

Student Suspensions 12/8/80 Up For Second Month In Sacramento Schools

By Sigrid Bathen
Bee Staff Writer

Student suspensions in the Sacramento City Unified School District rose sharply for the second month in a row, with senior high school suspensions in the current school year more than double the number at the same time last year.

Despite steadily declining enrollment, down to 37,000 students from approximately 39,000 last year, district suspensions for this school year have increased substantially at all class levels, even among elementary school students.

Suspension statistics are traditionally regarded by school officials as a gauge of discipline problems and even violence in the schools. Alarmed by the sharp increase, district officials are unsure whether it reflects harsher discipline, worse student behavior, or both.

The matter will again come before the city school board during its regular meeting at 7:30 this evening in district headquarters at 16th and N streets.

Suspension figures for October 1980, the most recent figures available, indicate a continuation of the pattern established in the September statistics. And that pattern may rebut the theory of many district officials that the inflated figures merely mean a disciplinary crackdown common at the beginning of the school year.

In the senior high schools, 246 students were suspended in October 1980 compared to 137 in October 1979. For the first two months of this school year, 421 students were suspended for a total of 1,043 school days, compared to 165 for 354 days in the first two months of the previous school year.

Again, John F. Kennedy High School Principal Ron Morgan suspended the largest number of students, nearly doubling his 44 September suspensions to 87 in October. By contrast, Morgan suspended 35 students in October 1979.

Known as a tough disciplinarian who will not tolerate student misconduct, Morgan consistently defends his suspension methods. He notes that Kennedy has the highest enrollment of any district high school and recently inherited ninth-graders for the first time — with serious overcrowding as a result.

Although Kennedy has the highest suspension rate of any district high school, Morgan says it also has the fewest number of students in continuation school.

"This is one of the most peculiar years," the Kennedy principal told the city school board when it grappled with the suspension issue last month. "I have classes in storerooms. Problems arise. Friction arises. More soft drugs, and by that I mean marijuana, are being brought in."

Luther Burbank Senior High School again took dubious second-place honors in the suspension numbers for October, with 61 suspensions compared to 31 in September. According to the district figures, 13 students were suspended at Burbank in the first two months of last school year.

C.K. McClatchy Senior High reported the fewest number of suspensions, 10, in October 1980.

Of the 61 students suspended at Bur-

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bank this October, 41 were black and 11 Hispanic, figures which point up the persistent complaints of black and Hispanic parents that their children are disproportionately represented in the growing ranks of students who have been suspended.

Districtwide, 177 of the 421 high school suspensions for the first two months of this school year were black students, and 85 Hispanic. Whites accounted for 130 suspensions, although they are roughly 48 percent of the student population.

In the junior high and middle schools, 323 students were suspended in October 1980 compared to 279 the same month last year. In the first two months of the previous school year, 367 students were suspended.

Of the 534 in September and October of 1980, 208 were black and 148 Hispanic. Whites accounted for less than one-third of the suspensions.

The junior high with the highest number of suspensions for the first two months of this school year was Will C. Wood, with 75. It was followed closely by Peter Lassen with 74, John H. Still with 67 and Charles M. Goethe, 62.

The junior high with the fewest number of suspensions was Sutter Middle School, which reported five, — com-

pared to 16 in the first two months of the previous school year.

In the elementary schools, where suspensions are much more rarely used, or needed, 65 students were suspended in October of this year, compared to 37 in the same month last year and up substantially from the 17 reported in the first month of this school year.

Of the 65 October suspensions in the city elementary schools, 34 were black and 11 Hispanic.

Suspension offenses run the gamut from assault, which can be verbal or physical and often involves students fighting, to profanity or to weapons and drug possession. A student can be suspended for more than one offense.

In the senior high schools, 158 of the 246 October suspensions involved assault or abuse; 219 disobedience; 56 drugs; and 17 weapons possession.

Among the 323 junior high suspensions in October, there were 409 citations for disobedience, some students apparently being cited more than once; 239 for assault or abuse; 14 for drugs; 13 for theft; and 12 for defacing school property.

Among the elementary schools, 47 of the 65 October suspensions involved assault or abuse; 54 disobedience; 10 profanity. Four children were cited for defacing school property; two for smoking; one for weapons possession.