

The term “tough love” was not yet in usage when I was in high school, but it was the prevailing attitude in terms of discipline. Chronic disruptors were expelled. Teachers had real authority — and admittedly at times too much. “Getting the strap” is long gone in Ontario schools, as it should be. But so, for students it would have constrained in my day, is fear of teacher and principal authority. The Toronto Sun's Sue-Ann Levy recently published accounts illustrating the “high school hell” of some Toronto-area schools. In one, former auto shop teacher Rob Ball of Scarborough's Bendale Business and technical Institute told Levy that a “certain line” students used not to cross is now routinely ignored. Students have “cussed him blind,” threatened physical harm and hurled unprintable obscenities at him. He told Levy a pregnant teacher had a chair thrown at her with no consequence (“suspensions don't happen”). Ball was motivated to share his experiences by Levy's previous column on the subject, in which Toronto District School Board elementary school surplus teacher Shawn Goldman said he would “feel safer as a prison guard” at his public school (“nicknamed Millhaven by staff”) than supervising what he described as “a prison that is out of control.” The awful thing is that a few of these rotten apples can seriously diminish learning opportunities for kids who want to learn, not to mention creating an unsafe environment no child deserves. (--image--)

(--image--)

Goldman told Levy 50 per cent of his fellow teachers had taken a stress leave of absence this past year due to “almost daily chaos.” A former Israeli soldier, Goldman said the violence TDSB teachers endure is comparable to what he remembers from military days. The worst incident involved a female teacher being mobbed by four students and slashed on her forearm with an X-Acto knife. Your reaction to these stories is probably to think they represent only a tiny minority of students and only in certain schools in certain areas. In other words, that the problem isn't widespread and Not in Your Back Yard. I'd agree that for people in the Annex or Playter Estates or Forest Hill Village, such tales seem unbelievable, since the public schools their children attend provide happy, safe and learning-friendly environments. I am more inclined to give credence to the problem as significant and widespread enough for general concern, because these examples align with examples I receive from teachers who have endured similar ordeals, but who for good reasons cannot go public. A former Israeli soldier, Goldman said the violence TDSB teachers endure is comparable to what he remembers from military days. The worst incident involved a female teacher being mobbed by four students and slashed on her forearm with an X-Acto knife. (--image--)

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I know from a file I keep on this subject that Levy's courageous subjects are not exaggerating. One of my sources, an extended-family member, teaching at a school where physical defiance is common, is unfazed because she herself grew up in a tough neighbourhood. Appealing to parents for co-operation is usually unhelpful. She told me she has hosted parent-teacher meeting evenings to which not a single parent showed up. Another supply teacher — I'll call her Marcia, with decades of experience in Special Ed — that I know well and can trust, has told me numerous stories of her travails with students. In one class, a violent eight-year old (!) pushed her, punched her, bit her and threw a chair at her. His “punishment” was to cool down in an office where a computer was available to play games on. The administration refused to deal further with the child, her union rep did nothing, but Marcia was given a 10-point “behaviour modification plan” — for her! “Don't raise your voice, give him choices, don't crowd him,” etc. Marcia was once called a “motherf-ker” by a student during a disciplinary exchange. Marcia requested that the vice-principal make the student apologize. His reported response: “Well, he doesn't want to apologize and we don't want him to feel uncomfortable at school.” Appeasement and fear of students by administration is a common thread in all the stories I have heard. Student plus near-perfect attendance equals free truck at Manitoba high school. His high school banned him from giving his valedictorian speech so he took to a megaphone outside. None of this is a concern for people with high disposable income. Bad school? Move to a better catchment area. Still not good enough? Send the kids to private school. Your child is the disruptor or suffers from “Oppositional Defiance Disorder”? Send him to a “therapeutic boarding school” like Wingate Wilderness Therapy or Robe Land Academy with tuition at \$40-60K a year, where tough love and enforced skills-building are the norms. The awful thing is that a few of these rotten apples can seriously diminish learning opportunities for kids who want to learn, not to mention creating an unsafe environment no child deserves. Shop teacher Rob Ball attributed escalating discipline breakdown to Kathleen Wynne's 2013 Progressive Discipline Policy, embraced by “equity-obsessed TDSB education director Dr. John Malloy.” So I wouldn't have bothered writing this column if Wynne were still in office. But I am

emboldened because Doug Ford's people just might listen to my proposals, namely: i) Return authority to teachers; ii) prioritize safety for children who want to learn and teachers who want to teach over bad-apple "rights" and iii) Institute compulsory boot camps for chronic offenders. National Post kaybarb@gmail.com [Twitter.com/BarbaraRKay](https://twitter.com/BarbaraRKay)