

District 214 sets limits for chaperones

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Posted Friday, August 11, 2006

Not everyone was sold on it, and at least a couple of parents think it's asking for trouble.

Nonetheless, a hotly debated rule became official Thursday night in Northwest Suburban High School District 214: Chaperones on school trips will be clear to drink while on such excursions, but only when they are listed as off-duty per a schedule drawn up in advance.

No drinking can be done by anyone around teenagers.

That wording actually is a relaxed version of the rule the board originally was asked to OK. That earlier edition would have strictly banned alcohol consumption by any appointed chaperones for the entire trip.

The total prohibition still was endorsed by administrators Thursday — Superintendent David Schuler said he could not in good faith back a policy allowing any room for drinking— but the board voted 5-2 in favor of the loosened-up tenet.

Miriam “Mimi” Cooper and Leslie Pinney voted against it. Cooper said she feels such trips should be about teens — not about parents sipping wine in Italy, no matter how apropos.

Now and then, “I have a glass of red wine. My doctor says it's healthy,” Cooper said Thursday. “But if I'm on a trip with kids, it's not happening.”

Mom Ann Haberl agrees.

“What's the purpose of a field trip?” Haberl asked the board. “It's not for the chaperones. It's for learning to take place.”

She said the rule suggests to teenagers that it's not possible to have fun without alcohol.

Another parent questioned what may happen if those who drink return to be near teens.

“These are responsible adults,” Buffalo Grove parent Jeff Weinman argued, adding there is a noted difference between “having a glass of wine and being intoxicated.”

District 214 has not had problems with parent behavior on trips, and several parents say the rule OK'd Thursday already was an unwritten one.

The new policy requires the trip supervisor to fill out an itinerary in advance showing who's on duty when. The plan must be approved afterward by a series of administrators.

Chaperones who will be off duty at any point will sign a hold-harmless agreement prior to

departing, per new policy. The district assumes no liability for actions done off duty.

The alcohol guidelines are among a long list of new rules governing chaperone conduct, drawn up in the aftermath of an Arlington Heights school district incident that saw a group of teachers resign after drinking on an excursion.

District 214's new guidelines also ban tobacco use by chaperones while around students and require background checks for all parent chaperones.

The latter stipulation, which will cost \$25 or so a pop, saw little debate from the board but raised eyebrows of a few parents who fear checks may seem insulting and discourage parents from volunteering.

But "if my child is in Germany, Austria or France ... I want to know that whoever's in charge and accountable for the safety of my child is criminal-record free," said John Hillary, who helped draw up the policy. "I see it as being responsible."
