

A4 CENTRAL ILLINOIS

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SCHOOL: Jackson heads home

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strations on school property during school hours before Tuesday's hearing. The civil rights group agreed.

After the court appearance, Jackson told reporters he would be going home, but plans to return to the area for a hearing Monday in U.S. District Court in Urbana.

"After I answer this last question, we have two major stops left today. The first is Shaw's (restaurant) and the second is my own bed in Chicago," Jackson joked at the end of a news conference outside the Macon County Courts Facility.

While at the regional office of education, Jackson reiterated his stand that the Decatur school board should have offered the students alternative education when they were expelled in October. He called again for the board to evaluate the performance of each of the six in their alternative setting with an eye toward allowing them to return to regular classes when the second semester starts in mid-January.

The six were expelled for fighting at a Sept. 17 football game at Eisenhower High School.

Jackson was repeatedly questioned by reporters about why he waited until Thursday to seek to have the students admitted to the alternative program, rather than 10 days earlier after meetings with the school board, Gov. George H. Ryan and state school Superintendent Glenn W. McGee.

The Decatur school board agreed Nov. 8 to reduce the expulsions to one year, and the state officials opened the door for enrollment in an alternative school for the remainder of this school year.

"The school board would be willing to use their nonattendance when in court," Jackson said, referring to a federal court petition by Rainbow/PUSH. There will be a hearing Monday on the petition, which seeks a temporary restraining order against the school board to allow the students back into regular classes.

School board President Jackie Goetter was pleased with Thursday's developments.

"I think it's wonderful that the students have finally gone to enroll in the alternative education classes," she said. "I had hoped that they would have gone last Tuesday, but I'm glad they are there today getting prepared for the classes in the program."

Regional Superintendent Craig Milligan said one or more of the expelled students would likely be enrolled in each of the four alternative programs based in Decatur and run by his office. They are:

- Futures Unlimited, whose students normally have severe attendance problems and have fallen behind;
 - Safe School, for disruptive students on the brink of expulsion;
 - PACE, for students on probation;
 - Teen GED, for older teenagers.
- Jackson said the school board should have offered enrollment in the Safe School program before expelling them.

Caucus: Madigan rejects request for Decatur hearing

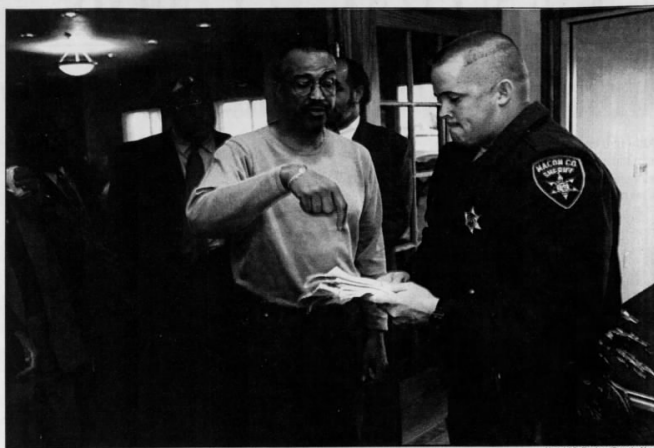
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school board's actions received the support of the Ku Klux Klan, which staged a rally in Decatur last Sunday.

"I would not like them for my allies. That school board should denounce them and say, 'We don't want them as our allies,'" she said. "Who are the allies for the children? They are the community of Decatur. They are the ministers. Now who are the allies of the school board? Are they going to be the KKK?"

Davis also said the students in question are not the only ones who may have engaged in wrongdoing. "At this point, the criminals in my opinion, are those who chose to deny education to six boys who merely needed supervision and it wasn't there for them," Davis said.

Davis is one of the most outspoken members of the Illinois House on racial and educational issues. She confirmed in an interview that she wanted legislative hearings on school violence to begin today in Decatur, but Illinois Speaker Michael J. Madigan, D-Decatur, rejected her request.

Davis said she would have called members of the Decatur school board to testify.



SERVED: Macon County Sheriff's deputy Adam Walter, right, presents subpoenas to Rainbow/PUSH Coalition attorney Lewis Myers Jr. early Thursday morning ordering Lewis, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and several other members to appear in court later that day.

State Rep. Rick Winkel, R-Champaign, helped write the bill in 1995 that ushered in the Safe School program throughout the state.

Winkel said Safe School was designed as an option for districts considering expelling a student. The student can then receive credit in the Safe School and move back into the traditional program or can opt to remain in the program. Either way, once enough credits are gained, students graduate with a diploma from the transferring school.

