

11/2

## School Headaches

# Suspensions Provoke Problems

By Sigrid Bathen  
Bee Staff Writer

She says she wants to go to college and major in "fine arts," by which she means literature. She even has the schools all picked out — two years in community college, partly because her grades aren't exactly terrific, then on to a state university and then graduate school.

Barbara (for their privacy, students' names in this report have been changed) is 17, and on this day it doesn't look like she'll be going anyplace academic beyond the breezeways of Luther Burbank Senior High School, where Principal Charles Jones has just become very upset with her. Chronically tardy, Barbara was not in class when he called her to the office.

Barbara had agreed to talk with a reporter about the increasing problem of student discipline in Sacramento City Unified School District. When Jones

finally located her, she sauntered in eating a piece of pie. She was hungry, she explained, and had skipped class to get something to eat.

Charles Jones is an amiable sort of principal, not as hard line as Ron Morgan, his counterpart at John F. Kennedy, which has the highest suspension rate among the city's six high schools, but known to be equally as firm.

The first month of school saw 44 students suspended by Morgan. Jones ran a distant second with 31.

"Suspensions raise complicated questions," Jones says, his migraine worsening. "It is like walking on a razor blade at all times."

Barbara tells the reporter that her most recent suspension occurred because she and a hall monitor had a misunderstanding about when and

See SUSPENDED, Page B2

Continued From Page B1

whether Barbara was supposed to be in class.

"I was mad," Barbara said. "She said I called her a name. She don't work here anymore. She was getting on everybody's nerves."

Barbara gets out of school at 12:15 every day. Then, she says, she does homework at school. Both of her parents work, and when she's home, Barbara says she watches a lot of TV — "practically all night, until the TV sounds off."

Before she came to Burbank, Barbara went to Charles M. Goethe Junior High School, where she said she was suspended for fighting. "Arguments, you know, little bitty things, like over books and pencils and paper."

"Everybody fights," says Barbara.

Leonard is 16 and a junior at Burbank, where principal Jones allowed a reporter to interview students in his office. A similar request was denied at Kennedy, although reporters were allowed to interview masses of students during their lunch break — an experience which yielded confusing, and largely unreportable, results.

Leonard's grades range from B's to D's, and he likes "all sports." He would have been playing football this season, but he works after school doing janitorial chores for a local church organization.

A few weeks ago, Leonard was not in school for a couple of days because he had been suspended for fighting.

"This guy was talking some stuff, saying he could knock me out," Leonard recalls, "so we just started fighting."

Leonard figures he was suspended for fighting at least once every year at John H. Still Middle School. "I don't like to fight," he explained, "but it's something that has to be done."

In district suspension statistics, 178 of the 386 junior high and high school suspensions in September 1980 were for "assault or abuse," which generally means students fighting and/or insulting one another. And the figure is up considerably over September 1979 when 54 junior and senior high students were suspended in the assault/abuse category.

David is 14, one of the new class of ninth graders at Burbank. Barely into the new school year, David was suspended for fighting. He says the other student, also 14, jumped him, but the facts — as best they can be determined — are unclear. Authorities indicate there may have been some racial goading on both sides. David is black, his adversary white.

David said the other student said "something racial," but he wouldn't repeat it. "I still don't know his name," David said.

Next time, if there is one, David says, he will walk away and tell the dean.

John is 16 and likes drafting classes. On the jacket of the book he is carrying is a carefully rendered vehicle design. John is quick to say it is a Chevrolet Monte Carlo.

John was suspended after getting caught with alcohol on campus. He protests his innocence, insisting he was just holding the bottle for another student.

"The evidence wasn't that good," he says, "and I didn't have to go to court or nothing." The suspension and the criminal justice system seem to be one and the same to him, although in this case they are not.

"We were out in the parking lot," he says, "and I didn't know the other dude. He tossed the bottle to me and I caught it." A school official familiar with his case, however, says John was seen drinking the liquor, not just catching a wayward bottle in the parking lot.

Although he does not think he was treated fairly, John believes suspensions have a place in school discipline for some infractions, "like if they're beating up a teacher."