

# The Protecting our Students in Schools Act

Background, History, & Path Forward



**Blair Wriston**

Senior Manager,  
Government Affairs,  
EdTrust

1 Corporal Punishment in America

---

2 History of POSSA

---

3 Current State of Play

---

4 Next Steps

# About EdTrust

EdTrust is a national nonprofit based in Washington, DC

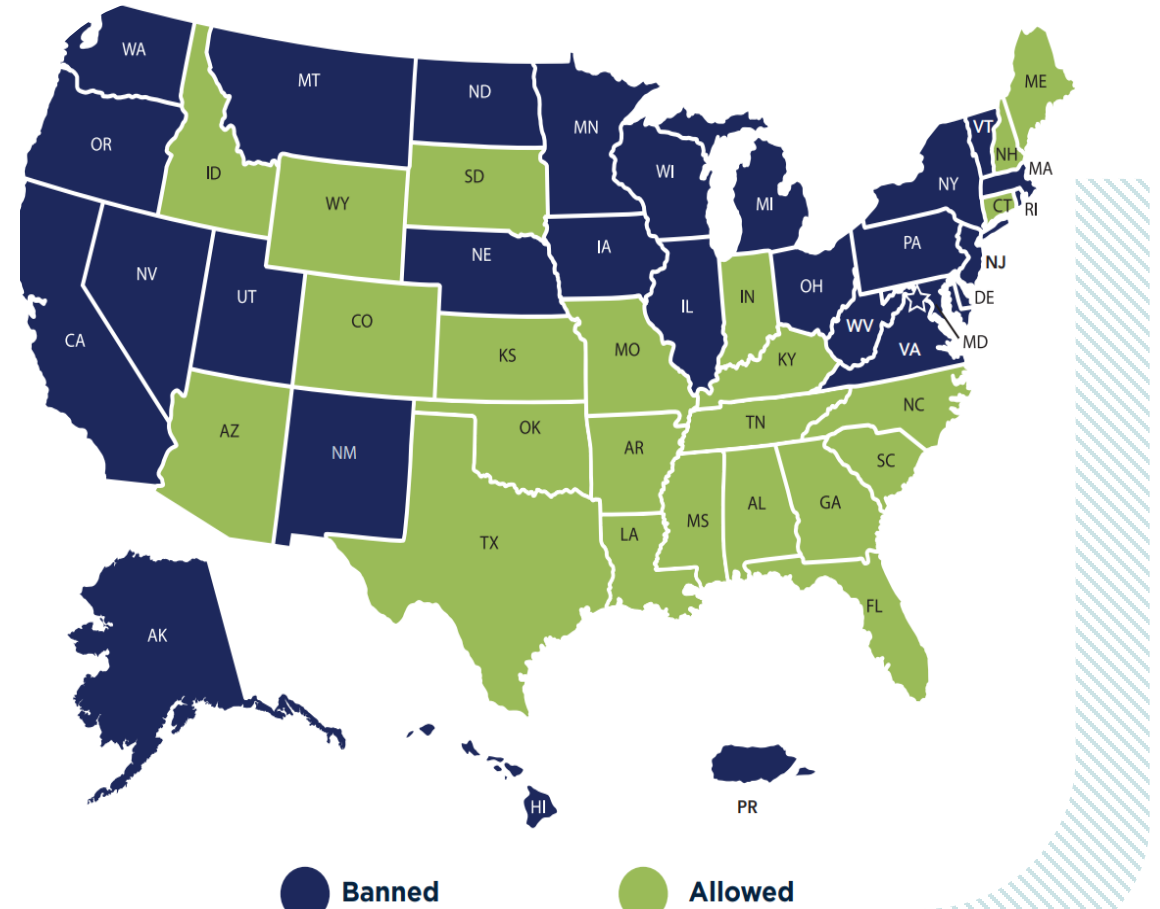
*“EdTrust is committed to advancing policies and practices to dismantle the racial and economic barriers embedded in the American education system. Through our research and advocacy, EdTrust improves equity in education from preschool through college, engages diverse communities dedicated to education equity and justice, and increases political and public will to build an education system where students will thrive”*

