

Tom Horne Reports

Tom Horne Reports On Discipline

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One of the primary foundations for a first rate school system is effective discipline. Discipline is not a sufficient condition (many more positive and creative factors are also needed), but it is a necessary condition. Without it, there is too much anarchy for effective learning to occur.

Some people believe that only private schools can have adequate discipline, that anarchy has opened its wide jaws and swallowed the public school systems whole. This is not so. We can have classrooms as disciplined as those of private schools and we are determined to do so.

Our Governing Board has taken the approach that we will support the staff in applying necessary discipline. All students must know that disruption of other students' learning will not be tolerated.

In the last four years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students that have been expelled by the Governing Board. Here is a summary of our actions:

At Paradise Valley High School, we expelled one student for setting off a smoke bomb (disrupting classes), and another for trespassing at Horizon and lighting a smoke bomb there. We expelled five students for marijuana or other drug related offenses, such as attempted sale and possession. We expelled three students for theft, illegal entry and vandalism. We expelled two students for collecting money for purchase of beer, or bringing alcoholic beverages on campus.

At Shadow Mountain High School we expelled one student for vandalism, another for striking a substitute teacher (contrary to a tribunal recommendation of leniency), and another for possession of a dangerous weapon and threatening another student. We expelled one student for a bomb threat and two students were expelled for providing marijuana.

At Horizon High School we expelled three students for activation of sprinkler systems and destruction of school property.

At the middle school level, we have expelled two students for vandalism and burglary, and we expelled an older elementary school student because of a horrendous incident of vandalism.

These actions sometimes meet with fierce opposition. Parents of students have threatened to sue us. Other parents have threatened us with recall, because of allegedly unduly harsh discipline. We have remained stoic in the face of those threats.

Sometimes, students who were expelled in previous years have come back and indicated that it was the best thing that happened to them - - that it brought to their attention the consequences of their acts, and caused them to buckle down in, for example, a parochial or private school. Some of these students have, in subsequent years, been readmitted to our schools. What is more important is that it creates a better learning environment for the other students, who have not been misbehaving.

I have recently received a letter from an Assistant Principal at Paradise Valley High School, indicating some of the benefits of our strict discipline program. I would like to share part of this letter with you:

"I wish to convey my appreciation to you as well as the rest of the Board on the firm stand which you have taken on discipline. As an Assistant Principal, it gives me a great deal of confidence to know that our Board is backing the people who are daily on the firing line. I was especially gratified to see in your Board letter dated December 1981 where you mentioned that the Board did expel a student due to classroom misbehavior. I have a copy of your letter on my desk and have outlined in red the passage concerning this expulsion. You would be surprised and amazed at how much this has helped me when speaking with students and parents. This dramatically shows them the stand which the Board has taken. It also expresses the Board's interest in education and their displeasure with anyone who misuses or disrupts our valuable educational