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Board Grapples With Suspensions

By Sigrid Bathen
Bee Staff Writer

Members of the Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education agreed Monday night that a huge jump in student suspensions is cause for concern — and spent much of a lengthy meeting searching in vain for immediate solutions.

John F. Kennedy Senior High School Principal Ron Morgan — whose school has the largest enrollment and the highest suspension rate — provided updated figures which showed a suspension rate at Kennedy more than double last year's, up from 70 in 1979 to 145 thus far in this school year.

Morgan and other high school principals who spoke on the suspension issue at the meeting offered a variety of reasons for the increase — with overcrowding one of their major concerns.

Kennedy and Luther Burbank, which has the second highest suspension rate for district high schools, both have ninth graders for the first time this year.

"This is one of the most peculiar years," Morgan said. "I have classes in storerooms. Problems arise. Friction arises. More 'soft drugs' — and by that I mean marijuana — are being brought in. I don't know whether the younger

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students are responsible."

C.K. McClatchy High School Principal William Morgan said his school was plagued by more than the usual number of fights at the start of the school year, and speculated students were bringing summer problems to campus.

Board members Vernon Freeman and Thomas Chinn expressed concern about the high rate of suspensions for black and Hispanic students, and Chinn said officials are "beating around the bush" if that issue is ignored. He also noted the low rate of suspensions for Asian students.

"At one time there was concern with Asian suspensions related to possible gang activity," Chinn recalled. "The Chinese community sent out a message to the gangs to get out of our schools."

Superintendent A. Tom Glugni urged further monitoring of the suspension figures to see whether they represent a positive crackdown on disciplinary infractions, or simply more violence.

"Everytime I see these figures, I wonder what we use them for except to read them," Freeman commented.

Overcrowding brought on by budget cutbacks was seen as a major culprit in increased suspensions, and a contingent of high-achieving students from Sacramento High School said it also is damaging their education.

Students spoke of advanced English classes being discontinued for want of adequate enrollment, and teachers expressed fear that they could not keep order — much less teach — in classes which often exceed 40 students and sometimes reach 60.



Burbank High School Principal Charles Jones