments in 2022. These schools were the only state or jurisdiction to show an increase in performance in any grade or subject that year.

The U.S. Army has a larger minority population than America as a whole: 46% compared with 40%. The outperformance by secondary schools on military bases compared with other public schools is due to better discipline.

A total of 45% of students in these Department of Defense secondary schools are in low-income families, which is higher than the national average of 38%. Moreover, one-third of

the children in military families move each year due to transfers of their parents, which is a hardship.

The military knows how to discipline its members, without permitting bad behavior until expulsion becomes necessary. Corporal punishment, such as swatting a misbehaving student, was allowed nationwide by the U.S. Supreme Court for public schools in *Ingraham v. Wright* (1977), yet states outside the South ban it.

In public schools 77% of teachers are female today, in sharp contrast with how our military is run. The overwhelming percentage of those public school teachers are liberal and opposed to any physical punishment of any kind for bad conduct.

Studies show that physical penalties for misbehavior are not any more harmful than other forms of punishment, such as repeated yelling. Many of the same students who are violent toward other students and teachers also play in violent sports like football, which create a far greater risk of injury to them than any physical discipline would.

Bringing back sensible discipline to public schools is way overdue, and would be a better focus of the never-ending special sessions in Texas where Gov. Greg Abbott just called for a record-breaking fourth legislative session on education. Even if vouchers for private schools were to pass there, the vast majority of students would remain in declining, undisciplined public schools.

A third of teachers encounter threats by students annually, yet effective punishment is not allowed. Instead, liberals are permissive about misconduct until violence occurs, and even then sometimes fail to impose appropriate penalties.

While forbidding any meaningful discipline, public schools ultimately expel students but only after an egregious rampage. The single biggest reason for the increase in homeschooling is a fear by parents for the safety of their children in public schools.

Yet rather than restore order in schools, the failed approach of Vice President Kamala Harris while she was the district attorney for San Francisco was to prosecute parents for truancy, the outdated criminalizing of non-attendance at school. When she campaigned for California attorney general she promoted enacting a state law to punish parents when their children missed more than 10% of public school.

“We are putting parents on notice. If you fail to take responsibility for your kids, we are going to make sure that you face the full force and consequences of the law,” Harris threatened parents.

Harris, Biden, and the entire Democrat Party pander to teachers unions who should be blamed for turning schools into dens of crime, drugs, and liberal ideology. A study by the libertarian Cato Institute during Covid showed that delaying the reopening of schools was not based on valid concerns about the virus and safety, but on how powerful the regional teachers unions were.

John and Andy Schlafly are sons of Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016) and lead the continuing Phyllis Schlafly Eagles organizations with writing and policy work.