

# Safe but Sorry

## Students Pay Price as Schools Restrict Travel After Sept. 11

By **ROBIN KAVANAGH**

**I**MAGINE working hard toward a goal, making it halfway and then being held back from finally getting there by a rule made up by someone who doesn't even know you.

This happened to Steven Boxer, a 17-year-old honor student and one of the latest victims of decisions made by boards of education because of the Sept. 11 tragedies.

Mr. Boxer, a senior at Morris Hills High School in Rockaway, placed third in February against 50 other students in a business management competition in Cherry Hill, winning a chance to compete nationally this month in Salt Lake City.

However, his school will not allow him to go because of a ban on students' flying to any event financed by the school. Mr. Boxer's parents were willing to sign a waiver and even to pay for the trip and chaperon him themselves. But the district still declined — and refused to send Mr. Boxer by any other means, citing costs and increased time away from the classroom.

The president of the Morris Hills Regional District Board of Education, Sam Parsons, said the main reason for the decision was safety. He said the board did not feel the educational value of the trip and the time away from class were worth risking Mr. Boxer's life and said waivers did not completely release the school from liability.

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A similar controversy arose in December in Parsippany, when the school board voted unanimously to end the high school's foreign exchange program in Spain. For the last two years the program placed Parsippany High School students with Spanish families and schools for three weeks as they immersed themselves in the culture. Students were also required to complete assignments from their teachers back home. In explaining the decision, board officials cited the time spent

Award, which goes to students with a 90 percent grade point average for a full year. Now the school is telling him that missing school to complete a three-day competition, plus travel, cannot be justified. Mr. Boxer worked hard to get where he is and deserves to be able to compete, even at his own expense. His school has no right to deny him this.

Denise Hayner, a Parsippany parent who earlier sent two of her children through the exchange program and is hoping to send another, presented to the Parsippany board some research she had done. She said she had compared students' grades before and after completion of the program. She found that most maintained A's and B's. She also looked at nine other New Jersey high schools' policies on foreign exchange. She found none that had discontinued their programs completely, but had merely suspended them for the year. Ms. Hayner's findings and the testimony of other students and parents left the board unswayed.

Parents want these programs. They want their children to be able to compete nationally and to study abroad. Yet their wishes remain unheard, unheeded. These districts' policies are perpetuating the fear the Sept. 11 attacks were meant to create. At the same time, they are inhibiting our future.

Schools should not have the power to override the wishes of parents. The excuse of cutting into class attendance is just that, an excuse, and a poor one. These students are seeking nontraditional education, but education all the same. Instead of running scared, these schools should show the world that terrorism will not hold the next generation back.

out of the classroom, equal to 10 school days over the whole program, although the students would be attending Spanish schools. Sept. 11 also played a role, they said.

Even though thousands of flights have taken off and landed safely since Sept. 11, students are being blindly restricted. The most these districts should be able to say is that they will not finance such events. When they prohibit students from attending them, they go too far.

Last year Mr. Boxer was given Morris Hills High School's Excelsior



Tom Bloom