

0014-99

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
AND
PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

COMMISSIONER
OF
EDUCATION

IN THE MATTER OF HEATHER W.

DECISION

The appeal is denied and dismissed.

DATE: June 18, 1999

Findings of Fact

Narragansett is one of those Rhode Island communities which has a policy of not allowing seniors who lack sufficient graduation credits to receive a blank diploma and participate in graduation exercises. This is an unwritten policy which has been in effect for at least five years and probably longer in Narragansett. The parent suggests that an exception to this rule was once made for a student, but a school official, based upon a review of records, testified that no such exception had been made. We do not believe that the school committee had made any exception to their policy.

We have held in the past that a school committee may have a graduation policy such as the one Narragansett has. Jane B.B. Doe v. Warwick School Committee, June 10, 1998; John B.A. Doe v. Warwick School Committee, June 10, 1994. We reaffirmed the right of a school committee to have such a policy as recently as last week. In the Matter of Katie L., June 11, 1999.

The student in the present case has failed United States History. A passing grade in United States History is required for graduation under the Regulations of the Board of Regents. She has failed this course despite the school district's decision not to deduct points from her average despite her poor attendance. The student alleges that she will suffer embarrassment if she is not allowed to get on stage and receive a blank diploma. We cannot see in this any justification for us to order Narragansett to change a policy which it feels benefits the maintenance of high academic standards.

The present case is completely different from the Katie L. case we decided last week. For Katie there was a special public award duly noted and specially mentioned at a graduation convocation where other students received diplomas. Katie was entitled to

this award because her participation in school and school life was a special achievement which all acknowledged and were willing to recognize. On the other hand there is no award for failing United States history. There is no reason for special recognition. We simply encourage this student to diligently pursue her studies this summer so that she may be presented with a diploma when she has earned it. Perhaps the Narragansett Superintendent could organize a small informal ceremony to note this occasion when it occurs.

Conclusion

The appeal is denied and dismissed.

Forrest L. Avila, Hearing Officer

APPROVED:

Peter McWalters, Commissioner

DATE: June 18,1999