

THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

BEFORE

THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

<p>In the Matter of the Expulsion of</p> <p>C S</p> <p>by Milwaukee Public School District Board of Education</p>	<p>DECISION AND ORDER</p> <p>Appeal No.: 11-EX-14</p>
---	---

**NATURE OF THE APPEAL**

This is an appeal to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 120.13(1)(c) from the order of the Milwaukee Public School District Board of Education to expel the above-named pupil from the Milwaukee Public School District. This appeal was filed by the pupil and received by the Department of Public Instruction on December 1, 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 September 22, 2011, from the Student Service Coordinator of the Milwaukee Public School District. The letter

advised a hearing would be held on September 28, 2011 that could result in the pupil's expulsion from the Milwaukee Public School District for a length of time to be determined by the Independent Hearing Officer. The letter was sent separately to the pupil and her parent. 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 the pupil participated in assault and battery of another student on September 14, 2011, at Northwest Secondary School.

The hearing was held in closed session on September 28, 2011 before an independent hearing officer. The pupil and her parent appeared at the hearing without counsel. At the hearing, the school district administration presented evidence concerning the grounds for expulsion. The pupil and her parent were given the opportunity to present evidence, to cross-examine witnesses, and to respond to the allegations.

After the hearing, the hearing officer 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 hearing officer 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 hearing officer, dated September 28, 2011, was mailed separately to the pupil and her parent. The order stated the pupil was expelled through June 16, 2012 with no opportunity for conditional reinstatement. The school board met on October 27, 2011 and affirmed the independent hearing officer's order. Exhibits introduced at 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 one issue which requires consideration. The appeal states that the pupil has learned her lesson and asks that the expulsion be reversed in order for the pupil to be readmitted to school. 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 C S by the Milwaukee Public School District Board of Education is affirmed.

Dated this 9<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2012

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