

THE STATE OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE
THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

In the Matter of the Expulsion of Hannah W by River Falls School District Board of Education	DECISION AND ORDER Appeal No.: 03-EX 18
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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 River Falls School District Board of Education to expel the above-named pupil from the River Falls School District. This appeal was filed by the pupil and received by the Department of Public Instruction on October 14, 2003.

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 July 17, 2003, from the district administrator of the River Falls School District. The letter advised a hearing would be held on July 24, 2003 that could result in the pupil's expulsion from the River Falls School District through the pupil's 21st birthday. The letter was sent separately to the pupil and

her parents by personal service. 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 that on June 26, 2003 at school, while attending summer school, the pupil was possessed and was under the influence of marijuana.

The hearing was held in closed session on July 24, 2003. The pupil and her parents appeared at the hearing without counsel. At the hearing, the school district administration presented evidence concerning the grounds for expulsion. The pupil and her 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. 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 July 24, 2003, was mailed separately to the pupil and her parents. The order stated the pupil was expelled through 2003-04 school year. Minutes of the school board expulsion hearing and an audiotape of the expulsion hearing are part of the record.

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 alleges that the decision to expel was too severe because the pupil was treated more harshly than others. Because expulsions are considered on a case-by-case basis, the treatment of other students is not relevant to this review. See *Aron P. v. Sturgeon Bay School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 341 (December 17, 1997); *Nathaniel S. v. Wausau School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 350 (March 25, 1998); and *Leo P. v. Whitewater School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 351 (March 31, 1998).

Furthermore, 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 causes me to modify the pupil's expulsion period.

The parent also complains about the terms of the conditional early reinstatement offered by the school district. School districts are not required to offer early readmission. If they do offer it, the conditions must be related to reason for the expulsion. §120.13(1)(h)2. If a pupil or parent does not agree that the condition relates to the reason for expulsion, the pupil or parent must appeal to the school board within 15 days of the order. The school board determination is final. The state superintendent does not have authority to review those conditions.

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

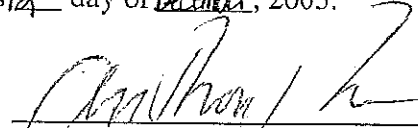
CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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

ORDER

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the expulsion of Hannah W by the River Falls School District Board of Education is affirmed.

Dated this 12th day of December, 2003.



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

