

Striking out

Techniques used by teachers during pay disputes do little but hurt children

This past week, the longest teacher strike documented in the history of Washington state came to an end after being ordered to return to work by a judge. The teachers were on strike for seven weeks, delaying the start of school for more than 11,000 students in the Lake Stevens area. The teachers drew their picket line in protest of their current salaries and benefits, even though they are teaching in one of the top paid districts in the state and country. The teachers wanted a 7 percent increase over the next three years; they were offered a 3 percent increase and refused to settle for this.



LAUREN ESPOSITO

What the teachers do not realize, or do not care to see, is that they are not gaining anything by striking. While it's true that teachers earn less than they should, strikes only hurt the students teachers are there to teach and help. Teachers must find another, more mature way to get their concerns across, one that does not leave innocent children in limbo.

The consequences of teacher strikes are far reaching. Seniors miss out on opportunities to apply for scholarships and colleges; sports teams are unable to compete because school is not in session, and children lose that classic first day of school they've looked forward to all summer. The children's parents, who have

to come up with seven more weeks of child care or activities to keep their children occupied, suffer a financial and mental strain as well.

Simply put: There are no winners.

The teachers may win a salary increase, or more benefits, but at what cost? Children miss days of school, extracurricular activities and time with friends, and the only thing they learn from the strike is how to whine and pout and disregard responsibilities to get their way.

Law requires a 180-day school year. The students have already missed more than 35 of these class days because of the teachers' childishness. One wonders when those days can be made up. The students and families should not have to suffer because the teachers they relied on decided not to do their jobs.

"Based upon common law

of this state, strikes by public employees are illegal. There is no express or explicit statutory right for teachers to strike," said

Washington state Superior Court Judge Joan Dubuque. Public employees cannot strike, and that is what teachers are: public employees. It is amazing that they could carry on a strike for seven weeks and not have any outstanding repercussions.

Although dually noted and documented, the strikes by teachers in many states have no real consequences for the teachers themselves.

A few states are beginning to change this, though. Currently in New York, teachers are docked two days pay for every day missed while on strike. Some districts in other states are now beginning to file unfair labor practice complaints and order local, regional and state union offices to pay a fine of \$100 per teacher per day of strike. Other states should follow these exam-

ples to make sure that pay disputes involving teachers do not have dire effects on innocent third parties.

A day of strike may not harm students too much — and no student ever complains about a day off — but when the strike drags on for weeks, the lives of students are disrupted. It could even be said that a seven-week strike, and essentially the loss of those seven weeks of education, could be charges of irreparable harm to a minor.

A teacher becomes a teacher to help and educate students so they become helpful and productive citizens of society. With a frivolous strike for more money that lasts an extended and unnecessary time, the teachers are only teaching their students to be selfish, no matter what the true basis behind the strike is.

Teachers have a huge responsibility and should be paid more than what the average teacher makes, but they should go about obtaining pay increases in an adult manner. The teachers need to remember why they are teachers in the first place and put their students above a slight pay increase. Frankly, people do not go into the field of teaching thinking that they are going to make millions; they go into it to make a difference in a child's life.

Lauren Esposito is a senior English major.



GRACIE ARENAS • THE BATTALION

Zero-tolerance policies excessively harsh

Following violent incidents in schools, school districts around the country have implemented zero-tolerance policies among other countermeasures to tend to the increasing need for safety in schools. Safety is and should be a primary concern for school officials, and zero-tolerance approaches seem a reasonable and predictable investment. However, these policies are losing touch with reality and do more harm than good.

Initially meant to reduce the prevalence of weapons in schools, the policies now sometimes include long and detailed lists of prohibited behaviors. Now, children are treated as if they are the next ring leaders of terrorist plots for drawing pictures, joking with classmates and simply being kids. However, nothing draws more attention to the approach than its inability to distinguish between situations that warrant punishment and those that do not.

An eighth-grader named Christina Lough from Katy, Texas, was disciplined by her school in early October after being caught with a pencil sharpener that violated the school's zero-tolerance policy on weapons. The sharpener consisted of a two inch blade and is traditionally used in Christina's native Korea. In addition to being sanctioned to a special disciplinary class for seven days, the straight-A student was removed as president of the student council and honor society, according to The Houston Chronicle.

Regardless of how school officials try to sugarcoat it, a perfectly honorable and dedicated student has been labeled and punished by her own school. The policy went so far as to not even acknowledge the utensil as part of a cultural heritage, and



CHRIS LIVELY

then demoted the girl as if she was acting in a criminal or negligent way.

