

# CENTRALIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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TO: Dean Sorenson  
FROM: Andy Pazaruski *AP*  
RE: Report on Investigation of Alleged Use of Excessive Physical Force When Disciplining Students by Mr. Lee Coumbs, Teacher, Centralia Middle School  
DATE: November 19, 1990

**INTRODUCTION:** An investigation was conducted during the week of November 12, 1990 relating to the alleged use of excessive physical force when disciplining students by Mr. Lee Coumbs, a teacher at Centralia Middle School. The investigation consisted of a review of all documentation related to the reported use of excessive physical force, an investigative conference with Mr. Brian Glaspell, Principal, Centralia Middle School, and an investigative conference with Mr. Lee Coumbs.

**FINDINGS:** There are nine (9) documented incidences of the use of physical force by Mr. Lee Coumbs when disciplining students. The timeframe for the incidences range from April 27, 1987 through November 1, 1990. During this time, Mr. Coumbs was employed both as a teacher at the Kiwanis Vocational Home School and as a teacher at Centralia Middle School. A summary of the incidences as reported are as follows:

April 27, 1987: Kiwanis Vocational Home School

Mr. Coumbs was reported to have grabbed a student by the neck and hair and marched him into another part of the building. He was also reported to have slapped a youth and pinched others.

September 8, 1989: Centralia Middle School

Mr. Coumbs was reported to have hit a student on the forehead.

November 15, 1989:

Mr. Coumbs was reported to have hit a student with a book on the back of the head.

November 17, 1989: Centralia Middle School

Mr. Coumbs was reported to have grabbed and pushed a student to the floor.

Dean Sorenson, Ph.D.  
Superintendent

Andrew Pazaruski, Ed.D.  
Assistant Superintendent

Peter Hendrickson, Ph.D.  
Curriculum Director

PCVA 003828

January 31, 1990: Centralia Middle School

Mr. Coumbs was reported to have pushed a student up against the wall in his classroom.

February 6, 1990: Centralia Middle School

An unconfirmed report indicated Mr. Coumbs had grabbed student by the neck and pushed him into the wall.

April 24, 1990: Centralia Middle School

It was reported that Mr. Coumbs grabbed a student by the neck and pushed him back into his chair.

September 28, 1990: Centralia Middle School

It was reported Mr. Coumbs pushed a student into his chair forcibly, making him remain seated.

November 1, 1990: Centralia Middle School

It was reported that Mr. Coumbs grabbed a student by the back of the neck and shoved him to the floor. He also shoved him out of his classroom into the hall.

In an attempt to verify the authenticity of these reports, an investigative conference was held with Mr. Brian Glaspell. As indicated in the attached notes, Mr. Glaspell verified that the incidences reported to have happened at his school did in fact occur. He further indicated that in each case, the teacher did not act properly, and in doing so, was not in compliance with the procedures that are in effect at Centralia Middle School regarding the use of force when disciplining students. Additionally, he stated that he warned Mr. Coumbs on several occasions about such actions in an attempt to stop Mr. Coumbs from using unnecessary physical force when dealing with students.

The investigative conference held with Mr. Coumbs on November 16, 1990 provided verification that the nine (9) reported incidences had occurred. Mr. Coumbs, by his own admission, reported that he had used physical force to discipline students on numerous occasions during his professional career, including but not limited to those that have been documented. He also stated he was fully aware of the school district's policy with regard to the use of physical force and knew he was violating the policy. Additionally, he admitted to having been warned by school administrators that such conduct was inappropriate and had to stop.

As to his explanation regarding why he has continued to use force when disciplining students, Mr. Coumbs indicated he's aware that such conduct by a teacher is not appropriate, but when students are defiant it triggers his anger and the use of physical force is the way he, on occasions, is able to regain control of his students. He admittedly

is a very emotional person who states, "I'm too soft and too tough."

During the investigative conference, Mr. Coumbs stated he is concerned about losing control when teaching, and that while he never intends to hurt students, there is a possibility it could happen. (Attached are notes from the investigative conference with Mr. Coumbs which provide a complete summary of the conference).

SUMMARY: As a result of the investigation, it has been verified that Mr. Coumbs used physical force when disciplining students. While the degree to which the physical force was used in excess cannot conclusively be determined in each reported incident, there is substantial information that indicates Mr. Coumbs has improperly engaged in the use of excessive physical force on several occasions. Additionally, he has been repeatedly advised that such conduct is not tolerable and that, should it continue, disciplinary action would result. Several attempts have been made by school administrators to correct Mr. Coumbs' conduct. He has been appraised of the appropriate procedures which are to be employed when handling student discipline problems. There is little evidence that these attempts have been successful. Through testimony given during the investigative conferences and through the review of related documents, it is clear a pattern of behavior exists that demonstrates Mr. Coumbs has a propensity for using excessive force when disciplining students.

AP/wd

Attachments:

1. April 29, 1987 Memo Regarding Counseling Report for Steve Williams
2. May 1, 1987 Memo Regarding Handling of Student Concerns
3. May 2, 1990 Letter Regarding Use of Unnecessary and Excessive Force
4. May 25, 1990 Teacher Evaluation Report
5. November 5, 1990 Memo Regarding Concerns Relating to Lee Coumbs
6. Summary Document of Alleged Use of Physical Force
7. Response to Disciplinary Incident November 1, 1990 by Lee Coumbs
8. Notes of Investigative Conference Held with Brian Glaspell on November 15, 1990
9. Notes of Investigative Conference Held with Lee Coumbs on November 16, 1990

DATE: April 29, 1987  
TO: Dave Potter and Bill Brumsickle  
FROM: Rod Hoeltzel, Ph.D. *RCH*  
SUBJECT: Counseling Session Report for Steve Williams 4/28/87

During family counseling with Steve Williams and his mother, Ms. Jan McDonough, it came to light that Steve has been handled roughly on several occasions by Lee Coumbs. (as reported by Steve).

The most recent was on 4/27/87 when Lee grabbed Steve by the neck and hair (at neck line) and marched him to another part of the building. A previous situation reported by Steve was when Lee slapped Steve in the face. Steve subsequently had to be subdued by our Youth Care Director. This slapping incident has not been previously reported by or to anyone. An additional technique used by Lee on Steve and apparently on other youth, is to pinch them on the trapezious muscle hard enough to get control over the youth.

All of these incidences were reported by Steve to Rod Hoeltzel, Ph.D., Clinical Director and Guy Cornwell, Youth Care Director.

It is my opinion that if in fact, these techniques of control are being used, they are absolutely inappropriate and a violation of the youth's rights.

This matter has been discussed with Guy Cornwell, Chuck McCarthy, Director of Kiwanis Vocational Home, and Dave Potter, K.V.H. School Principal.

My recommendation is that Mr. Potter discuss this matter with both Lee Coumbs and Bill Brumsickle, Asst. Superintendent of Centralia School District.

The mother is very angry over these reports. However, she is willing to back off if the district censures Mr. Coumbs, places a letter of reprimand in his personnel file and training in proper restraint be provided for Mr. Coumbs and the rest of the school and home staff.

It is my recommendation that the cost of this training be shared proportionately by K.V.H. and Centralia School District and that the training occur in the fall just before school starts again.