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**Party, suspension policy collide at school board meeting**

The aftermath of an undisclosed incident involving Hoopeston Area High School students caused approximately 50 people to attend Thursday's Hoopeston Area School Board meeting.

According to those who spoke at the meeting, the incident occurred in late August when some students gathered at an abandoned farmhouse south of Hoopeston. According to reports, some students had alcohol at the gathering. City and county police went to the scene but no arrests were made.

At issue is the way the incident was handled by school officials.

Parents of at least some of the students who attended the gathering were told by Principal Hank Hornbeck that their children would be suspended from extra-curricular activities simply for being at the gathering. That decision was overturned by the school board dur-

ing a closed session meeting on Sept. 3 in which no official vote was taken in open session but, according to officials, a straw vote was taken in closed session.

According to board president Larry Lobb, the suspensions did not go into effect because registered letters were not sent to the parents. Parents who favored Hornbeck's suspension and those who favored the board's dismissal, asked for clarification of the policy.

The policy, which must be signed by all students and parents, states that the school "strongly discourages students attending parties and being present where...abuses (of alcohol, drugs or tobacco) take place."

Violations of the three-year-old policy include category A, when an extra-curricular participant actively seeks, solicits, supplies or uses illegal drugs; and category B, when the participant seriously violates the rights of others by violations including theft, vandalism and violations which result in a police referral or arrest. Punishments range from suspension for between 25 percent of remaining contests to a minimum of one calendar year or possibly the remainder of high school.

Those who spoke at Thursday's meeting expressed disappointment and embarrassment at the board's overturning of the planned suspensions.

Dismissing the suspensions caused "major damage to the community, which I'm not sure can ever be fixed," said Betty Shaffer, director of the Hoopeston Multi Agency which oversees the Teen Reach program. "Shame on you."

Shaffer added that the board took away Hornbeck's credibility with the student body. "I'm disappointed and ashamed of all of you," she said, to applause from others present.

Hank Shaffer also addressed the board, saying its action caused a loss of "what little credibility you had with

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## Police News



**Amanda L. Garman**, 29, of 615 E. McNeil, was arrested at 11 a.m. Thursday at city hall. Garman, wanted on a warrant for failure to appear for a rule to show cause hearing, was released on \$42 cash bond.

**Amanda L. Garman**, 29, of 615 E. McNeil, was arrested at 11 a.m. Friday at city hall.

She was charged with criminal damage to property, trespassing and disorderly conduct on a complaint from a 38-year-old woman who alleged Garman drove through

her yard in the 600 block of East Young, used profanity and did not leave after being asked to twice.

Garman was released on three notices to appear.

**Daniel W. Bridgman**, 37, of 640 E. McCracken, was

arrested at 3:30 p.m. Friday at city hall.

Bridgman was charged with auto burglary stemming from an Aug. 16 incident in the 600 block of East Thompson.

He was taken to the Public Safety Building in Danville.

**A ladies billfold** was found Saturday on East Orange, just east of Hoopeston Area High School. The owner may identify and claim it at the police station.

### Policy continued from other side

your teaching staff,” and blamed the board for the loss of the last two high school principals and the former coaching staff and said the board needs to focus less on disciplinary issues and more on other issues, such as finances.

Bill Goodwine read an editorial from the Chicago Tribune about a similar situation at another high school in which suspended athletes remained off the team for a big game. “If you really love the kids, I think you’ll set up a system where if they make a bad decision, they’ll get caught,” he said. “That’s not the case here today.”

Christie Barr told the board their action teaches students that it’s all right to lie to get out of a situation.

Those who favored the board’s unofficial action did not speak at Thursday’s meeting, but two did after the meeting.

Misti and Rod Kaag said their daughter was among those at the party but that she did not drink and, in fact, left the area and stood by a vehicle. When police came, Kaag, a Vermilion County Sheriff’s Investigator, requested that a deputy give the girl a Breathalyzer test, which she passed. The Kaags were among those who were told their child would be suspended for attending.

“You can’t assume things that happened,” Misti Kaag said. “To me there has to be some kind of proof, some kind of paper trail.” She also questioned whether attending a party constitutes “soliciting.”

### Obituaries

**GOODEN** - Sanford E. “Sandy” Gooden, 85, of Hoopeston died at 9:45 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 18, 2003 at Hoopeston Community Memorial Nursing Home. Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. Monday at Brown-Alkire Funeral Home. Burial with military rites will be in Floral Hill Cemetery. Visitation will be held one hour before services at the funeral home. Memorials are suggested to the American Cancer Society.

The existing policy must be signed by every student and parent or else the child will not be allowed to attend school. “You can’t disagree with it until something happens,” she said.

Further, Kaag said, all students were not treated the same and those who lied and said they were not there were not punished.

Kaag said she wants to make sure that the students involved in this incident and those in the future, are judged under a better policy and recommended that a committee be made up of teachers, coaches, administrators and parents. “That recommendation was apparently shot down,” she said.

Lobb told those assembled that the policy is under review and will be changed, with better definitions. However, he said, those attending did not know for certain what happened that night. “I will tell you explicitly that you do not have the facts,” he said. Knowledge of what happened came only from rumors and innuendos, he said.

Board member Duane Sheppard said children have changed and so must policies governing them. “What are kids supposed to do today, sit around at the library and play checkers,” he asked. “We’re not out here to bust everybody, not prosecute innocent kids for making a right decision.”

Board members disagreed whether students could be disciplined simply for attending a party. Member Mark Wagoner said board attorney Bill Nelson said the board was on “good ground” in its policy but Lobb countered that in a private conversation with Nelson, the attorney indicated differently.

### Weather



Chance of showers today. High 71. Tonight, mostly clear. Low 42. Tomorrow, mostly sunny. High 72, low 49.

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Member John Smiley said the new policy must be fair and include what constitutes a triggering mechanism - what causes the policy to kick in. Also, he is suggesting that the policy include community service for up to half the suspension time.

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