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BOARD: 'Discipline without destroying'

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wrong message to the community," she said. "We do not want our school grounds to be unsafe places. We don't want our children to be at risk. This was a melee and threatened many people's lives."

Jackson said the fight which led to the expulsions did not include weapons.

"It was a fistfight," he said. "There must be some sense of judgment here or proportional justice. This zero-tolerance policy is devoid of love. It's devoid of human feeling and care.

"God has a zero-tolerance of sin, but the reason you are alive is because of grace and mercy," Jackson said. "Mercy and grace tempers justice. The schools should discourage violence and use of guns, drugs, sex without love and babies being born out of wedlock. But, you must discipline without destroying. Instead of two years, just one year. The children should be reclaimed now."

Jackson said the impact of two years out of school is devastating. It prevents students from going to school, going to college and getting jobs. He said expulsions should be used only in extreme situations, and he defended his involvement in seemingly a local issue by saying "injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere."

"I had to go to Selma, Ala.," he said. "I had to go to Kosovo to bring back three American soldiers. Some people said it was not my business. It was my business. If I can go to Kosovo and negotiate with (Yugoslavia leader Slobodon) Milosevic to reclaim our youth, I can come to Decatur.

"I'm here because I care. I want to resolve this conflict, but right now the board has locked us out the way it locked the children out by not allowing any sensible alternatives."

Attending the closed-door meeting Wednesday in the law offices of the district's attorney, Jeffrey C. Taylor, were Jackson, Taylor, Goetter, Perkins, Superintendent Kenneth Arndt, Keith Anderson, vice president of the Decatur chapter of Rainbow/PUSH, and Valerie Johnson, education spokeswoman for Rainbow/PUSH in Chicago.

Herald & Review/Dennis Magee

EFFORTS AGAINST EXPULSIONS: The Rev. Jesse Jackson leaves the meeting on Wednesday with school officials accompanied by school board members Terry Robinson, right, and Jeffrey Perkins, left. Jackson said the group will rally on Sunday to protest the expulsion of seven students.

Perkins, whose term on the school board ends Tuesday, accompanied Jackson from an early morning leadership breakfast. "I won't talk about the content of the meeting, but I felt it was important I be here," he said.

Board member Terry Robinson was expected to attend the meeting but agreed to step out because he thought it was important to have a board member there that was involved in all the expulsion votes. Under the Open Meetings Act, no more than two school board members could attend the meeting and keep it behind closed doors.

The students were expelled during student disciplinary hearings on Oct. 1 and 4.

Three were expelled on Oct. 1 on a 3-1 vote. Michael Setina, D.R. Roberts and Phil Wilhelm voted for the expulsions and Perkins against.

Robinson attended the hearing but had to return to work before the vote was taken. Goetter and Jan Mandernach did not attend.

Four other students were expelled Oct. 4. Mandernach and Goetter joined Setina, Roberts and Wilhelm in voting for the expulsions; and Perkins again voted against them. Robinson did not attend, but said he would have voted against all the expulsions because two years was too long.

It's not likely to happen, but a special meeting of the board can be called by Goetter or any three other members of the board. The board would have to give the public 48 hours notice. The board meets in regular session at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday.

"We need to look at the options and possibly look at some things that need to be changed," Robinson said Wednesday. "We need to show we care about students, care about education and care about safety and violence — but two years is too long. It was callous and insensitive."

Mandernach, Wilhelm and Roberts were contacted separately on Wednesday, and they are comfortable with the board's stance. Setina could not be reached for comment.

Mandernach thinks the dialogue is a good thing.

"I value the fact there are parents who are becoming interested and encouraged about student education," she said. "The more parents who are concerned about what is going on in school, the more it will help everyone.

"This is suddenly not about violence at a football game."

She also said it is important that people know there are many people who have called in support of the board and its decision.

Wilhelm agreed the board's verdict stands.

"I'm amazed people like Jackson are prepared to be arrested," he said. "That's not very civic-minded. I don't see any benefit of that."

Wilhelm was the only board member who was actually at the Eisenhower football game where the fight erupted. He was part of the "chain-gang" on the sideline.

"I ran toward the commotion as it quickly moved away," he said. "I saw people pushed down and shoved. Older people were trying to move out of the way and falling. It was a real mess."

Roberts helped draft the wording of the expulsion motions, which include the chance for a reduction in the expulsion if the students do community service or remedial work. He stands by his decision.

"For Jackson, this is a photo op and a sound bite," he said. "To characterize this as a schoolyard brawl is not right. I've heard people say they were terrorized. Children were knocked over. People kept children from being trampled. The police are even calling it felony mob action.

"Do we have to wait until someone is killed to take action? Do we have to have a Columbine or Paducah? It was a lot more serious than people are making out of it."

Roberts said it would not send a good message if the board catered to a special interest group. "I hope the board stands firm," he said.

Dan Oakes, who takes a seat on the school board on Tuesday, said he would have to abstain from any votes, if they arise, until he gets all the information.

"This is the stance of the board," he said. "They've discussed it, and they've talked to counsel. I'm sure they know what they're doing."

CHILDREN: Jesse Jackson calls expulsions irrational

Continued from A1

youngsters who aren't having problems. Rather than toss those kids aside, he said, it's up to their teachers, parents, pastors and community to "redeem" them.

"There's something about justice that calls for proportional justice," Jackson said. "The scales must be balanced. They're high school seniors. There were no guns, no drugs, and they get a two-year suspension? That's not proportional. That's irrational."

Jackson suggested that the boys involved in the fight should be punished according to their level of involvement and that any punishment should keep them in the school environment.

"It could mean washing windows. It could mean being locked up in the computer lab all day Saturday and Sunday for weeks," he said. "The byproduct of discipline should be of some educational value. You reprimand them. You put them on probation. You reclaim and you redeem, and let them go on with their lives."

