

## NEWS BRIEFS:

# Mints lead to suspension

MANASSAS, Va. - Joey Hoeffler says he was handing out the tiny white tablets like they were candy.

As it turns out, that's what they were. Certs Concentrated Mints, to be exact. But officials at Weems Elementary School said the minuscule mints looked an awful lot like illicit pills - and parents of another child complained that their son thought that's what they might be.

So Joey, age 9, was suspended from school for one day last week, punished for violating the Manassas public school policy on "look-alike drugs."

"He's not a breath-mint addict or anything like that," said Joey's exasperated father, Wayne Hoeffler, 33, a GTE Corp. employee. "I know the rules are there to stop illegal drugs, and if it had been illegal drugs, I agree he should probably have been expelled. But I think this is going a little too far. It's just ludicrous."

Manassas school officials aren't saying much about the case, citing student confidentiality. But they defended their policy and their actions.

"We don't suspend kids for bringing Certs to school, or handing out Certs to other kids," said Manassas School Superintendent Jim Upperman. "We will, however, suspend kids for bringing Certs or Lifesavers or anything else to school and acting like it may be something else... Without being specific, something else obviously happened here."