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Student problems can be linked to class

Regarding the editorial on zero-tolerance polices in public schools, unfortunately social class plays a major role in education as with the criminal justice system ("Zero tolerance takes student discipline to harsh extremes," Our view, School discipline debate, Friday).

It should not be surprising that African-American and Hispanic students are suspended more than white kids. The prison population is also more represented by these groups.

According to Good Schools Pennsylvania, a non-profit organization, only \$5,520 is spent on each student in the lowest-spending district in Pennsylvania, compared with \$13,954 in the highest. Such inequality is too common.

Our nation has billions to spend on the space program; another mission to the moon may be in the works.

We need to focus on the needs of this planet, which sustains life, instead of one that cannot.

Janice White

DuBois, Pa.

'Zero tolerance' fails

As a sophomore in high school, I'm always overjoyed when a news venue takes up an issue that is relevant to my life. The fact is, zero-tolerance policies can't be linked to a lack of violence because there is no link.

The Columbine High School shooters in Littleton, Colo., would not have been caught by the system, but if they had and had been expelled, they probably would have come back to school and murdered dozens of people anyway. The idea that punishing students for exercising their right to free expression will prevent violence is contrary to the U.S. Constitution and, in practice, worthless.

Eric Peck

Madeira, Ohio

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Err on side of safety

Kudos to Gerald Tirozzi, executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, for his accurate and eloquent explanation of the dilemma school officials face in enforcing rules to keep America's schools safe ("Policies are appropriate," Opposing view).

As Tirozzi well stated, principals always should err on the side of school safety in enforcing school-discipline policies. The phrase "zero tolerance" has become a meaningless, politically abused buzzword existing more in the minds of academicians and politicians than of school leaders.

The vast majority of principals I have worked with during my 20-plus years as a school safety specialist always have strived to administer firm, fair and consistent discipline applied with good common sense. The entire debate about so-called zero tolerance itself is meaningless. After all, what did we have before we had zero-tolerance policies -- a 50% tolerance for school violence?

Kenneth S. Trump, president

National School Safety and

Security Services

Cleveland

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