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Comptroller's Office Reviews Corporal Punishment in Tennessee Schools

The Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) has released a new report on corporal punishment in Tennessee public schools, including an analysis of its use for students with disabilities. The report was requested by members of the Tennessee General Assembly in July 2017.

Corporal punishment refers to paddling, spanking, or other forms of physical punishment imposed on a student.

The Comptroller's Office reviewed 148 school board policies in Tennessee and determined that 109 districts have a policy which allows corporal punishment. Most of these policies are similar to one another and leave discretion to the principal, assistant principal, or teacher who administers corporal punishment.

Researchers examined federal and state laws, local school board policies, interviewed school and district personnel, surveyed principals and directors of schools, and analyzed available data on corporal punishment use.

OREA's analysis showed:

- The use of corporal punishment varies in districts where it is allowed. In the 2013-14 school year, 907 schools were located in districts allowing corporal punishment. Of those 907 schools, 40 percent reported using it to discipline students.
- Students with disabilities received corporal punishment at a higher statewide rate than students without disabilities for two of the three most recent reporting years.
- The number of students with disabilities receiving corporal punishment declined from 2009-10 to 2013-14, but not as much as the decline for students without disabilities. There were about seven percent fewer students with disabilities who received corporal punishment in 2013-14 than in 2009-10, while the number of students without disabilities receiving corporal punishment declined by about 46 percent across the same time frame.
- Of the schools that used corporal punishment for students with and without disabilities, about 80 percent used corporal punishment at a higher rate for students with disabilities in all three reporting years.

The report includes policy considerations for the General Assembly and school leaders. OREA has also created a supplemental appendix of all schools that reported using corporal punishment in one or more of the last three reporting years, including the number of students with and without disabilities who received corporal punishment and the corresponding rates of use.

To read the report and view the supplemental appendix, please visit OREA's website at:

<http://comptroller.tn.gov/orea/>

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