

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Professor Sommers begins the video by stating, “Being a normal boy is a serious liability in today’s classroom,” because, “As psychologist Michael Thompson has aptly observed: ‘Girls behavior is the gold standard in schools. Boys are treated like defective girls.’” Why do you think that this is the case? How did this condition come to be so pervasive in schools across the country? Isn’t this an example of why kids should NOT be treated the same in schools and held to the same set of expectations? Why or why not?
- Professor Sommers shares with us Justin’s story: “An alarmed teacher summoned his parents to school to discuss the picture the 8-year-old had drawn of a sword fight – which included several decapitated heads. The teacher expressed grave “concern” about Justin’s “values.” The boy’s father was astonished, not by his son’s drawing which to him was typical boy stuff, but by the teacher’s overwrought – and femal-centered – reaction.” How does this anecdote support Professor Sommers’ main point? In what ways was the teacher wrong in handling this situation? Do you think the teacher was qualified to judge what Justin’s ‘values’ were, and was she right to compare them to her standard? Wasn’t her reaction sexist? Why or why not?
- Professor Sommers points out that, “Boys need to work off their energy. They need to be free to play games they enjoy. And keeping them cooped up inside all day will not help them learn.” Considering that this reality is well-documented and proven, why don’t more schools accommodate what is in the best interest of boys, especially in regards to their learning? We learn that, “...since the 1970s, schoolchildren have lost close to 50% of their unstructured outdoor playtime.” Why do you think that this is the case? How much do you think that the egregious overemphasis on standardized testing has to do with this? What do you think should be done as a corrective measure? How can our society get schools in general to change their value systems to better serve male students?
- Professor Sommers teaches us that, “As our schools become more feelings centered, more competition-free, more sedentary, they move further away from the needs of boys, “ and that as a consequence, “Boys are languishing academically, while girls are prospering;” that, “Compared with girls, boys earn lower grades, win fewer honors [and] ...are far less likely to go to college.” Why is this so important to recognize? What are the short-term consequences for boys and their families? Why do you think more schools don’t acknowledge this reality and take corrective action?
- Professor Sommers warns us that, “In an ever more knowledge-based economy, this [treating boys as defective girls] is not a recipe for a successful society,” and that, “We need to reverse the boy-averse trends. Male underachievement is everyone’s concern. These are our sons. These are the young men with whom our daughters will build a future. If boys are in trouble, so are we all.” How can these boy-averse trends be reversed? What are the long-term consequences if they aren’t?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Pop Tart Gun

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Md. state board upholds boy’s suspension in pastry gun case,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What did the child in this case do? The state board concluded that, “The student in this case had a long history of behavioral problems that were the subject of progressive intervention by the school.” Do you think that the other ‘incidents’ were likely similar to this one? If so, wouldn’t this case support Professor Sommers’ main point?
- What case is the school district attempting to make? From what is presented in the article, do you think the school district’s case has any merit? Why or why not?
- The boy’s family argues that, “...Anne Arundel school officials misapplied disciplinary policy because there was no disruption to the classroom,” and that, “... the decision was contrary to good educational policy and that the child was simply being a mischievous 7-year-old.” Do you think that even the boy’s family got it wrong in characterizing his behavior with the Pop Tart ‘mischievous?’ Why or why not? Do you think that this school is applying the wrong standard and set of expectations onto this boy (and likely others)? Why or why not? Do you believe that the boy should be punished at all for what he did? Why or why not? In the end, do you believe that the school took appropriate punitive measures against the boy? How do you think that this incident will affect the boy long term?



QUIZ

WAR ON BOYS

1. Boys tend to be:

- a. Calm and organized.
- b. Disorganized and restless.
- c. Hyper Vigilant.
- d. Violent.

