Alternate Actions for Hazing in High Schools

There are several reasons to explain high school principals’ recent responses to suspend students within their schools. One of the most common reasons in the last ten years is due to cases of hazing. Hazing can be defined as “to persecute or torture somebody in a subordinate position, for example, a fraternity pledge or a first-year military academy cadet.” (Encarta, 2003) As a result of there having been no evidence to uphold the act of suspending students for their behavior there has been some positive feedback on other means of punishing those involved in hazing.

A 16-year-old was beaten to death in 2002 after he was teased and was demanded for a club initiation. (Lifting, April 2002, p.21) Members of that club forced the 16-year-old to “consume alcohol, perform naked jumping jacks, and assume a special nickname.” After the 16-year old had done these things, he was to fight a 17-year-old who already possessed a criminal record; “the 17-year-old beat him to death.” (Lifting, April 2002)

In another case, a Louisiana family filed a $50,000 lawsuit for issues regarding hazing. (Lifting, April 2002, p.21) Allegedly, a new football player suffered a broken nose and other head injuries from being beaten in the football locker room. “In Illinois, two female students reported cheerleader hazing, alleging physical restraint, abusive behavior, and verbal abuse.” (Lifting, April 2002, p.21)

Allegations were drawn up against Coach Kevin McElroy in Mineola, New York, in September for hazing rituals on his football team following attending a preseason camp in Preston Park, Pennsylvania. When McElroy spoke for the first time publicly, he stated that “he did not know of any previous incidents of hazing on the team.” (Healy,
September 30, 2003) However, as the investigation goes on in the Long Island community of Bellmore, former teammates under the leadership of McElroy have spoken out and told tales of hazing “ranging from jocular to cruel.” (Healy, September 30, 2003)

Currently three varsity players have been suspended from school. The football season for the year has been canceled by the board of education for the school district until further notice. After the allegations had been made, victim Reichsteins, as well as his parents, attended a school board meeting to ask that McElroy as well as the high school principal resign or be fired for lack of supervision on the night of the alleged hazing. (Healy, October 2, 2003)

In one last case, female students were suspended for ten days from a suburban Chicago high school after a junior/senior “powder puff” football game. These senior students face expulsion as well as the possibility of criminal charges for injuring five junior girls. Two of the girls went to local hospitals with one suffering a broken ankle and another having stitches placed in her scalp. (Students, May 13, 2003)

According to Helen Oliff, writer for the Reader’s Digest:

There is a need for guidance around athletics, initiations, and other high school group activities to eliminate hazing. Students are drawn to hazing because they believe it brings them a sense of belonging, and it offers a means of dealing with and creating diversity. As well as having adverse effects on students, hazing has serious legal implications, with public schools both constitutionally and criminally liable for their actions, failures, or deliberate indifference to protect a student’s constitutional rights. (Lifting, April 2002, p.22)
There is a need for guidance around these activities to reduce and possibly eliminate hazing. Oliff has suggested a means of providing the guidance through “anti-hazing programs” that would involve “education, role playing, discussion of hazing, and involvement of faculty and parents in anti-hazing efforts to bring hazing under control.” (Lifting, April 2002, p.22)

There has been legislation passed in forty-three states regarding anti-hazing laws. “Hazing can be a misdemeanor or a felony (depending on the extent of the bodily harm, or death), and punishment can include expulsion from school, fines up to $5,000 or more, civil and/or criminal prosecution, and/or jail for up to one year or more.” (Lifting, April 2002, p.23) The only problems that have risen regarding these laws is the ineffectiveness due to the groups they are directed towards, and the number of states involved (or not involved). For example, students in South Carolina were not prosecuted when a case of sexual assault occurred during athletic hazing because the state hazing law applied only to fraternities and sororities, not to athletic incidents. (Lifting, April 2002) In other states the hazing laws have been quite effective. In some states, such as Connecticut and Arizona, hazing laws have led to convictions and jail time for the same type of offenses. (Lifting, April 2002)

One school in Minneapolis has hazing under control through anti-hazing programs and policies in the school.

The Roseville Area District policy manual defines hazing as committing an act against a student, or coercing a student into committing an act, that creates a substantial risk of harm to a person, in order for the student to be initiated into or affiliated with a student organization, or for any other purpose. The policy lists specific examples of hazing, such as physical brutality (whipping, beating, electronic shocking), sleep deprivation, exposure to weather, consumption of drugs or alcohol, any form of ostracism, violations of
law or school district regulations or policies, and others. (Lifting, April 2002 p.25)
Roseville, a secondary school district in Minnesota, offers information regarding a follow-up for the set policy. This information includes five outcomes that were implicated with this policy to determine punishment of the students involved in hazing occurrences as well as assessment of the students involved through the school year. This provides a means of observing the academic behavior of the students involved in the acts of hazing and to monitor the students. Every five weeks the students who were involved in committing the hazing are subject to meet with members of the school administration to report recent behaviors and how the students are progressing following the hazing. (Lifting, April 2002)

Although in many cases suspension and expulsion have been used, alternative means of punishments are being implemented and currently are producing more positive reports than those of the suspension cases. Thus suspensions and expulsion are becoming obsolete.
Bibliography


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