

From the RVC:

From time to time, unfortunately, members of Mensa make themselves so obnoxious that their fellow members, in self-defense, find it necessary to impose some sort of disciplinary action upon the miscreants. This is accomplished by means of the procedures specified in Article IX of the Bylaws of American Mensa, which can be found on the national website (www.us.mensa.org). Section 6 of this article provides for regional disciplinary hearings, subject to the limitation (in Section 5) that no member can be suspended or expelled from membership except following a hearing by the national Hearings Committee, composed of the three most recent Past Chairmen of American Mensa (with provisions for substitutes if necessary). At the last meeting of the American Mensa Committee (AMC), someone moved to place on next year's national election ballot a proposal to amend Article IX of the Bylaws by changing the composition of the national Hearings Committee to a group of members appointed by the AMC. This motion failed.

One reason for the lack of support for this motion was that it was virtually the same proposal which was presented to the membership in the last election, and failed to gain the necessary two-thirds majority for adoption. Several AMC members felt it was inappropriate to offer the same proposal again. Personally, I see nothing wrong with trying to pass something a second time, but I was swayed by the argument that this proposal did nothing to move us closer to the ideal of decision-making from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. Under both the current Article IX and the proposed amendment, while a regional hearing can recommend certain disciplinary actions, which then must be confirmed by the AMC, the most severe discipline can only be imposed after having a whole new hearing before the national Hearings Committee, thereby making the regional hearing moot, and incurring substantial costs for the Committee members to travel to the hearing site.

So, I have a modest proposal: why not emulate the real-world American court system, and just have one hearing at the regional level, with the right of appeal limited to a review of the record of the original proceedings. In the courts, this is done (at great expense) by means of a written transcript, but we can cut costs by requiring that a video record be made of the original hearing. If a party elects to appeal, a DVD can be sent to each member of the AMC, who can review the video at home before voting by e-mail to confirm, modify, or reverse the decision of the Regional Hearings Committee, or even to return the matter to the regional level for additional proceedings before a new regional committee. The appealing parties would be required to specify what errors they believe were made at the hearing.

What do you think? Is this a good idea, or the worst idea you've ever heard? Let me know how you feel, and if this suggestion meets with general approval, I'll offer it at the next AMC meeting. If not, maybe you can come up with something better. Send your comments to me at rvc6@us.mensa.org or 9920 Ridgehaven Dr., Dallas, TX 75238.

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