Active in 10 states, including CA, DE, KY, LA, MD, MA, MI, NY, TN, and TX

The screenshot shows the EdTrust website homepage. At the top, the EdTrust logo is on the left, and navigation links for 'Research, Tools & Insights', 'Blog', 'Press Room', 'Jobs & Internships', 'About', and 'Campaigns' are on the right. A red 'Donate' button is also present. Below the navigation is a search bar and a 'Contact' button. The main content area features a teal banner with the text: 'EdTrust has a bold vision for the ideal education system. Imagine with us for #EduReimagined!' and a 'Learn More' button. To the right of this text are four images: a young boy smiling, a girl writing at a desk, a girl with a backpack, and a graduate in a cap and gown. Below this is a red banner with the text: 'Committed to advancing policies and practices to dismantle the racial and economic barriers embedded in the American education system' and the tagline 'Equity-Driven • Data-Centered • Student-Focused'. The bottom section is titled 'Research, Tools & Insights' and includes a 'Browse Our Resources' button. Below this are several filter buttons for 'Students We Serve', 'P-12', 'Higher Education', 'Advocacy', 'Education Equity', and 'Social, Emotional and Academic Development'. At the bottom, there are three images showing students and a man in a suit talking to a woman.

# Corporal Punishment in America

- 28 states, DC, and PR ban corporal punishment in schools
  - Only 5 states also ban in private schools: IL, IA, MD, NJ, and NY
  - 22 states either, “expressly allow corporal punishment in at least some circumstances or does not expressly prohibit it”
- Most students who receive corporal punishment are in southern states, particularly AL, AR, MS, and TX
- Roughly 70,000 students received corporal punishment, per 2017-18 CRDC
  - Black students 2.3x more likely to receive corporal punishment
  - Students with disabilities also overrepresented



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, March 2023



*The practice of corporal punishment is antithetical to positive child and adolescent development and school safety... Schools should be safe places where all students and educators interact in positive ways that foster students' growth, belonging, and dignity—not places that teach or exacerbate violence and fear.*

**- Miguel Cardona, U.S. Secretary of Education**

[HOME](#) / [LAWS AND POLICY](#) / [EDUCATION POLICY](#) / [KEY POLICY LETTERS SIGNED BY THE EDUCATION SECRETARY OR DEPUTY SECRETARY](#)

### March 24, 2023 - Letter from Secretary Cardona calling for an end to corporal punishment in schools

---

March 24, 2023

Dear Governors, Chief State School Officers, and School District and School Leaders:

Our nation's schools should make every effort to provide children and youth with safe and supportive environments that protect and enhance their physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Unfortunately, some schools continue to put the mental and physical well-being of students at risk by implementing the practice of corporal punishment,<sup>1</sup> defined by the U.S. Department of Education (Department) as the practice of paddling, spanking, or otherwise imposing physical punishment on students.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, if the use of corporal punishment is permitted or practiced in schools and educational settings within your state or district, I urge you to move swiftly toward condemning and eliminating it.

Laws in a majority of states and the District of Columbia ban the use of corporal punishment in public schools,<sup>3</sup> and other states have prohibited the use of corporal punishment for students with disabilities.<sup>4</sup> According to the Department's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), the number of public school students subjected to corporal punishment declined between the 2013-14 to the 2017-18 school years.<sup>5</sup> However, the use of corporal punishment in school is either expressly allowed or not expressly prohibited in 23 states.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, researchers have determined that the use of corporal punishment in schools is likely underreported.<sup>7</sup>

Corporal punishment can lead to serious physical pain and injury.<sup>8</sup> It is also associated with higher rates of

