

Student drug penalties

The Hoke County school system's method of handling student drug violations seems a kind yet a firm way of dealing with the violations.

A student caught with a "controlled substance" (illegal drug) on campus is expelled for the duration of the school year, if he or she cooperates with the school administration. The student is given the alternative of going through juvenile court, or an adult court, depending on his or her age.

Possession of a controlled substance anywhere, anytime by anybody of any age is a violation of criminal law. The school system's method, however, provides a disciplinary, rather than criminal treatment of a violation allegedly

committed by a student. Obviously, the disciplinary action not only prevents the danger of a student having a juvenile or adult court penalty on his or her record and reputation permanently but it also gives the student a chance to continue with schooling, though not at his/her regular school. At Hoke High School, the Extended Day classes have been going for some time, for both expelled students and for students who for other reasons cannot go to school during the regular class hours. Recently, an "excluded class" for expelled students of junior high school age was started at Mc-Lauchlin Elementary School, for the same purpose -- to allow students expelled for disciplinary

reasons to get schooling till they are re-admitted to a regular school.

In the past two months, however, a complication has arisen. Four students expelled from Upchurch Junior High School for drug violations have appealed and appeared before the school board with an attorney.

The four were among 32 students expelled from Upchurch and Hoke High in the past year for drug and other violations of school rules.

The effect of the participation of a lawyer in the appeals has been that school administrators untrained in the techniques of the courtroom lawyer have been faced with a professional experienced and educated in courtroom practice, and in a non-courtroom situation.

The non-lawyer educators, consequently, have gone to the hearings without the formal professional-lawyer preparation of their cases.

Of the four cases, the school board upheld the expulsions in three each hearing for each pair of students consumed about 3 1/2 hours.

The effect is that administrators will have to spend more time formally preparing their "cases" in the future and be prepared to devote about 3 hours per case when a case is appealed to the school board and the student is represented by an attorney.

In view of the load of duties already carried by school administrators, it would be understandable

if they decided to take the easy way out: turn accused students, over to the sheriff's department, with supporting evidence, for prosecution in the proper court.

Thus, the school's briefs as well as the student's, would be handled by professionals in the law, in juvenile or adult court.

The hope is, however, that the administrators will resist this temptation and continue offering the alternative of expulsion. This does serve the purpose of impressing a guilty student with the seriousness of the offense and provides a stiff penalty without the stigma of an official criminal violation.

The exceptions, however, should (See STUDENTS, page 15)

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