



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on January 17, 2013

## Six-Year-Old Suspended From Maryland School for Using Fingers as Gun

A six-year-old boy was suspended from school in Trappe, Maryland, for the grave offense of using his fingers as an imaginary gun in a game of cops and robbers — the second such suspension in the Old Line State this month.

The boy's mother, Teri Bildstein, told the Easton, Maryland, [Star Democrat](#) that "the whole incident was the result of one student telling a teacher who was not in attendance about the 'fingers like guns' game on the playground."



In days gone by, the snitching student would have been treated to a lecture about being a tattletale. Today, with "zero tolerance" policies and a school shooting still fresh in the minds of nervous administrators, the boy with the digit derringer instead ended up in the principal's office, whereupon Principal Marcia Sprankle suspended him.

"This is easily the most ludicrous thing I have ever heard of," the boy's father, Army Staff Sgt. Stephen Grafton, told the [Star Democrat](#) shortly after the incident. "This, a completely harmless act of horseplay at recess, was by no means an offense that warranted a suspension. It was a pair of 6-year-olds playing with imaginary pistols, one of whom has a father who is charged by the United States with using firearms in his defense."

Though initial reports suggested that two boys had been suspended over the incident, only Grafton and Bildstein's son was — something they discovered in a Monday meeting with school administrators. Bildstein told the [Star Democrat](#) she had heard from "a few" other parents that their children had told them that they, too, were involved in the cops-and-robbers game; yet only her son was disciplined for it. It is the second time this school year that he has been suspended. "The other suspension," the paper writes, was "for something she said is equally difficult to understand."

Her son, too, was thoroughly confused, telling his parents, "I was just playing. I don't understand."

"The biggest concern we have right now is the consistency in discipline practices: What deserves a note home? What deserves a phone call to a parent? If he is in trouble for something like this now, what does this bode for the rest of his education at this school?" Bildstein said last week. "These are situations he could learn from and this is a severe punishment for this age. I want to know what the school board considers appropriate behavior and the appropriate consequences for a child his age."

"If anything," Grafton added, "this was a teaching point, an opportunity to discuss with the boys and the remainder of the class the importance of not shooting at one another. Instead, the boys were removed from the playground and their parents instructed to immediately pick them up and any teaching opportunity was lost, an action which I interpret as either not having the ability to address the situation or not having the desire to. Neither of these are acceptable answers."



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No acceptable answers, it seems, were forthcoming during the meeting with administrators, either.

According to the *Star Democrat*, “The administrators told Bildstein and Grafton according to the Code of Maryland Regulations, bringing a weapon to school or distributing drugs on campus are grounds for automatic suspension, Bildstein said, but imaginative ‘finger guns’ are outside what the discipline regulations cover.”

“There is a problem placing this type of burden on the shoulders of the school principals and leaving it up to ‘interpretation,’” she told the newspaper. “The school told us his behavior was considered a ‘threat,’ but parents came to us and told us at no time did they or their children find our son’s behavior to be frightening. There are children who are sensitive to this sort of thing, of course. But that is where we wish the school would have taken the opportunity to teach our son instead of automatically punishing him.”

Apparently, in the America of 2013 it is asking too much of school administrators to distinguish between a kid pretending to shoot other kids with his fingers and one planning to mow down his classmates in a hail of bullets. This seems particularly true in Maryland, where another six-year-old boy was suspended from Roscoe R. Nix Elementary School in Silver Spring earlier this month for the same offense. His parents had to hire an attorney to get the suspension reversed and removed from his school record. In the case of Grafton and Bildstein’s son, the school was at least gracious enough to do that without being threatened with legal action; but the parents are still not satisfied.

“Our son is our number one priority,” Bildstein told the *Star Democrat*. “But this also is a concern of the community. We want to know things are going to change from here on out and will result in policies that are reasonable and fair to everyone.”

“We will not consider this matter closed until we and all other parents have seen consistent evidence that common sense will prevail when adjudicating future punishment,” Grafton declared.

Considering that Grafton and Bildstein are dealing with public school administrators, they may have a long wait.



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