

## President's Message

### Paradise Valley Schools Require High Standards Of Behavior From Students

From The Observer, Aug 1998 (vol. 30, no. 1)

The father yelled at us. The mother was crying. We were about to expel their son.

What was the philosophy that we were bringing to this decision?

Our philosophy has been that students can learn only in an orderly atmosphere. Behavior that interferes with other students' learning cannot be tolerated. Consistent enforcement of the rules is a necessary precondition to a good learning atmosphere for the 99% of students that want to learn while they are in school, without interference from those who don't.

For some violations, recommendations for expulsion is automatic, and to my knowledge we have never wavered from it. This would include providing drugs, weapons violations, or assaulting a teacher.

A student can forfeit his right to a free public education by violating the rules. However, in most cases, following expulsion, we permit students to apply for readmission in subsequent years, if they can show a change of attitude and a commitment to abiding by the rules.

For other violations, which are serious but not to that level, we remove students from the classroom so that they will not interfere with the learning of others, but still, under some circumstances, pursue alternative education in the interest of the student. For middle school students, we have an Alternative Education Center in the district office complex, which emphasizes computer-based education. For high school students, we can send them to Ombudsman, a national for-profit company located at 20th Street and Bell, which also emphasizes computer-assisted education. Our district has also emphasized prevention programs, such as peer mediation, conflict resolution, anger management: and support groups. "

'Our strictness is in marked contrast to what I believe to be excessive lenience in many public schools, both nationally and locally. I believe that this has seriously interfered with the effectiveness of public education. Why has this happened?

One of the reasons is that elected school board members often view themselves as parent advocates. In a conflict between a parent and a teacher over discipline, or retention, such school board members may tend to favor the parent. This undermines the teacher's authority, reduces the teacher's effort to maintain discipline in the future, and leads to a lax system.

In my twenty years on the school board, I t: have often said to new school board members, as they are elected, something like the following:

Be a parent advocate. But be an advocate for the 99% of parents who want a proper learning atmosphere for the students. Don't bean advocate for the less than 1% who come before us arguing that their child can do no wrong.

I believe that our strict attitude towards discipline has helped produce our high test, scores, in which we exceed national state, and local averages in every subject and every grade level, 36 separate measures.

So, in the incident described previously, we stuck to our guns, and upheld the expulsion. This was followed by a case in which the student had been in several other school districts before arriving in ours. He thought it was unfair that we were strictly enforcing the rules, because he was not used to that kind of strictness. The other school districts he had been in were lenient. He remarked on how much stricter we were.

I thought, "I wish he would have put that in writing, so that we could frame it."