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Teens expelled for WRHS beating One could be allowed back BY L. L. LEHANS LLEHANS@ HOLDENLANDMARK.COM

REGION - On May 6, the Wachusett Regional School Committee voted to expel two students for their part in the April 14 after-school beating of a 16-year-old Wachusett Regional High School student from Sterling. The incident drew national attention after a video of the beating was posted on the Internet.

Per request of the first student, identified only as a 15-year-old freshman from Holden, the first hearing was held behind closed doors and attended by the student, his parents and attorney Lynsey M. Heffernan of Worcester.

The second teen, a 16-year-old junior at WRHS who lives in Worcester, neither appeared nor responded to

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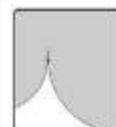
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The beating took place off-campus on nearby Sunnyside Avenue, when a pre-arranged fight between two Wachusett students escalated after the 16-year-old Worcester student allegedly called in reinforcements from Worcester, one armed with a lead pipe. The victim of the beating was a 16-year-old Sterling student, who was not seriously injured. A second student from Sterling was also injured in the fight after attempting to help the victim.

One of the dozen or so Wachusett students watching the fight recorded the event on his cell phone, e-mailed it to police and posted it on the Internet.

Four arrests followed, including three minors later arraigned in Worcester Juvenile Court on various assault charges, and 17-year-old Brendan M. Simpson of Worcester, arraigned in Leominster District Court on assault and battery with a dangerous weapon (metal pipe), assault and battery, and conspiracy. Two of the minors arraigned included the two students expelled on May 6.

No one from the Wachusett District administration attended the arraignments, Pandiscio said, and would only attend further court sessions if the school officials are called as witnesses.

Gone for good

The Worcester teen expelled May 6, who attended Wachusett as a School Choice student, will not be allowed to return to the school.

The Holden student, however, could be allowed to return in September 2009, his junior year, if he meets a number of conditions set by Pandiscio. The superintendent did not elaborate on the conditions, only to say they went into effect as of May 6. The school committee voted the expulsions on Pandiscio's recommendation as required by law, but it will be Pandiscio's decision alone on whether to readmit the Holden student.

Both teens can appeal the expulsions in Worcester Superior Court, he said, but he doubts that will happen.

"We followed all due process," Pandiscio said Monday. He said the hearings were conducted much like a court

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the first time the district has ever expelled students for fighting, he said.

"The school committee members took their role very seriously and asked very pertinent and thorough questions," Pandiscio said, in addition to viewing the video. "A great majority thought expulsion was the best option for the district."



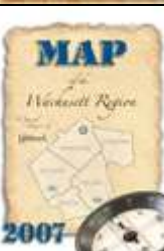
He said the second hearing went a little shorter than the first because the Worcester teen did not attend, and therefore there was no cross-examination or statements by the attorneys.

"But for the record, we had to call witnesses, make our case, and agree on statement of facts," Pandiscio said. He and Beando were the only two witnesses. No one from the Holden Police Department attended.



"The second hearing didn't require as much deliberation by the school committee," he said.

The law governs what happens to the two teens' future schooling. The Wachusett District has no financial obligation to pay for them to attend school elsewhere - "Only if they're found to have special needs," Pandiscio said. "We have an obligation, and informed them that they have the right to be evaluated for special education services."



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