

Tom Horne Reports

Discipline and Test Score Results

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A recent well-publicized study, comparing public with private schools, argues that public schools should place more emphasis on discipline and homework. I was happy to see those results publicized, because increased emphasis on discipline and homework has been precisely the emphasis of the Paradise Valley Governing Board for the last few years, and the results have shown in the performance of PV students in standardized test scores.

I report to you, below on the following. (1) discipline at the elementary school level; (2) discipline at the high school level; (3) homework; (4) the results in standardized test scores.

1. DISCIPLINE AT THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL.

Discipline is a necessary precondition to learning. Students cannot learn in conditions of anarchy, and this has been a major problem in public schools in some parts of the country.

Eight of our elementary schools have adopted a formal assertive discipline program. This was a program developed in Los Angeles, as a result of studying teachers who were most effective in their classrooms.

The studies found that the most effective teachers used an "assertive" manner. This included clearly and firmly expressing the teacher's expectations of the students, and being prepared to back up words with appropriate actions. An important part of this was giving recognition and positive reinforcements to the students who behaved appropriately.

In the adoption of the assertive discipline program, teachers have been trained with films and by consultants. Those schools which have not adopted formal assertive discipline programs, nevertheless have similar programs emphasizing proper discipline, and positive reinforcement of the students who behave appropriately.

2. DISCIPLINE AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

The Governing Board has adopted, for the first time in the history of the school district, a policy which sets forth consistent disciplinary measures for given infractions.

In a previous issue of the Observer, I reported to you on the expulsion of students by the Governing Board for serious offenses, such as vandalism, disruptive conduct, bomb scares, and alcohol and drug related offenses. We have insisted on expulsions for these kinds of offenses, despite threats of lawsuit and political retaliation by parents.

In no case has the Board imposed less serious discipline than that recommended by Staff, and in a few cases we have imposed more serious discipline than that recommended by tribunals. An example was a student expelled for striking a substitute teacher, although a tribunal had recommended less severe discipline.

The message is being brought home, that this school district will not tolerate students interfering with the education of other students.

3. HOMEWORK

The Governing Board has adopted a homework policy, which encourages the use of homework, and pledges the Board to support teachers in seeing to it that students do their homework. Students need to spend more time with books, and less in front of the television set, as established by numerous studies.

Although we still occasionally hear reports of bright, able students who have no homework, and are not receiving the proper challenge to their intellects, such examples are investigated, because they are violations of Board policy.

4. THE RESULTS IN TEST SCORES.

All students statewide are given standardized California Achievement Tests in reading, math, and grammar. The scores are given by grade level (i.e., 8.0 is the national average for eighth graders, 9.0 the national average for ninth graders, and so on). Our high schools "topped out" by scoring the maximum 12.9 beginning in the tenth grade in reading and math, and in the eleventh and twelfth grades in grammar.

Our students scored well above state and national averages in all areas at all grade levels. For example, in reading our fifth graders obtained a grade equivalent of 7.0; sixth graders 8.0; seventh graders 9.3, and eighth graders 10.5.

In judging the effectiveness of our policies, we need to examine the trend over the years in our test scores. Such an examination reveals significant improvements. For example, in math, the fourth grade improved last year from the 56th to the 65th percentile, and the fifth grade improved from the 60th to the 71st percentile.

Comparing ourselves with Mesa, which often receives a good press for its school system, our students did better in reading at every single grade level, except at the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades where pupils of both districts achieved the maximum possible.