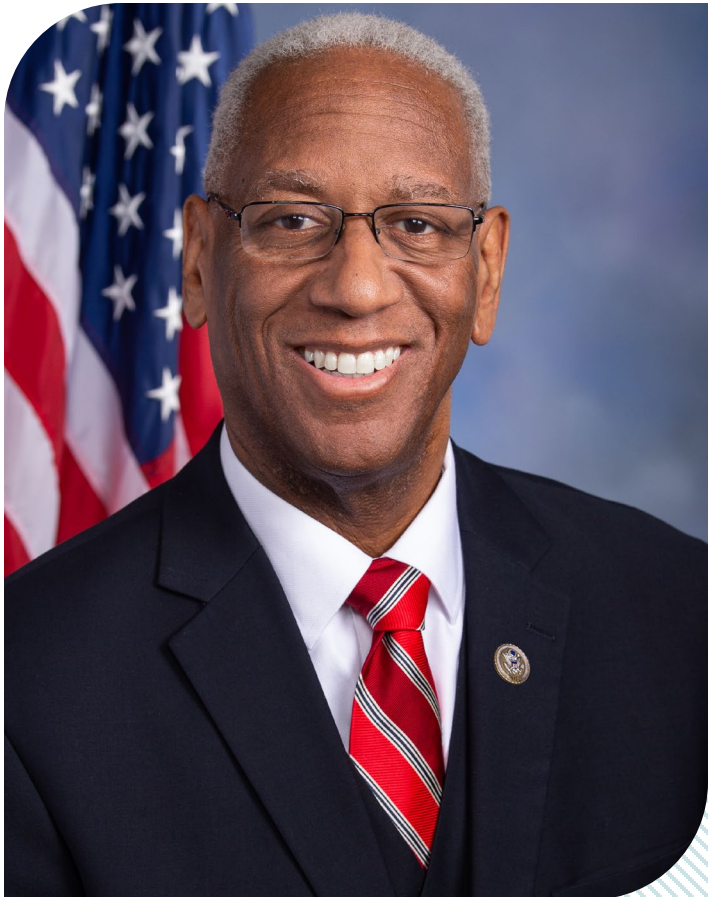
**Related Content**

- June 18, 2024- Joint Letter from Secretary Cardona and Secretary Blinken regarding World Refugee Day
- June 18, 2024- Joint Letter from Secretary Cardona and Secretary Blinken regarding World Refugee Day.
- March 15, 2024- Letter from Secretary Cardona to Presidents, Chancellors, and CEOs on 2024-25 FAFSA processing updates
- Letter from Secretary Cardona to Presidents, Chancellors, and CEOs on 2024-25 FAFSA processing updates.
- April 9, 2024- Letter from Secretary Cardona to schools regarding the Better FAFSA Rollout
- Letter from Secretary Cardona to schools regarding the Better FAFSA Rollout.

APRIL 9, 2024



# The Protecting our Students in Schools Act



## First introduced in 116<sup>th</sup> Congress

- Originally led by the late Rep. A. Donald McEachin & Sen. Murphy
- 8 House cosponsors and 0 Senate cosponsors

## As of 118<sup>th</sup> Congress

- Led by Rep. Bonamici & Sen. Murphy
- 49 House cosponsors and 7 Senate cosponsors

# POSSA Cont.

Supported by more than 70 national, state, and local groups, including:

- NEA; AFT; PTA; NAACP; ACLU; and many more
- To see if your organization is listed as supportive, check the following: [Bonamici](#) Press Release or [Murphy](#) Press Release
- For more information, or to add your organization, contact:
  - Allie Pearce, Legislative Assistant for Rep. Bonamici, [allie.pearce@mail.house.gov](mailto:allie.pearce@mail.house.gov)
  - Pete Mills, Legislative Assistant for Sen. Murphy, [pete\\_mills@murphy.senate.gov](mailto:pete_mills@murphy.senate.gov)

## REPS. BONAMICI, MCBATH, MOORE, WILSON, SEN. MURPHY LEAD BILL TO END CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN SCHOOLS

May 23, 2023 | [Press Release](#)

WASHINGTON, DC [05/23/23] – Today Representatives Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), Lucy McBath (D-GA), Gwen Moore (D-WI), and Frederica Wilson (D-FL) and Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) introduced legislation to prohibit the practice of corporal punishment in any school that receives federal funding.

