

THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

BEFORE

THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

<p>In the Matter of the Expulsion of</p> <p>L . . . F . . .</p> <p>by Milwaukee School District Board of Education</p>	<p>DECISION AND ORDER</p> <p>Appeal No.: 07 EX 08</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 Milwaukee School District Board of Education to expel the above-named pupil from the Milwaukee School District. This appeal was filed by the pupil and received by the Department of Public Instruction on April 19, 2007.

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, 2007, from the student services coordinator of the Milwaukee School District. The letter advised a hearing would be held on April 5, 2007 that could result in the pupil's expulsion from the Milwaukee School District. The letter was sent separately to the pupil and her parents. 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 March 8, 2007 the pupil possessed two knives and a steel pressing comb at Lincoln Center of the Arts Middle School.

The hearing was held before an independent hearing panel on April 5, 2007. 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 independent hearing panel deliberated and 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 panel 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 panel, dated April 5, 2007, was mailed separately to the pupil and her parents. The order stated the pupil was expelled through January 28, 2008. The school board reviewed the independent hearing panel's order on April 19, 2007 and approved it. The pupil and parents were advised by letter dated April 27, 2007 of the board's decision. A transcript of the hearing is 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 raises no specific issues. The pupil was expelled because she took two knives to school and chased a student down the hall. Her parents allege in the letter that the pupil has been a good child who acted out because she felt threatened. The record of the hearing indicates that while she may have felt harassed by other pupils, she did not report that to anyone.

In fact, the record indicates that the day before the incident the school administrator was concerned for her and asked her if anything was wrong. She denied that there was, and claims that she told him that she was going to fight some girls. The next morning a “code red” alert went out in the school when she was seen chasing a girl with two butcher knives.

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 or independent panel 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.

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.

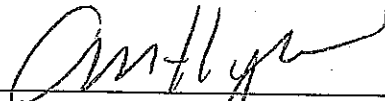
CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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 L F by the Milwaukee School District Board of Education is affirmed.

Dated this 18th day of June, 2007.



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