

THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

BEFORE

THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

In the Matter of the Expulsion of

Adam P'

by Tri County Area School District
Board of Education

DECISION AND ORDER

Appeal No.: 00/01 EX 24

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 Tri County Area School District Board of Education to expel the above-named pupil from the Tri County Area School District. This appeal was filed by the pupil and received by the Department of Public Instruction on November 19, 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 October 10, 2001, from the district administrator of the Tri County Area School District. The letter advised a

hearing would be held on October 16, 2001 that could result in the pupil's expulsion from the Tri County Area School District until his 21st birthday. The letter was sent separately to the pupil and his parents 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 allèged that on October 8, 2001, Adam possessed marijuana on school grounds. Minutes of the school board expulsion hearing, an audiotape of the expulsion hearing, and a copy of the exhibits used at the hearing are part of the record.

The hearing was held in closed session on October 16, 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 October 16, 2001, was mailed separately to the pupil and his parents. The order stated the pupil was expelled until January 17, 2002.

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 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 raises three issues. First, the pupil's attorney alleges that the principal abused his discretion in referring the case to the board for expulsion. He alleges that the board policy states that the administration "may" recommend referral. The state superintendent is only authorized to review expulsion decisions to ensure that the pupil has been provided adequate procedural due process. See e.g. *John J. D. v. Whitehall School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 406 (February 15, 2000); *Justin S. v. Marshfield School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 361 (May 27, 1998); *Joshua R. v. Edgerton School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 330 (July 29, 1997);

Donald P. v. Westby Area School District Board of Education, Decision and Order No. 299, (August 9, 1996). Even if the superintendent had authority to review the principal's decision, the pupil's attorney does not explain how the principal abused his discretion.

Secondly, the pupil's attorney alleges that the "expulsion was unwarranted given Adam's record." Again, there is no explanation of this allegation. Regardless, 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. *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.

Finally, the pupil's attorney complains about the quality of the tape made of the expulsion hearing. The tape submitted with the hearing record is intelligible and assisted in the review of the case. Additionally, the board is only statutorily required to take written minutes of the meeting. The board did so in this case.

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

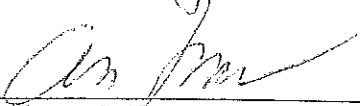
CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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 Adam P. by the Tri County Area School District Board of Education is affirmed.

Dated this 18th day of January, 2002.



Anthony S. Evers, Ph.D.
Deputy State Superintendent of Public Instruction