Milligan said he was not endorsing Jackson's cause by accepting the students for placement into alternative programs. "The only endorsement we have is putting children first," Milligan said. "We have authority from Dr. McGee to give these students the option of alternative education."

While Jackson and Milligan spoke, members of the East Peoria-based World Church of the Creator were held away from the scene by police. Earlier, the group had distributed fliers outside Eisenhower High School, inviting Decatur residents to attend a 3 p.m. rally Sunday at Pavilion No. 1 in Nelson Park.

Benjamin Smith, a former member of the church, committed suicide this summer after a two-state shooting rampage that left two dead and nine wounded, including a Decatur minister.

Matt Hale, head of the white supremacist group, said he came to Decatur to support the school district in its expulsion of "hooligans" and to further divide the races.

"This issue here in Decatur has truly polarized the community," Hale said. "and we're happy about that."

"It's caused many white people to take a second look at our church," he said. "Others are simply realizing that blacks are not interested in real peace or equality; they're interested in supremacy and intimidation."

"And I think that's what we've

seen from Jesse Jackson for almost two weeks now."

Hale came to the Macon-Platt Regional Office of Education in hopes of confronting Jackson, but to no avail. Jackson avoided him. "I don't know him - wouldn't recognize him if I saw him," Jackson said.

Pastor John Hilberling of Real Life Assembly of God, which is near the education office, said he came along with guest evangelists of the church to pray in support of the community.

"We're not here to take sides. We're here simply to pray for unity in our community," he said. "We want to see this attention end. We want to see the best outcome for the boys involved and the best outcome for the community as well."

Also on Thursday, Jackson met for nearly two hours with Decatur Mayor Terry Howley, City Manager Steve Gorman and Assistant City Manager Rolanda Johnson at the Hawthorn Suites Hotel.

Howley refused to comment after the meeting and said Jackson would be making a statement. He did say, however, that the meeting was called by Jackson.

Before getting into the car with the other city officials, Gorman said, "We all enjoyed our meeting with Rev. Jackson very much."

Jackson said he asked for the meeting because the "crisis" has exposed "real challenges" for Decatur and "wounds that must be healed."

"We're interested in reconciliation beyond this crisis," Jackson said. Thursday evening, a capacity crowd at the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church South prayed for the people of Decatur.

Jackson said the expelled students and Jackson. At the end of the hour-long prayer service, hugs, handshakes and smiles filled the church.

Wayne Dunning, associate pastor at the church, said it felt like the people in the church took a deep breath, let it out and started to feel better.

"The absence rate at Eisenhower was 12 percent Thursday, with 111 students not showing, slightly higher than Wednesday's rate of 10 percent. At MacArthur, which has been the site for other rallies

"Instead of concentrating on the negative, we should all accentuate the positive. We can all find a lot of positive solutions within us," a smiling Dunning said after the service.

More than 20 local ministers sat at the front of the church during the service while members of the crowd bowed their heads in prayer.

"We need to bring peace to our city," Tanya Eubanks said after the service. "As my pastor once told me, don't pray for something you don't believe in because it probably won't happen."

Hale and three supporters distributed leaflets early Thursday outside Eisenhower and succeeded in drawing a few supporters, whom they acknowledged with stiff-arm, "white power" salutes.

One of them was Mark Reynolds of Decatur, who was arrested last week for obstructing a police officer during a Jackson-led rally.

"I'm not here to be like the KKK and the Aryan Nation," Reynolds said, "but it's time for the white man to stand up for his rights."

For every motorist who honked in support of World Church members, there was a passer-by who shouted or gestured obscenely. Most of the people near Eisenhower simply ignored them.

"I think it's crazy," said Kevin Brown, an Eisenhower student. "And when Reynolds shouted to student Heather Neff, asking her to attend Sunday's rally, Neff shot back that she was a Jackson supporter."

"I think they need to leave and quit bugging Jesse Jackson because he's trying to support the kids to get them back in school," Neff said.

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by Rainbow/PUSH this week, Thursday's absence rate was still the highest of the three high schools at 14 percent. Stephen Decatur's rate was 8.3 percent.

No threats were exchanged between World Church members and passers-by, though Jay Dee was one of four men who confronted Hale and his followers to challenge their beliefs.

"The reason why they're scared of Jackson is for the simple fact that they've never gotten to know them," Dee said. "That's why there's been a separation (among the races)."

Carolyn Wagner, executive director for Decatur Not In Our Town, said she discourages anyone in the community from attending Hale's rally or lending him support.

Wagner has called a news conference for 3:15 p.m. today at the Decatur Civic Center to address this issue at greater length.

