

# 5 Suspensions From 2016 That Show a Common-Sense Deficiency in Our Schools

In recent years, the rise of zero-tolerance discipline policies in schools has resulted in suspensions for ... interesting incidents. 2016 was no exception. Some of the craziest incidents include:

## 1. The Chicken Nugget Suspension

In early November, *USA Today* [reported](#) that a Tennessee teenager was suspended over allegedly taking too many chicken nuggets in the school cafeteria. After the student's mother complained, it was discovered that there had been a mistake on the cashier's part. The student was cleared and returned to school shortly after.

## 2. The Bubble Gun Suspension

A Colorado mother was stunned when her 5-year-old daughter was suspended for bringing a clear, plastic, bubble-blowing gun to school. Commenting on the incident in the *Washington Post*, the head of the Colorado ACLU [noted](#):

*“This is a silly example of a very real problem.*

*‘Zero-tolerance policies often mean zero common sense.’”*

## 3. The Goodwill Pocket Knife Suspension

In September, [a middle school student](#) was suspended when he found a pocket knife in a backpack which his mother had recently purchased from Goodwill. The kicker? The student chose not to hide the problem and brought the knife to school authorities, claiming that it wasn't his. In return for his openness, the student was suspended for 30 days.

#### 4. The Toddler Knife Suspension

The most recent unusual suspension incident happened to a middle school student who brought a table knife from a child's silverware set. According to the *New York Daily News*, the girl stuck the knife in her lunch in order to cut a peach to share with a friend. Her act of kindness was rewarded with a six-day suspension.

#### 5. The \$2 Bill Detention

While not an official suspension, a Texan middle-schooler [was removed](#) from lunch earlier in the year after using a \$2 bill to buy food in the cafeteria. The reason? School officials didn't realize that the \$2 bill was legal tender...

That these suspensions are infuriating is the understatement of the year. But I wonder: are these suspensions just the natural outgrowth of a system that seeks to create a one-size-fits-all approach to education?

Alexis de Tocqueville would likely say yes. In his 1840 work, [Democracy in America](#), Tocqueville explained what happens when a small local community is overtaken by a heavy-handed, "supreme power." His words, when viewed in the light of today's education system, are surprisingly prophetic:

*"After having thus successively taken each member of the community in its powerful grasp and fashioned him at will, the supreme power then extends its arm over the whole community. It covers the surface of society with a network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate, to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and*

*industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd."*

If schools continue fixating on the letter of the law rather than the spirit in these suspension incidents, will they further depress the energy and ingenuity of today's students and eventually turn them into a "flock of timid and industrious animals"?