The Protecting Our Students in Schools Act of 2023 would establish a series of important protections for students and families and create a federal grant program for states and school districts to improve school climate and culture.

Corporal punishment, the act of inflicting physical pain as a form of discipline, can result in serious injury with long-term negative consequences. Physical injuries have included abrasions, broken bones, bruising, hematomas, and other medical complications. Psychologically, corporal punishment can cause depression, anxiety, anti-social behavior, and make students more likely to have mental health problems as adults. Research overwhelmingly shows that corporal punishment in schools does not lead to improvements in student behavior; instead it is linked to poor academic performance, physical and emotional harm, and damage to students' self-esteem and trust of educators.

"Schools should be safe places for students to learn and grow without fear," **said Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici.** "It is alarming and unacceptable that corporal punishment is still allowed in nearly half of the states in our nation. Corporal punishment in schools is an unjustifiable, outdated, and draconian practice that leaves children with lasting physical and psychological damage and disproportionately harms Black students and students with disabilities. I'm grateful to lead the Protecting Our Students in Schools Act with Reps. McBath, Moore, Wilson and Sen. Murphy to finally end corporal punishment and promote healthy learning environments that value the physical, mental, and academic wellbeing of students."

# Plan of Action

## 1. Reintroduction

- Maintain current cosponsors
- Grow organizational support

## 3. Committee Action

- Hearing on school climate
- Markup on POSSA, at a minimum

## 2. Grow Support

- Double congressional support in both Chambers
- Make it Bipartisan\*\*\*

## 4. Passage

- Move as standalone
- Attach prohibition to another vehicle



# Next Steps

1. Add your organization
2. Reach out to your U.S. Senator and/or Representative
3. Encourage committee action
4. Join advocacy push



March 22, 2023

Dear Federal, State, and Local Policymakers:

On behalf of The Education Trust, the National Women's Law Center, and the more than 100 undersigned organizations, we call on federal, state, and local policymakers to eliminate the shameful practice of corporal punishment in our nation's schools. Corporal punishment in schools is not only abhorrent, harmful, and ineffective, but it is also disproportionately applied to students of color and students with disabilities. Instead of perpetuating violence against our nation's children and youth, we urge policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels to end the practice of corporal punishment in our nation's schools and ensure that all students can learn in a safe, supportive, and healthy environment.

Corporal punishment in schools refers to the act of inflicting physical pain on a student's body for the purpose of discipline, including striking, paddling, spanking, and other forms of physical violence. Although the practice of corporal punishment in schools has continued to decline over the last decade, more than 98,000 students across preschool and K-12 schools received corporal punishment according to the 2017-18 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).<sup>1</sup> Corporal punishment is an allowable form of school discipline in 23 states, with 99% of all instances occurring in 10 states—Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, Oklahoma, Georgia, Tennessee, Missouri, Florida, and Louisiana—and 75% of all cases occurring in just four states—Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, and Alabama.<sup>2</sup> Corporal punishment in schools is often employed for a variety of minor, subjective, and arbitrary infractions, including dress and hair code violations, talking in class, tardiness, truancy, poor academic performance, and more.<sup>3</sup> Although corporal punishment in schools is legal in some states, it is often banned in other settings, such as day care programs, mental health facilities, penal institutions, and more.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, corporal punishment of *adults* has been banned in U.S. prisons and military training facilities.<sup>5</sup> Allowing the practice of corporal punishment to continue in our nation's classrooms is a colossal failure of leadership.

The science is abundantly clear: corporal punishment is both ineffective and deeply harmful. Corporal punishment in schools not only fails to decrease disciplinary infractions in the classroom, but it can actually result in more aggressive, defiant, and oppositional student behavior.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, corporal punishment in schools significantly harms a student's physical and emotional health. In addition to causing serious physical injury, including broken bones, bruising, abrasions, and other serious medical complications, corporal punishment can have a significant impact on a student's mental health and

# Contact

Blair Wriston, Senior Manager,  
Government Affairs

- [Bwriston@edtrust.org](mailto:Bwriston@edtrust.org)

