

Torturing Children at School

By The Editorial Board

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Federal investigators have opened an inquiry into the tragic case of a high school student in Bastrop County, Tex., who suffered severe brain damage and nearly died last fall after a deputy sheriff shocked him with a Taser, a high voltage electronic weapon.

In North Carolina, civil rights lawyers have filed a complaint with the Justice Department, charging the Wake County school system with violating the constitutional rights of minority children by subjecting them to discriminatory arrest practices and brutality by police officers assigned to schools. In one nightmarish case described in the complaint, a disabled 15-year-old was shocked with a Taser three times during an interrogation at school, resulting in punctured lungs. And in New York, civil rights lawyers have sued the city of Syracuse on behalf of two students. One was shocked three times, not for threatening behavior but for lying on the floor and crying, they say, and another was shocked while trying to break up a fight.

Complaints about dangerous disciplinary practices involving shock weapons are cropping up all over the country. The problem has its roots in the 1990s, when school districts began ceding even routine disciplinary duties to police and security officers, who were utterly unprepared to deal with children. Many districts need to overhaul practices that criminalize far too many young people and that are applied in ways that discriminate against minority children. In the meantime, elected officials need to ban shock weapons in schools.

The Taser, the most popular of these weapons, uses a powerful electrical charge to create intense spasms that drive the suspect to the ground. Police organizations view such weapons as a means of defusing violent confrontations without resorting to deadly force. But a growing body of research shows how lethal these weapons can be.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/12/opinion/torturing-children-at-school.html>