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Supporters march for paddling at Catholic school

Kari Dequine The Times Picayune | Mar. 29, 2011

NEW ORLEANS -- More than 500 students, parents and other supporters of St. Augustine High School marched Saturday on the offices of Archbishop Gregory Aymond to oppose his call for an end to the school?s policy of using corporal punishment.

The archbishop ?is trying to fix something that?s not broken, and he?s going about it in the wrong way,? said Jacob Washington, the student body president at the historically black school.

The protesters called on the archbishop to issue a ?public, unequivocal retraction ... of all statements linking St. Augustine disciplinary policies with violence, particularly in the New Orleans community.?

Protesters also demanded proof of Aymond?s claims that parents have complained about the paddling policy, along with evidence for a study he has cited to bolster his position.

The archbishop has said corporal punishment institutionalizes violence, runs counter to Catholic teaching and good educational practice, and violates local archdiocesan school policy.

The Center for Effective Discipline has identified St. Augustine as the lone Catholic school in the country still using corporal punishment.

In a prepared statement, Aymond held his ground and prayed for a ?peaceful resolution? to the dispute. ?I share their passion for the school and its success; we disagree only on the issue of corporal punishment,? Aymond said.

Supporters say the issue is not as much about the wooden paddle as the rights of African-American parents to educate and discipline their children in their own traditions. ?It?s about the right to self-govern,? said Warren Johnson, a 1981 alumnus.

[Kari DeQuine writes for *The Times Picayune* in New Orleans.]

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