

Alumni defend paddling at Catholic school

Andrew Vanacore | The Times Picayune | Feb. 28, 2011

NEW ORLEANS -- One by one, alumni of St. Augustine High School took the microphone Feb. 24, recalling one paddling at the hands of a St. Augustine teacher that turned them around and taught them a lesson.

The 60-year-old tradition of corporal punishment at St. Augustine, believed to be one of the few remaining Catholic schools in the country that still paddles, faces a potential end.

Alumni aimed their impassioned defense of corporal punishment at New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond, whose concern about the policy prompted the Josephite order that founded the school to suspend paddling for the current school year.

The priests overruled objections from the local board of directors that runs daily operations at St. Augustine, a historically black, all-boys school that has furnished generations of New Orleans political and business leaders.

Aymond told reporters he had listened carefully to the crowd, but reiterated his concern about injuries reported by parents, and his own unease. Yet plenty of people argue that the paddle had an undeniable role in lending St. Augustine its high reputation.

"It worked on us," said 1961 graduate Lambert Boissiere Jr., a former state senator and city councilman. "After one or two times with the paddle, you wouldn't cut up anymore. Some of those priests could swing."

At last count, 56 out of 70 school districts in Louisiana still allow corporal punishment, according to the state Department of Education.

Nationally, just 12 percent of U.S. schools allowed corporal punishment, and only 9 percent actually used it during the 2007-08 school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

[Andrew Vanacore writes for The Times-Picayune in New Orleans.]

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