

A "B" Sample

Writing prompt: What, in your opinion, is the best way to stop bullying in schools?

Getting Tough with Bullies

Laws have been passed, lawsuits filed, but school bullies still roam our school halls, locker rooms, and classrooms. School bullying has been a hot topic in recent years for school boards throughout the United States, but most school officials and teachers do not do very much to stop bullying (Weddle 1). However, their reluctance to take action is understandable, since they have few options for disciplining bullies in any meaningful way. Teachers and school officials could do a great deal to stop bullies if we protected them from frivolous law suits and gave them more power to hold students responsible for menacing or violent behavior.

Teachers and school officials often do not discipline students because they are afraid of being sued. According to author D.J. Burrough, "A recent Harris Interactive poll found that 77 percent of principals and 61 percent of teachers 'avoid decisions that they think are right simply because they might be challenged legally'" (7). Angry parents do not just sue to prevent physical punishment or other forms of serious abuse. They often sue to stop even soft punishments like detention after school or suspension from school. One teacher, Elizabeth Anne Moore, was so fed up with her school doing nothing to stop a student from harassing her in class that she decided to use the courts herself. "A justice of the peace ordered the student not to have any contact with her on or off school grounds," but it seems ridiculous that this would be necessary in the first place. The teacher and school officials should have had the power to take much more decisive action against that student.

We can't let teachers or principals beat or abuse students when they misbehave, but we can think about loosening some of the current restrictions. For example, right now most of the schools prevent "school employees from touching any students, whether it's to give them a friendly hug or to force them to sit" (Burroughs 7). When you think about it, this means that teachers can't even stop a fight by grabbing the students to pull them apart. As another example, "In the New York school system, the form required to start a suspension is 100 pages long" (Burroughs 7). This sounds like punishment for the teacher more than the bully! Unless we do something to change these rules, nothing will be achieved by laws like "the lofty-sounding California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000" (Hymowitz 2). As Kay Huymowitz says in her Los Angeles Times article, "Schools without bullies--and though rare, there are such things--are places where dynamic principals build a supportive but serious community whose norms are set by adults" (3). We have to give the people who have the most direct contact with bullies the power to decide on school rules and make sure students follow them.

Fear of lawsuits has given control of our schools to the bullies. We need to give that control back to the people who should be in charge. We need to pass laws that allow teachers and school officials to make reasonable rules for how students are expected to behave and to discipline

bullies without bullied by lawsuits.

*****8

Commentary on the "B" Sample

Paragraph One: In the opening sentence, the writer attempts to catch the reader's attention with a compelling statement relevant to the topic. He/she then provides some basic background explanation of the problem, citing the paraphrased information from one of the articles. The paragraph ends with a specific thesis statement, and the paragraph is generally free of repetitiousness. Some of the background information could be better explained, especially the statement about disciplining bullies in any meaningful way." The "hook" may not be as extensive or compelling as an "A" essay.

Paragraph Two: The paragraph begins with a topic sentence that is clear and slightly more specific than the thesis point. The writer quotes and cites evidence and follows the quote with a statement which further clarifies the evidence. He/she then cites an example of a teacher forced to use the courts in frustration. Although the example only indirectly follows the idea stated in the topic sentence, the closing sentence of the paragraph applies the example to the central point. However, the writer could have provided better transition to the example.

Paragraph Three: The topic sentence is once again clear and slightly more specific than the thesis point. The writer then gives an example of a restriction referred to in the topic sentence and provides some logical analysis of how it applies to the problem. The writer then cites another example from the readings and comments on it, although the commentary is less detailed than that regarding the first example. The writer then refers to the weakness of the California Student Safety and Prevention Act of 2000 but does not explain the law. Although the writer provides a third reference from the readings in order to develop the point about "loosening restrictions," the writer does not explain how to "build a supportive but serious community." The closing sentence refocuses attention on the central point without repetitiousness wording.

Paragraph Four: Although the writer provides an adequate summary of the major points in the essay, rewording to avoid repetitiousness, he/she could have recommended more specific action, especially in explaining the kind of laws needed to protect teachers and school officials. The conclusion does end with a cleverly-worded closing sentence.