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ABSTRACT

An examination of rules and regulations of five schools within a 15-mile radius in Cook County, Illinois, illustrates the diverse nature of behavior problems in schools. Overcrowding, race, poverty, and drugs are suggested by social scientists to be among the causes for disruptions within school systems. The schools in this study include an entirely black inner-city school; a multicultural, economically diverse school in an old established suburban community; a private parochial school with tuition of \$1,900 per year; a school with students from predominantly upper and middle income classes; and a school which serves five culturally different suburbs. A comparison of guidelines for student behavior as codified in student handbooks is made. Punishable infractions range from excessive absences to abuses of property rights and use of dangerous drugs or illegal substances, i.e., guns and knives. Each school has different policies dealing with infractions: the private school institutes immediate expulsion for serious first offenses, whereas other schools hold conferences between school personnel and parents before expelling unruly students. The author points out that adolescents commit more crime per capita than any other age group. He urges that society as a whole must deal with problems of violence in order for the school to overcome discipline problems. (AV)

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Conflict and Change: The School As Reality

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Conflict and Change: The School As Reality

A great deal has been written about the causes of the "new" problems in the schools. Overcrowding, race, poverty, and drugs are just a few of the diagnosis that social scientists describe as the causes for disruptions within the school system. Whatever the causes, schools have had to draft new policies, and, hopefully, new solutions to meet these problems.

To begin to comprehend the problems that schools now face, one only need remember the time when school parking lots were unguarded and security men did not stand in the halls with walkie-talkies. Security has become a major portion of school districts' budgets. School systems are spending \$240 million dollars annually to protect themselves (Phi-Delta Kappan, December, 1974 page 254). In 1972-73, in Chicago, 1,264 "incidents" were reported to authorities that centered around school-related crimes of assault. Police speculate that over four times this many actually happened.

Depending on size, location, and population, school problems can vary even though physical facilities are separated by a few miles. A look at five high schools from the Suburban Cook County, Illinois area illustrates this premise. Each school is unique and each serves a different and diverse community. Selected aspects of discipline and discipline procedures as stated in each schools' student handbook were examined and

compared. The greatest physical distance between these schools is fifteen miles. Yet, the conflict problems and solutions to these problems are, seemingly, hundreds of miles apart.

School Used in the Survey

Five four year high schools (9-12) from various parts of Cook County were used in this study. Four of these schools were public schools, while the other was a private, parochial school. Although the information provided in the handbooks is open to the public, Pseudonyms will be used.*

School "A" is located on the North Shore of Cook County. It is in an old established suburban community. The school is multi-cultural. There is a large measure of economic diversity within the community that the school serves.

School "B" is in the Southern part of Cook County. While there is some ethnic diversity, it is ninety-five percent white. The population comes from predominately upper and middle income homes.

School "C" is a private, parochial school. Students are drawn from all of Cook County, as well as other parts of the Chicago Metropolitan Area. The cost of tuition - \$1,900 per year, limits the type of student who attends this school; although some scholarships are provided to those in need.

*A note of explanation: The author feels that if these schools were identified, fulltime research in these schools might be curtailed or prohibited. However, a list of the schools used is available upon request.

School "D" is located in the North-West section of Cook County. Its attendance area includes sections of five different suburbs. The types of students within the school vary in cultural and economic background.

School "E" is an inner city school located on the West Side of Chicago. The school population is entirely black. Many of the parents of these students are on welfare, aid to dependent children or some other form of "economic-aid."

While each of these schools is unique, they all issue guidelines for student behavior. These guidelines are codified in Student Handbooks, that are issued to all students upon enrollment.

The Student Handbook and its Structure

Most social institutions, including schools, find it necessary to develop guidelines for the actions of their membership. These guidelines define the nature of the institution as well as the needs of its individual members. The size of the institutions, its goals, its organization, and its constituency determine the extent and specificity of regulations.

Each school's handbook reflects its student body and its community. All of the handbooks provide rules and define responsibilities for students and for teachers. These schools all recognize the educative function of the school as well as the legal requirements of in loco parentis, which charge the schools

with the protection and care of their students. The structure of all the handbooks followed the same general format:

1. A statement of the educational philosophy of the school.
2. A list of discipline procedures.
3. Rules delineating suspension and expulsion.
4. Rules concerning absences and tardiness.
5. A statement codifying the suspension rules with a section of the Illinois School Code.
6. Lists of offenses considered "serious" and the resultant punishment when one of the offenses occurs.

All suspensions and expulsions were listed in accordance with the provisions of the Illinois School Code. According to this code, a building principal may suspend students up to ten days for "violation of school rules or gross misconduct or gross disobedience when, in their judgement, such suspension is necessary for the good of the student or the school."

