



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 10, 2013

Pencil-packin' Pupils Suspended From Virginia Elementary School

On Wednesday, May 8, seven-year old Christopher Marshall was [allowed to return](#) to Driver Elementary School in Suffolk, Virginia, following a two-day suspension. Christopher's offense: pointing a pencil at a classmate and making "bang bang" noises — behavior the other boy, a friend of his, playfully emulated.

Such typical boy behavior, naturally, violated the school's zero-tolerance policy on weapons, leading to the suspension of both second-graders.



"A pencil is a weapon when it is pointed at someone in a threatening way and gun noises are made," Suffolk Public Schools spokeswoman Bethanne Bradshaw told Portsmouth, Virginia, television station [WAVY](#).

Indeed, just about anything can qualify as a weapon under Suffolk's policy, which "also bans drawing a picture of a gun and pointing a finger in a threatening manner," according to the [Associated Press](#).

The policy has been in place for decades, but it has been enforced more stringently in recent years because of school shootings across the country, Bradshaw told WAVY.

"Some children would consider it threatening, who are scared about shootings in schools or shootings in the community," she explained. "Kids don't think about 'Cowboys and Indians' anymore, they think about drive-by shootings and murders and everything they see on television news every day."

The zero-tolerance policy is "an effort to try to get kids not to bring any form of violence, even if it's violent play, into the classroom," Bradshaw told the AP. "There has to be a consequence because it's a rule. And it's a rule that the principals go over."

It is also, as Christopher's parents see it, a rule that makes no allowance for normal boy behavior — not to mention common sense.

Paul Marshall, Christopher's father, told WAVY that when he asked his son about the incident, the boy said, "Well, I was being a Marine and the other guy was being a bad guy."

"It's as simple as that," the former Marine added.

Marshall said his son has good grades and is well-behaved at school. At the time of the incident, when the teacher told him to stop "shooting" his pencil, he did so. That, one would think, should have been the end of it.

Instead, Christopher's mother, Wendy Marshall, was called to the school to pick him up in the middle of the day last Friday. Proving that he was not used to being in trouble, "he was shaking in fear and didn't understand why he was in trouble," Wendy told [Yahoo! Shine](#). "So we reenacted the scene and I told him that he did nothing wrong."



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Wendy said she “told the principal that Christopher’s father is an ex-Marine and he was just emulating his dad.” That didn’t sway the zero-tolerance administrator in the least.

“Apparently,” she continued, “the students were told at the beginning of the year that they couldn’t pretend that objects were guns — there are only four weeks left in school. How could they remember that? Kids need to be reminded to bathe and brush their teeth. Besides, they were just being boys.”

Unfortunately, in today’s government schools, “just being boys” is not permitted. Earlier this year a six-year-old Maryland boy was suspended from school for [using his fingers as a gun](#). Another boy, age seven, in the Old Line State was suspended from his school in March for [chewing a strawberry breakfast pastry into the shape of a pistol](#) and pretending to fire it at another student — an incident that concerned school officials so much that they made a counselor available to any students who were traumatized by the sight of the fruit filling. Even more egregiously, a 10-year-old Virginia boy was [arrested](#) the previous month for showing a toy gun to another student on a school bus; it took three weeks for prosecutors to be shamed into dropping the charges. (Being a girl isn’t a guarantee of smooth sailing in school, either: A Pennsylvania kindergartner was suspended in January merely for [talking about shooting her friends and herself with a soap-bubble gun](#) that was not even in her possession at the time.)

According to his mother, Christopher Marshall had a grand time being out of school, eating ice cream, playing, and even helping her clean the house. Too bad he’s not allowed to enjoy himself as boys of previous generations did at school.



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