

THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

BEFORE

THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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| <p>In the Matter of the Expulsion of</p> <p>A H</p> <p>by Adams-Friendship Area School District<br/>Board of Education</p> | <p>DECISION AND ORDER</p> <p>Appeal No.: 11-EX-08</p> |
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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 Adams-Friendship Area School District Board of Education to expel the above-named pupil from the Adams-Friendship Area School District. This appeal was filed by the pupil and received by the Department of Public Instruction on March 30, 2011.

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 4, 2011, from a principal of the Adams-Friendship Area School District. The letter advised a hearing

would be held on March 15, 2011 that could result in the pupil's expulsion from the Adams-Friendship Area School District through the pupil's 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 alleged that on March 1, 2011, the pupil was suspended for participating in unsafe behavior, intimidation or threatening behavior and fighting while at school.

The hearing was held in closed session on March 15, 2011. 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 that 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 March 16, 2011, was mailed separately to the pupil and his parents. The order stated the pupil was expelled through until the pupil's 21st birthday. Minutes of the school board expulsion hearing, an audiotape of the expulsion hearing and a transcript of the 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 raises two issues which require consideration. First, the appeal alleges that while the pupil was in the wrong for fighting, the board did not take into consideration that the other student involved approached the pupil asking him if he wanted to spar. Included in the record is a video of the fight which was submitted as evidence during the

expulsion hearing. The pupil claims that had the volume been turned on when watching the video during the expulsion hearing, the school board would have heard the student challenge the pupil which started the fight. It was within the board's discretion to give weight to the evidence and arguments, as it deemed appropriate and to judge the credibility of witnesses. See e.g. *State ex rel. DeLuca v. Common Council*, 72 Wis. 2d 672, 242 N.W. 2d 689 (1976); *State ex rel. Wasilewski v. Board of School Directors*, 14 Wis. 2d 243, 111N.W. 2d 198 (1961). See also *Jeremy B. v. Waukesha School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order 395 (August 16, 1999); *Tracy M. v. Random Lake School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 244 (January 11, 1995); and *Kathleen W. v. Tri--County Area School District Board of Education*, Decision and Order No. 130 (May 10, 1985).

Second, the appeal claims that expulsion until age 21 is an extreme form of punishment and asks that the period of expulsion be modified to one year. 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 an

extraordinary circumstance or a procedural violation that cause me to modify the pupil's expulsion period.

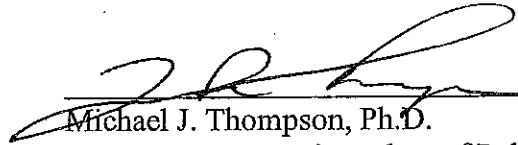
### CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

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 A. H. by the Adams-Friendship Area School District Board of Education is affirmed.

Dated this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of May, 2011

  
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Michael J. Thompson, Ph.D.  
Deputy State Superintendent of Public Instruction