Sometimes, Jackson said, it takes an extreme situation to get people's attention. He hopes this situation will get parents and influential adults involved in kids' lives and education.

He offered five steps parents should take to stay involved: Take your child to school; meet your child's teachers; exchange home phone numbers with those teachers; turn off the television for three hours in the evening; and pick up your child's report card.

And he was adamantly against seeing this particular situation as a racial issue.

"Don't let this degenerate into a black/white issue," Jackson said. "It isn't that. This is not black and white, this is wrong and right. This is about judgment."

Keith Anderson, vice president of Decatur's chapter of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, said much the same thing in his opening remarks. And Anderson also warned against seeing the issue as a personal vendetta against Jackie Goetter, Decatur school board president.

"We do not hate Jackie Goetter. We do not hate our school board," Anderson said. "We are behind our school board. We think they made a bad decision."

The Decatur chapter's spokesman, Julius Bailey, said the morning meeting was called to tap the resources of the city's clergy in particular.

"Our point was to have a smaller session (than the town hall meeting Tuesday night) with individuals who understand dialogue, who understand compromise, who understand fair-mindedness," Bailey said. "Individuals who are concerned about the city, individuals who have made an effort toward change and are inclusive."

The guest list included not only ministers, but Mayor Terry Howley, Macon County Assistant State's Attorney Scott Rueter, Millikin University President Thomas Flynn and Macon County Sheriff Roger Walker. A total of about 200 people attended the breakfast at the Decatur Holiday Inn Select Conference Hotel.

The school board members were invited, Bailey said, but only Jeffrey Perkins attended. Jackson made references to that fact during his remarks.

This whole incident has polarized the city, said the Rev. Doug Lowery, pastor of Maranatha Assembly of God, who was one of the pastors attending.

"I just pray that God gives wisdom, that there's something to be done that's right," Lowery said. "There should be some compromise where these kids can be salvaged and helped like Rev. Jackson said, some way we can reach beyond this incident and find a way we can redirect these kids."

But Decatur can't depend upon Jesse Jackson to fix this situation, said Saisa Neel, a member of Decatur's Muslim community and of the Committee of Concerned Citizens.

"We are a community who needs to have been doing something about what was going on long before he came here," Neel said.

Decatur has deep-seated problems, Neel said, and the situation with the expulsions is only one symptom of those problems. But Jackson's involvement could be helpful because it shines a spotlight on those problems, she said.

"I hope that out of this will come some good things," she said. "Not just the readmission of those young men back into school, but a re-examination of our policies vis-a-vis our youth and the community and our commitment to education."

Ryan asking high court to review Sullivan case

Police prevented man from entering his property while waiting for search warrant.

By JOHN C. PATTERSON
H&R Springfield Bureau Writer

SPRINGFIELD — When a Sullivan woman told police her estranged husband had marijuana under his couch, it touched off a case that now may be headed toward the U.S. Supreme Court.

The central issue in the case is whether police were justified when they refused to let Charles McArthur back in his trailer during the nearly two-hour wait for a search warrant. McArthur had stepped outside the trailer while his estranged wife was talking to police about getting a warrant.

Although McArthur was not under arrest at the time, he was told he could not go back into his home without a police escort. Police feared he would destroy the evidence, and McArthur later admitted he would have flushed it down the toilet.

Circuit Judge Arthur F. Powers Jr. threw out the evidence, saying McArthur was the victim of an illegal arrest. The 4th District Appellate Court upheld that decision, and the Illinois Supreme Court recently refused to consider an appeal filed on behalf of Moultrie County State's Attorney Tim Willis.

Normally that ends a case. But Willis said Wednesday that Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan's office will ask the U.S. Supreme Court to review the case.

The latest action leaves McArthur's lawyer, Jeff Justice, at a loss. "I don't know why they're making such a big deal about this. It's not like he had 14 pounds of cocaine. We're talking about a couple joints," Justice said. "I don't think this is the kind of case that comes up enough for the Supreme Court to waste its time on it."

Justice said the court rulings are based on the sanctity of the home. "If you want to come into my house, you damn well better have a search warrant." Not letting McArthur back into his home was no different than placing him under arrest or going ahead with a search.

Justice said McArthur still lives in Sullivan. There was no telephone listing for McArthur. Justice noted that McArthur has spent more on legal fees than he would have in fines.

On the other side of the case, prosecutors said police did everything they could and the courts need to establish clear guidelines.

"What else could the police have done, other than allow defendant to destroy the marijuana after closing the door behind him?" said Charles Mansfield, an attorney with the appellate prosecutor's office.

Mansfield said the case offers the U.S. Supreme Court an opportunity to clean up an issue that severely divided the court in the past.

Willis said garnering a misdemeanor drug conviction is not the point of the appeal.

"These officers could have just walked away. They enforced the law and they did everything right in my opinion. I believe I owe it to my officers to try to get some resolution," Willis said. "I think it's a peculiar circumstance when the court tells authorities that we have to allow someone to commit an offense worse than what we were pursing."

The marijuana possession would have been a misdemeanor. Destroying evidence is a felony, Willis said.

Kirkland parking lot undergoing construction

DECATUR — The Kirkland Fine Arts Center parking lot on the Millikin University campus is undergoing construction until mid-November, and 24 parking spots will be fenced off.

The short-term project is essential to relocate a sewer line prior to beginning construction of a new science building on campus. All parking spaces will be restored after the completion of the sewer project. Construction of the science building will begin in the spring.

The university hopes, assuming good weather, that the sewer project will be completed by Friday, Nov. 12, the opening night of the Millikin theater and dance department's production of "Pippin" in the Kirkland Fine Arts Center.

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