

THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

BEFORE

THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

<p>In the Matter of the Expulsion of</p> <p>Dane G</p> <p>by Janesville School District Board of Education</p>	<p>DECISION AND ORDER</p> <p>Appeal No.: 00/01 EX 11</p>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------

NATURE OF THE APPEAL

This is an appeal to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction pursuant to Wis. Stats. § 120.13(1)(c) from the order of the Janesville School District Board of Education to expel the above-named tenth-grade pupil from the Janesville School District. This appeal was filed by the pupil and received by the Department of Public Instruction on May 7, 2001.

In accordance with the provisions of Wis. Adm. Code § PI 1.04(5), this Decision and Order is confined to a review of the record of the school board hearing. The state superintendent's review authority is specified in § 120.13(1)(c). The state superintendent's role is to ensure that the required statutory procedures were followed, that the school board's decision was based upon one or more of the established statutory grounds, and that the school board was satisfied that the interest of the school district demands that the student be expelled.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The record contains a letter entitled "Notice of Expulsion Hearing," dated March 21, 2001, from the district administrator of the Janesville School District. The letter advised that a hearing would be held April 5, 2001 that could result in the pupil's expulsion from the Janesville School District through his

twenty-first birthday.¹ The letter was sent separately to the pupil and his parents by regular mail and by certified mail. The letter alleged that the pupil engaged in conduct while at school or under the supervision of school authority which endangered the property, health, or safety of others. The letter specifically alleged "Dane ... did on March 15, 2001, engage in conduct, while in school, which endangered the property, health and safety of others by possessing within the school building a note which he had written stating, 'I'm not feeling good Ryan. I'm gonna do it. I'm sick of preps and teachers. I'm going to shoot everybody, you and me will be the only ones left. I will make us more popular than Columbine. I love you dude.'" Minutes of the school board expulsion hearing are part of the record.

The hearing was held in closed session on April 5, 2001. The pupil and his parents appeared at the hearing without counsel. At the hearing, the school district administration presented evidence concerning the grounds for expulsion. The pupil and his parents were given the opportunity to present evidence, to cross-examine witnesses, and to respond to the allegations.

After the hearing, the school board deliberated in closed session. The board found the pupil did engage in conduct while at school or while under the supervision of a school authority which endangered the property, health, or safety of others. The school board further found that the interests of the school demand the student's expulsion. The order for expulsion containing the findings of fact and conclusions of law of the school board, dated April 12, 2001, was mailed separately to the pupil and his parents. The order stated the pupil was expelled through his twenty-first birthday.

DISCUSSION

School districts are limited-purpose municipal corporations and have only such powers as are conferred specifically by statute or are necessarily implied therefrom. *Iverson v. Union Free High School District*, 186 Wis. 342, 353, 202 N.W. 788 (1925). A school board's power to expel students derives from § 120.13(1)(c), which establishes certain categories of offenses that may be the basis for an expulsion and

¹ A copy of the 1995 Wisconsin statutes pertaining to expulsions was included with the materials sent to the pupil and his parents with the Notice of Expulsion. However, the changes to the 1995 statutes are not material to this particular expulsion. For the convenience of the district, I have included a copy of the current expulsion statute.

sets out specific procedures that must be followed in the expulsion process.

In reviewing an appeal of an expulsion decision, the Wisconsin Court of Appeals has stated that the scope of the state superintendent's review is limited to that set out in § 120.13(1)(c). In *Racine Unified School District v. Thompson*, 107 Wis. 2d 657, 667, 321 N.W. 2d 334 (1982), the court of appeals *in dicta* stated: "The superintendent's review, then, would be one to insure that the school board followed the procedural mandates of subsection (c) concerning notice, right to counsel, etc." *Id.* In a related context, the court of appeals ruled this dictum has now become "embedded in Wisconsin school law." *Madison Metropolitan School District (Lenny G.) v. Wis. D.P.I.*, 199 Wis. 2d 1, 543 N.W. 2d 843 (1995). It is, therefore, incumbent upon the state superintendent in reviewing an expulsion decision to ensure that the required statutory procedures were followed, that the school board's decision is based upon one of the established statutory grounds, and that the school board is satisfied that the interests of the school district demand the pupil's expulsion.

The appeal letter in this case alleges the length of the expulsion was too severe. Since the authority to "approve, reverse or modify the decision" was conferred upon the state superintendent by 1987 Wis. Act 88, § 3, the state superintendent has consistently declined to modify the length of expulsions. *Nifataria B. v. Janesville School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 434 (June 20, 2001); *David D. v. Central High School District of Westosha Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 429 (January 25, 2001); *Tony R. v. Lake Geneva Joint No. 1 School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 294 (June 24, 1996); *Brandon H. v. DeSoto Area School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 206 (May 3, 1993). The school board is in the best position to judge the demeanor of witnesses as well as to know and understand what its community requires as a response to school misconduct. It would be inappropriate for me, absent an extraordinary circumstance or a violation of procedural requirements, to second-guess the appropriateness of a school board's determination. In reviewing this case, I do not see the extraordinary circumstance or procedural violation that cause me to modify the pupil's expulsion period. I also note that the school district has indicated that according to its policy, any student expelled may apply for readmission, even if permanently expelled.

In reviewing the record in this case, I find the school district complied with all of the procedural requisites. I, therefore, affirm this expulsion.

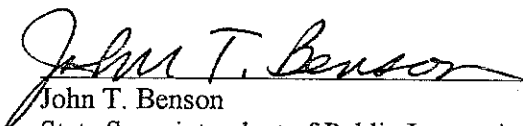
CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

Based upon my review of the record in this case and the findings set out above, I conclude that the school board complied with all of the procedural requirements of § 120.13(1)(c).

ORDER

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the expulsion of Dane G by the Janesville School District Board of Education is affirmed.

Dated at Madison, Wisconsin, on June 25, 2001.



John T. Benson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction