

## **School chief misses chance to teach**

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North Branford superintendent undercut state law against drinking by minors.

School chief misses chance to teach North Branford superintendent undercut state law against drinking by minors. Say what he will, North Branford's school superintendent, Robert K. Wolfe, appears to have undermined a new law aimed at underaged drinking in the name of winning the high school's homecoming football game.

The law, which went into effect Oct. 1, allows police to issue infractions to adults who allow their property to be used for teen drinking parties and to cite minors caught on private property in possession of alcohol.

When police broke up the drinking party on Oct. 21 at a Notch Hill Road home, they recovered more than 100 cans of beer. The contents of many more cans and bottles had been consumed and the containers scattered about the basement of the home of Caroline Pethick, where the party was held. She was charged with allowing underage drinking. Ten of the youths were charged with possession of alcohol by a minor. One, Matthew Rossi, is the starting quarterback on the football team. Other members of the football team and a cheerleader were also charged.

As a result, the schools suspended six from the homecoming game Oct. 27 and four others were required to perform community service.

After what Wolfe describes as "a very thorough investigation," he overturned the suspension of Rossi and another player. A third player's appeal was denied.

The superintendent's investigation appears to have consisted of talking with the players and requesting a police report. Unlike prior incidents, the police officers who made the arrests were not consulted.

Wolfe's action has brought severe criticism from the police and the state legislator who was the main sponsor of the law holding homeowners accountable for allowing underage drinking parties. State Rep. Michael P. Lawlor, D-99, said Wolfe should quit if he acted without hearing police testimony. Deputy Police Chief Michael Doody called Wolfe a weak superintendent who wanted to avoid outside pressure against the players' suspensions. He questioned Wolfe's claimed attempts to contact the police. An official of Mothers Against Drunk Driving accused the superintendent of playing favorites by lifting the suspensions in time for the homecoming game.

As incomplete as his explanation of his decision has been, Wolfe may have acted correctly. But as an educator, he lost an opportunity to teach a lesson about obeying the law and responsible student behavior. The Board of Education should review Wolfe's actions to be sure that in the future the schools can't be accused of overlooking an athlete's misconduct for the sake of winning a game.