



Written by [Ralph R. Reiland](#) on July 9, 2014

Harebrained Bureaucrats and Gun Craziness

Regarding a recent dust-up near Pittsburgh, here's the June 6 headline at *Reason* magazine's blog: "First-Grader Finds Toy Gun, Turns It In, Gets Suspension."

How a seven-year-old kid ended up in serious trouble is reported by Robby Soave, a staff editor at Reason.com: "Pennsylvania first-grader Darin Simak brought a different backpack to school this week, failing to notice the toy gun concealed inside it. When he realized that he had inadvertently brought the weapon — which is not a real weapon at all — to Martin Elementary in New Kensington, he immediately informed his teacher."



It sounds like the boy did exactly the right thing. He made an innocent and harmless mistake and told his teacher when he noticed the slip-up.

The teacher, following protocol, told the principal and the first-grader was promptly suspended from school for breaching the school district's "zero tolerance" policy against weapons — even though the toy gun was as far from a real weapon as a chocolate pistol or a cupcake in the shape of a hand grenade.

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"The New Kensington-Arnold School District superintendent said that bringing a toy gun to school violates the district's policy at the highest level and requires a child to be suspended immediately until a meeting can be held to discuss what happened and whether punishment is warranted," reported Soave.

"School zero tolerance policies require administrators to suspend or expel (and in some cases, arrest), students who break the rules — even inadvertently, as in Simak's case," explained Soave.

In due course, the school board declined to expel the first-grader, releasing the seven-year-old from further punishment, additional banishment, and continued public humiliation.

In any case, it seems like the school districts in my neighboring communities in Pittsburgh's more tony suburbs would handle the aforementioned case with more good sense, less paranoia, and less rigidity.

Students at the Bethel Park Senior High School, for instance, recently participated in the Habitat Games, sponsored by the school district's National Honor Society.

It's an elimination game, with groups of two eliminating rival groups of two until only one team remains.

Eliminations occur, explained the printed instructions, by "spraying a target with the issued spray bottle," or the "use of water balloons as a substitute" weapon. A restriction: "Do NOT paint your spray bottle black."



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Additionally, “no eliminations” of foes were permitted to take place at places of worship, hospitals, at the Bethel Park police or fire departments, or inside a student’s house (“the lawn and surrounding property,” however, were not safe zones — “please take care to respect the property and the landscape of your target’s house if you are planning a stakeout”), and no eliminations were permitted at a student’s workplace, unless “the target is on break and outside the building of his place of work,” or unless the student is working off the books (“Habitat participants are not safe while performing under-the-table jobs such as personal tutoring”).

Also not allowed are “car chases, at any speed” (but “if the engine is not running, a participant can shoot a target inside the vehicle”).

Elimination of targets is also prohibited on school property “between the hours of 11:59 p.m. and 4 a.m.” — the post-midnight hours when the real guns get deployed in the “senseless-killing neighborhoods” to commit what Joan called “casual killings,” the nonsensical and nightly murders that have now become humdrum and unexceptional in America’s major cities.

Also, “Shooting from a horse, bike, or Segway is legal,” and “shooting at sailboats is legal, but only from land or another sailboat.” No shots from submarines — but there are no subs in Bethel, except at Danny’s Pizza.

In any case, it all sounds like more fun than dealing with the officialdom in New Kensington’s schools.

Ralph R. Reiland is an associate professor of economics at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh.



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