One cannot forget the 1997 incident in which a 10-year-old girl was expelled from school in Longmont, Colo., after turning in a knife that her mom had left for her to cut an apple. Had it not been for national attention and public outcry, the girl would have not been let back in school. Incidents like these demonstrate the ruthless tendency of blind policy to subject undeserving students to far-fetched punishments.

Even when punishment is justified, it is often too harsh. Some students could simply be slapped on their wrists for minor infractions and then reinstated into the normal classrooms. Not anymore. The days of going to the principal's office are over. Most of the infractions prohibited by schools today result in expulsion.

Once expelled, children are at best put in alternative schools and sometimes suffer harsh blows to their academic careers and integrity. Many kids are going to feel like juvenile delinquents. In years past, many behaviors outlawed in schools were simply handled by the schools. Now, it is like the three strikes-you're-out rule, but worse — it is one strike.

Children are going to make mistakes, but they should not have to suffer consequences to their educational aspirations, especially after only one fault. The penalties that accompany these policies are often too strict and, in cases such as Christina's, completely unnecessary.

School is a place for students not only to learn but to develop their personalities and behaviors. With policies like these, they are

not trusted by their mentors. Schools have turned into prisons, randomly searching students and lockers, monitoring their every move, and potentially derailing their educational experience. It is as if every student is labeled a criminal for simply setting foot in what should be a haven for support and guidance.

Zero-tolerance policies disregard cases individually and create one category for their alleged violators. This is not the way it should be. The systematic and value-free approach is just another indication of the inhuman and robot-like means the country has adopted to more efficiently deal with certain situations. If schools want to steer clear of treating students on an individual and personal level, then they should at least take a cost-saving initiative and buy machines to do the job for them.

Principals and administrators have rational and compassionate capacities for reason. They should use them, especially when dealing with the most delicate and developing segment of the population. Each situation must be evaluated individually because children are after all individuals. Zero-tolerance policies are part of a new mainstream ideology that is dehumanizing the education system and the rest of society. Further, they are leaving dedicated students vulnerable to unnecessary and often harsh punishments.

Chris Lively is a senior sociology major.

“Zero-tolerance policies disregard cases individually and create one category for their alleged violators.”

MAIL CALL

A&M has alternatives to parking

In response to David Ege's Oct. 28 column:

I think it is absurd to be upset about the parking situation. Not only does Texas A&M probably have the most parking available to students compared to most major universities, it also has superior transportation alternatives. If you can't get a parking spot, take a bus, bike, car-pool or walk. If everyone drives to class, of course, there will not be spots. On-campus residents that pay to have a reserved spot deserve it. This is their home. You have a reserved spot at home. If you went to the University of Texas you would not be driving to class.

Doyal McGee
Class 2004

Parking situation does not have easy solution

Recently The Associated Press reported that one of the largest concerns for college faculty, staff and students was parking or the lack thereof. I feel that we all can agree

that parking is a common nuisance for all. Each day, many parking areas are filled by 9 a.m. and I have adjusted by arriving significantly earlier than my class schedule requires. For many others this is not reasonable.

I agree with David Ege, there most likely are enough parking spaces on campus to satisfy current demands. I do not believe there is a single solution to the problem but possibly a committee could be formed by the administration to assess the situation. Many other large universities have developed unique and creative solutions, some of which might work here. For example, park-and-ride lots are commonly used elsewhere and Reed Arena stays quite vacant daily.

I just want to know that something is happening to help solve this problem, because the student body at A&M is not getting any smaller.

Leaf Erickson
Graduate Student

On-campus students need reserved spots

Those of us who live on campus do exactly that, we live here on campus. For those people who have a blue permit, I understand your

frustration in finding a space when commuting to class, but you also have a spot to park when you return to your house or apartment. The garage spots that are used so "inefficiently" are the equivalent of an apartment parking space or one's driveway for students on campus. Would an off-campus resident not be upset to return home and find another vehicle in his parking place, even if it is more efficient? I pay for a garage spot because of its many benefits and want to keep them.

Jared Briggs
Class of 2005

Attending yell not football players' jobs

In response to an Oct. 28 mail call:

It is ridiculous for any member of the Twelfth Man to expect the team to attend the after game yell practice. The football team does its job by playing the game to the best of its ability and to represent Texas A&M on the field. Our job is off the field, yelling our hearts out to try and intimidate the other team. They have no responsibility to stay after

the game for yell, and for you to demand them to do so is absurd.

These boys are more Aggie than the majority of the students here and they bust their butts week in and week out trying to do the best they can. Respect them for that and

let them do their jobs.

You do yours, which is yell.

Charles Falgout
Class of 2003

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebattalion.net