2. Boys are treated like _____ in school.

- a. Young men
- b. Girls
- c. Defective girls
- d. Adults

3. To help boys get into reading, they should read:

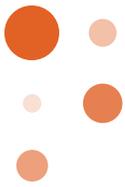
- a. Books that interest them, like comics and Guinness Book of Records.
- b. Little House on the Prairie.
- c. Fiction and poetry.
- d. Subtitles on TV.

4. Boys account for nearly _____ of suspensions, often for minor acts of insubordination.

- a. 50%
- b. 75%
- c. 60%
- d. 70%

5. True or False: Much loved games in schools, like dodgeball, have all but disappeared because they are now perceived as too violent or damaging to self esteem.

- a. True
- b. False



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/md-state-board-upholds-boys-suspension-in-pastry-gun-case/2015/03/04/782b412e-c1db-11e4-ad5c-3b8ce89f1b89_story.html

[Education](#)

Md. state board upholds boy's suspension in pastry gun case

By [Donna St. George](#) March 5

The Maryland State Board of Education upheld the suspension of [a boy who chewed his breakfast pastry into the shape of a gun](#), saying the punishment was warranted because of the disruption and other previous misconduct.

The decision, which a lawyer for the family said he would appeal to a circuit court, is the latest development in what has been called “the Pop-Tart case,” which gained national attention in 2013 at a time of widespread rethinking of discipline practices in public schools. Other states have since cited the Maryland case in proposing [Pop-Tart gun bills](#) that limit student suspensions for imaginary weapons.

The eight-page state opinion, dated Feb. 24, recounts the child's string of troubles at Park Elementary School in Anne Arundel County, Md.

“The student in this case had a long history of behavioral problems that were the subject of progressive intervention by the school,” the state board concluded. “He created a classroom disruption on March 1, 2013, which resulted in a suspension that was justified based on the incident in question and the student's history.”

The child at the center of the case was 7 years old and in second grade in 2013, when he nibbled his breakfast pastry into a gun shape and exclaimed, “Look, I made a gun!” He aimed the pastry at other students at their desks and in a nearby hallway.

Robin Ficker, attorney for the child's parents, said the boy was being playful and did not injure or frighten anyone the day he was suspended. The family has asked that the incident be cleared from the child's school record, saying that it unfairly tarnishes him with a gun-related offense.

“We're disappointed but not surprised,” Ficker said. “We're going to appeal to the court, as we said we would.”

Bob Mosier, spokesman for Anne Arundel schools, described the state decision as “a validation of what we have said all along.”

“It’s been about a student with a long history of disciplinary issues and a school that has gone to every conceivable length to assist that student with those issues,” Mosier said.

School officials have argued that the two-day suspension came as a last resort following repeated problems and that it was not about a gun or a pastry. Ficker has pointed out that the word “gun” is used four times on a discipline referral form and has said that the child meant no harm. A [hearing examiner recommended upholding](#) the suspension, and the Anne Arundel [Board of Education supported that view](#).

The state opinion noted that local school boards have the final say in suspension cases unless the local board allegedly failed to follow law, policies or procedures; violated a student’s due process rights; or acted in an unconstitutional manner.

The boy’s parents, through their attorney, have argued that Anne Arundel school officials misapplied disciplinary policy because there was no disruption to the classroom.

But the state board cited the teacher’s testimony that the instructional day had begun, with students working in journals while finishing their breakfasts. The state board wrote that the outburst “constitutes classroom disruption in that it interfered with instruction, learning and an orderly school environment.”

The parents also unsuccessfully argued that the child’s due process rights were violated, alleging [Anne Arundel’s school board](#) “rubber-stamped” the report of a hearing examiner without conducting its own review of the case or calling more witnesses.

The boy’s family also argued that the decision was contrary to good educational policy and that the child was simply being a mischievous 7-year-old. The state board said that claim went beyond its scope of review.

The 2013 incident dates to [a period of heightened sensitivity to guns](#) after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. The boy’s punishment was one of several D.C.-area suspensions involving imaginary or toy guns.



Donna St. George writes about education, with an emphasis on Montgomery County schools.