

Our View

School owes young pupil an apology

There must have been frightening costumes among those worn last Friday by the pupils at Curtisville Elementary School in the Deer Lakes School District. Common sense was scared right out of the building.

The scariest costume, of course, was the one worn by 5-year-old kindergartner Jordan Locke, who dressed as a firefighter for his class Halloween party. No one objected to the firefighter's garb, but school officials were spooked by the plastic ax Jordan carried as part of his get-up.

They were so spooked, in fact, that they ordered a one-day suspension for the youngster. The plastic ax, you see, was viewed as a potential weapon, and the youngster was in violation of the school district's ban on weapons in school.

That decision was asinine. A conclusion that a plastic ax that is part of a firefighter costume presents a threat and violates the rules goes far beyond the boundaries of common sense. The suspension of Jordan Locke did the school, the district and its pupils a disservice. It made a mockery of the serious problem that weapons policies are intended to prevent.

Do we really want our schools to teach our children that rules and policies should be so rigid that there are no exceptions? It's hard to imagine any justification for suspending the costumed firefighter. The ax was not dangerous. It was not wielded in any dangerous manner. Jordan was pretending to be a firefighter — something most American boys at some point aspire to be.

The school district might consider itself to have a "zero-tolerance" policy on weapons. Although that sounds nice, in this case zero-tolerance allowed school officials to abdicate responsibility for making a ridiculous decision. Parents should expect better from the people who run their schools.

As for Jordan, here are a few costume suggestions for the next couple of Halloween parties. Next year he could dress as a young George Washington with a cherry tree. The following year he might consider dressing as Paul Bunyan. Rather than a punishment, we hope Jordan looks at this as a lesson in challenging authority, which

next year he could dress as a young George Washington with a cherry tree. The following year he might consider dressing as Paul Bunyan. Rather than a punishment, we hope Jordan looks at this as a lesson in challenging authority, which sometimes can be a good thing. When he challenged authority with his frightening plastic ax, he was rewarded with a day off from school.

Parents and Deer Lakes residents should be outraged by this suspension and should complain loudly to the school board. The district owes Jordan an apology, not a suspension.

Zero tolerance policies don't reflect society

The bizarre enforcement of the Deer Lakes School District weapons policy should make school officials reconsider whether banning toys that look like weapons is an effective way of ending violence in schools.

In the wake of school shootings last year, many districts have adopted or reiterated their "zero-tolerance" policies on weapons. That means that district officials make no exceptions for circumstances if a pupil brings in an object that is defined as a weapon.

Such zero-tolerance policies, however, result in absurdities such as the suspension of the Deer Lakes kindergartner who carried a plastic ax as part of his costume. Zero-tolerance drug policies have resulted in youngsters being punished for taking an aspirin in school.

Such policies don't reflect society or our criminal justice system. And such policies certainly don't give pupils a chance to learn how to make decisions based on differing circumstances.

School violence certainly is a problem that North Hills school districts must address. Educators should reconsider, however, whether banning toys is an effective way to combat violence.