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Black Girl Sent Home From School Over Hair Extensions

By Julia Jacobs and Dan Levin

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An 11-year-old black student at a private Roman Catholic school near New Orleans was asked to leave class on Monday because administrators said her braided hair extensions violated school rules, according to a lawyer for the girl's family.

A viral video showed the sixth grader, Faith Fennidy, crying as she packed up her belongings and left Christ the King Parish School in Terrytown, La.

The video, which prompted outrage online on Tuesday, followed closely behind a similar episode in Florida last week in which a black 6-year-old was sent home on his first day of school because he had dreadlocks. Black children have historically faced punishment by school officials over their hairstyles, including twin sisters in Boston who were forced to serve detention last year for wearing their hair in braids.

In the most recent case, the Fennidy family lawyer, Inem O'Boyle, said school officials this month told Faith on the first day of school that her hairstyle did not align with school policy. After Faith changed her hair, spending a "considerable amount of money in the process," officials told her again on Monday that her hair did not comply with school rules, Ms. O'Boyle said.

"They told her not to come back," she said, adding that Faith had worn braids for the last two years at Christ the King.

Faith's mother, Montrelle Fennidy, said her daughter was devastated. She declined to say more, referring questions to their lawyer. Ms. O'Boyle said the family was not aware of the school's policy, instituted ahead of the new school year, before Faith attended the first day of classes.

In the video, [posted to Facebook](#) on Monday by Faith's brother, Steven Fennidy, Faith rubbed tears from her eyes as her parents argued with school administrators.

Ms. Fennidy can be heard saying: "What's wrong with her hair? Her hair is fine." Faith later walked out of the school wearing her backpack and got into a car with her parents.

The video gained traction and was [shared on Instagram](#) by the rapper T.I., who wrote that the school administrators should be ashamed of their actions.

The [school's handbook](#) reads: "Boys and girls: Only the student's natural hair is permitted. Extensions, wigs, hair pieces of any kind are not allowed."

It says hairstyles that are "faddish and deemed inappropriate by the administration" are not permitted. If students violate the policy, they may be sent home or asked to modify their hairstyle within a specific time period decided by the school's administration.

Failure to follow those directions will result in "severe consequences," including suspension, until the requirements are met, according to the handbook. The school, which requires that students wear uniforms, prohibits dyed hair, makeup, facial hair and long fingernails.

School administrators did not respond to emails on Tuesday, and calls to the school's phone number did not go through.

RaeNell Billiot Houston, the superintendent of Catholic schools for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, said in a statement on Tuesday that the student was not suspended or expelled. Her parents were offered the opportunity to comply with the hair policy, Dr. Houston said, but they chose to withdraw her from the school.

Betsie Gambel, a spokeswoman for Dr. Houston, said none of the documentation required for expulsion or suspension had been prepared.

But Ms. O'Boyle reiterated that school officials told Faith to "not come back." Faith still pays tuition, she said, and intends to continue her education at that school, where all of her friends are enrolled. Ms. O'Boyle declined to comment in response to a question about a potential lawsuit arising from the case.

Dr. Houston said in the statement that the new policy was communicated to parents during the summer and again before the first day of school, and that it applied to all students.

"The school leadership worked with families as needed to ensure compliance," she said in the statement. "We remain committed to being a welcoming school community that celebrates our unity and diversity."

Last week, a private Christian school in Florida faced similar criticism after a [viral video showed a 6-year-old boy](#) being turned away from his first day of class because of his dreadlocks.

The boy, C. J. Stanley, was excited to start first grade when he arrived with his backpack at A Book's Christian Academy in Apopka, Fla., in his crisp school uniform, said his father, Clinton Stanley Sr. His parents had hoped the small school would give him a better education than the local public schools could.

But school officials told the family that his dreadlocks violated rules listed in the school handbook, he said, although Mr. Stanley denied ever receiving a copy before the family's arrival that morning.

In the video, which Mr. Stanley recorded, a school official can be heard telling him that even braiding his son's hair up will not suffice. "It has to be above the ears," she says, as the boy looks at the camera, his eyes wide. "I have to unenroll him," the official continued. "That's all we got."

In a phone interview, Mr. Stanley said he withdrew his son and had found a temporary school as the family looked for a private school that would allow C. J. to wear his hair in dreadlocks and "let him be himself." But the pain of the ordeal continues to weigh on both father and son.

"It hurts to look him in the eye," Mr. Stanley said. "C. J. doesn't really understand, but he's disappointed."