Expulsions, in accordance with the Illinois School Code, and as required by Section 10-22.6 of the School Code, can only be done by the Board of Education of each district. Superintendents and Principals can recommend to the Board of Education that a student be expelled from school for gross disobedience, gross misconduct or gross disregard of rules.

Types of Offenses Mentioned in the Handbooks

The offenses mentioned in the student handbooks fell into

the following categories:

1. Excessive absences
2. Excessive tardies
3. Abuses of personal rights
4. Abuses of property rights
5. Use of dangerous drugs
6. Use of illegal substances

The first two offenses, absences and tardies, have been in existence since the first school began. All the schools dealt with this problem in different manners. In some cases (School A) there were not any specific number of days or absences required before disciplinary action took place. At other schools (School E) if a student is absent from class ten times (cumulative) in one quarter his grade may result in a failure (this is exclusive of illness or emergencies). Still another school (School D) sets the limit at twelve percent of the classes in a semester for "excessive" absences. The student may fail because of these excessive absences.

The last three types of offenses are relatively new to the public schools of the United States. Historically, most violence in the secondary schools of this country began in the middle and late sixties. The Civil Rights movement and anti-war protests focused adolescents on the processes of change. This process filtered down from the colleges to the secondary schools.

Like violence, the use of drugs and other illegal substances began to rise dramatically during the late sixties. At first the use of drugs was largely limited to urban ghettos and minority youth, but this picture has changed over the past ten years.

The public schools used in this survey generally followed the same disciplinary procedures when dealing with students who committed "serious offenses" (Fighting, drugs, etc.). The format followed was:

1. First offense - Conference with a dean or other school personnel or notification of police.
2. Second offense - Conference and notification of parents or notification of police.
3. Third or more offense - Possible suspension or expulsion.

The one private school surveyed, had a totally different type of disciplinary structure. All transgressions were considered serious and could result in immediate expulsion - even if it was the first offense. Besides the offenses mentioned in the public school handbooks, a student at the private school could be sent home if he was improperly dressed or not groomed according to the standards set by the administration.

"Students are expected to be clean and neat in their personal grooming. Failure to be properly dressed for school will result in the student being suspended from classes until

proper clothing is procured from home."

All of the handbooks surveyed had a section on the use of dangerous drugs and alcohol. Students were told what would happen to them if they were caught using these substances at school. There was no mention of any efforts directed at students to prevent the use of drugs, only what would happen after they were used.

Two schools (A & E) had sections in their handbooks dealing with the illegal possession of a weapon. Guns, as well as knives, were specifically detailed as being against school regulations and were forbidden on these campuses.

Arson was mentioned as an offense in three schools' guideline (A, B, & E). Threats and extortion were mentioned as infractions of school rules in four cases (A, B, D & E). Forgery was noted in two guides (D & E). Fighting was mentioned in all but one handbook (A) and assault and battery was listed as an offense once (School E). Smoking and the use of abusive language were infractions at all of the schools in this survey. Each of these schools attempts to educate and to protect its students. Often, the protection of students overrides the educational aspects of the school day. There are guards in all these schools. Police visit all these schools, frequently. "Trouble" has occurred at all these schools. Each of these schools, like the society that surrounds them, has not found a

successful way to deal with these kinds of problems.

Coping With Change

The school no longer stands aloof from the community; it is the community. The problems that the community faces - the school faces. The same social forces that have caused the society, as a whole, to change have caused the types of discipline problems that schools face and solutions to these problems to change as well.

Is the school of the future to become an armed camp? Are the teachers going to sit behind bullet proof glass? Is each student going to be frisked before he enters the building?

Unless, and until the society as a whole begins to deal with the problems of excessive crime and violence, the school can never hope to solve its problems. If society accepts the use of drugs, they will be brought into the schools - no matter what the boards of education say. A more realistic outlook is needed by members of society and members of the school community if these problems are to be dealt with. This realism must be tempered with concern about both the student and the community he comes from.

Crime statistics tell us that adolescents commit more crime, per capita, than any other age group. For decades social scientists have been groping for a reasonable explanation for this phenomena. Environment, social class, peer group pressures and

money have all been looked at as causes for aggressive behavior. Even though the reasons for these behaviors have been located no one has yet been able to stop them. Until these behaviors can be modified by society the school must be ready to deal with deviant forms of behavior and, hopefully, modify or change these patterns for the good of the school population as well as the entire society.

The school, alone, can not solve these problems. A working partnership between those outside the school and those inside the school must occur. This partnership would encourage change and, yet, not neglect the present. When these forces combine, the school can begin to relinquish the task of policing youth and return to its primary function - educating youth.

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