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“After that, she’ll just have to hit me...”

By Michael Brownstein

The seventh grade girl came back to school after a five day unexcused absence. Immediately she began cursing at another child in the class. When her teacher got the class back under control, the same student instigated a fight. Fortunately, the class ignored her.

“I can do what I want,” she screamed. “I’m in seventh grade.” She cursed some more. “Only third, sixth and eighth graders can fail.” She jumped out of her seat and cursed again. “I can’t fail.”

Ten minutes later she was cursing another child. Then she looked directly at her teacher and began cursing her.

The teacher did not say a word. She simply stood up, went into her closet, and pulled her cell phone out of her purse. She dialed the office first and told them she was calling the police on a student who had just verbally assaulted her. Then she dialed 911.

The girl began yelling louder. She screamed, “I don’t care who you call. I’ll treat the police too. I’m not scared of them.”

When the police arrived, they informed the teacher she could not press charges against a student for verbal assault. This had to be dealt with internally. The student had to actually hit her for them to arrest her. It did not matter that this would be the eleventh suspension this girl received in seventh grade — nor did it matter that she had missed fifty days of school.

The teacher called the Chicago Board of Education to find out if this student could be retained.

Diana Statton, a manager from the Office of Instruction and School Management, stated that students in any grade could fail. She informed the teacher that the “Retention” section of the Promotion Policy would answer all of her questions, specifically page 5.

Katherine Konopasek, also from the Office of Instruction and School Management, wrote in an email: “Teachers can recommend retention at any grade but kindergarten. Make your case from the policy and keep a file that you gave parents information including failure notices from the principal and the teachers.”

According to the Chicago Board of Education Promotion Policy, “Students in grades 1-8 can be retained in a grade for a second year only one time during the following grade cycles: 1-3, 4-6, and 7-8...Schools may retain students at non-benchmark grades (3rd, 6th, and 8th) based on the guidelines issued by the Office of Instruction and School Management.”

In the case of the above student, her parent was notified in a conference that her daughter was failing. Furthermore, the student received a failing notice at the end of the second semester and official verbal and written warnings during the fall report card pick-up. Additionally, she received a failing notice with her winter progress report.

“She has to learn to control herself,” her teacher said. “After she reads the promotion policy, I hope she will change. Otherwise, I guess she’ll just have to hit me.”