During Thursday's hearing in circuit court, Chicago attorney Lewis Myers Jr. attempted to put Jackson on the stand to testify, but Patton said he would make his ruling on the school district's emergency request for the temporary restraining order based on court filings and arguments from attorneys for both sides.

Myers attempted to argue the injunction is an attack on Jackson's First Amendment right of freedom of speech. Nicholas countered, saying the suit is an effort to ensure Decatur high schools are no longer disrupted by public demonstrations on school property.

As Jackson talked to a smaller contingent of reporters and television cameras after the short hearing, he appeared tired and kept his remarks short.

(Superintendent Kenneth) Arndt said the schools were threatened by white supremacists last week, and that's why they closed the schools. Yet, he have not sought a restraining order against them," Jackson said.

"Often times, on a personal basis, we are able to be that aunt or grandparent or good neighbor or caring teacher, to make a difference in a child's life," she said.

Perceptive adults can spot signs of trouble and head off problems early, said Scott Morton, school social worker for South Shore and John Adams schools in Decatur.

Often, when a child doesn't show interest in his work or exhibits disruptive behavior, it can mean he can't cope with school and needs help, Morton said.

"It's not a sure-fire giveaway," Morton warned, "but if the work is too hard, it's easier to have problems because of your behavior than because of the work."

Family and society must work together to give children the best foundation, Parks said.

"Part of what we need to do is present a more connected thought in our society, where we see the connections among things," she said.

Joanne Mak, 18, a Millikin freshman from Indiana who heard Parks' talk, credits her Chinese heritage for her sense of community, especially holiday celebrations.

"You know it's always going to be there," she said. "You can go somewhere else, into another Chinese community, and you can celebrate with them."

Trotter is chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus.

Fostering a sense of community

Author: Family rituals, role models provide stable foundation for kids.

By VALERIE WELLS
Herald Staff Writer

DECATUR — When Paul Seiz was a child, his family ate dinner together most nights — all four of them, sitting around the table, sharing their day.

"Since I left for college, my family has had some conflict," said Seiz, 19, a freshman at Millikin University. "But that will carry over. There is hope for my family, since if we did it right once, it can go right again."

Seiz is an example of how a firm foundation of ritual and stability can give a child the ability to look outward, to realize he or she is part of a community, said Sharon Daloz Parks, co-author of "Common Five: Lives of Commitment in a Complex World."

Parks visited Millikin on Thursday to speak at the university's Fall Convocation. She also spoke to Nancy Deloy's critical writing, reading and research class.

In the research she and her colleagues at Harvard University did, said Parks, now associate director of the Whilbey Institute in Clinton, Wash., they discovered three common characteristics of "strong," community-minded people of all cultures and ages: trust, fostered by rituals like family dinners and having an influential adult figure in their lives as children; a sense of power, the feeling that "I can make a difference," and a connection with "the other" — that is, the ability to recognize that common hopes, fears and feelings are shared by all people.

"We live in a world gone busy," Parks said. "But we all need a tribe, a sense of belonging to something larger. We must learn to transform 'us' and them into 'we.'"

But it's never easy to put the common good above one's own, and the controversy over the expulsions of six Decatur high school students is an example of that, she said.

"We're having the dialogue of the commons and it's full of tension and pain," she said. "We have justice, that more people have access to what is good and nourishing, and at the same time, we have the protection of individual rights for whenever anything happens that is violent or dangerous, we're trying to have both those things and that's what we're struggling over in this case."

For a healthy society and strong sense of community, Parks said, we need to not only accept, but identify, with others.

"I'm encountering otherness, and how can I let it change me?" she said.

"It's society's best interest for adults to become involved with children who need adult role models," Parks said.

"Often times, on a personal basis, we are able to be that aunt or grandparent or good neighbor or caring teacher, to make a difference in a child's life," she said.

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Denouncing 'zero tolerance,' lawmakers offer own ideas

By JOHN C. PATTERSON
and ANTHONY MAN
Herald Staff Writers

SPRINGFIELD — Sixteen members of the Legislative Black Caucus attended a news conference Thursday to call on changes to state law because of what they perceive to be inequities in Decatur's handling of student expulsions.

Several said they were concerned about schools' application of so-called "zero tolerance" policy toward violence.

State Rep. Constance A. Howard, D-Chicago, said zero tolerance is applied in a way that works against black students.

"From all the data that we've looked at, it does appear that African-American students are more likely to receive harsher penalties than non-African-American students," Howard said. "I'm sure that a lot of this is due to the lack of sensitivity by school administrators and school boards."

Added state Rep. Monique D. Davis, D-Chicago: "Those around the state who claim to have zero tolerance, what does it mean?"

— Staff writer John C. Patterson contributed to this story