



8-year-old suspended for sniffing marker

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WESTMINSTER ? Adams School District 50 is defending its decision to punish a third grader for sniffing a Sharpie marker.

Eight-year-old Eathan Harris was originally suspended from Harris Park Elementary School for three days. Principal Chri Benisch reduced the suspension to one day after complaints from Harris' parents.

Harris used a black Sharpie marker to color a small area on the sleeve of his sweatshirt. A teacher sent him to the principal when she noticed him smelling the marker and his clothing.

"It smelled good," Harris said. "They told me that's wrong."

Eathan's father, John Harris, says the school overreacted for treating Eathan as if he was huffing, or inhaling, marker fumes.

"I think it's outlandish," John Harris said. "It's ridiculous."

Eathan shyly shook his head "no" when a reporter asked if he knew about "huffing."

Benisch stands by his decision to suspend Harris, saying it sends a clear message about substance abuse.

"This is really, really, seriously dangerous," Benisch said.

In his letter suspending the child, Benisch wrote that smelling the marker fumes could cause the boy to "become intoxicated."

A toxicologist with the Rocky Mountain Poison Control Center says that claim is nearly impossible.

Dr. Eric Lavonas says non-toxic markers like Sharpies, while pungent-smelling, cannot be used to get high.

"I don't know whether it would be possible for a real overachiever to figure out a way to get high off them," Lavonas said. "But in regular use, it's just not something that's going to happen."

"If you went to Costco and bought 50 bags of Sharpies and did something to them, maybe there's a way to get creative and make it happen," Lavonas said.

Adams County School District 50 leaders were unfazed by the poison control center's medical opinion.

"Principals make hundreds of decisions everyday based on our best judgment. And in that time, smelling that marker, I felt like, 'Wow, that's a very serious marker,'" Benisch said.

Despite the medical evidence, Benisch promised to draw an even clearer line on markers.

"We've purged every permanent marker there is in this building," he said.

Eathan Harris says he's happy to be back in school after his suspension, but he did confide he worried the school's disciplinary action might hurt his dream of one day becoming a professional football player.

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