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# Schools Face Frustrating Increase In Suspensions

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Sacramento City Unified School District administrators Thursday struggled to make some sense out of the complex legal quagmire surrounding student discipline, and were told the issue probably will get even stickier.

Despite declining enrollment, the student suspension rate for the first month of school in the district's junior and senior high schools was more than double the rate for the previous September.

Officials are unsure whether the increase means a crackdown on disciplinary problems is occurring in the schools, or whether student conduct — including violence and drug use — is worse.

School principals attending a district workshop on school laws and discipline Thursday gave mixed views about how students are behaving. They agreed, however, that they are hamstrung by a

plethora of laws and regulations defining how discipline is administered.

"My concern is that we don't have good alternatives to suspensions and expulsions," said Sofia Robledo, princi-

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pal at Will C. Wood Junior High School, which had one of the higher junior high school suspension rates. Robledo suspended 25 students this past September; by contrast, 14 were suspended in September 1979.

"Each of us creates our own alternatives as much as we can," Robledo said. "Our goal is not to dump them out because most of the time they regard it as a vacation. When we do suspend, it is usually as a last resort."

Robledo and her dean of students, Rex Estes, are experimenting with a kind of "in-house detention" method instead of suspension. By that method, students whose behavior is disruptive or otherwise unacceptable continue to attend school, but are under the constant supervision of an adult staff member and cannot talk to other students.

Robledo and Estes think such a plan can — and does — have immediate results for junior high school-age students who are vulnerable to being "singled out" for discipline in full sight of their peers.

The drawback, Robledo said, is the ever-present bugaboo of public schools — money. It costs money to assign a staff member to accompany a student everywhere, and funds are short. So students are suspended instead, often to wreak havoc on their homes or neighborhoods or simply to enjoy the rest.

John Shupe, principal at Albert Einstein Junior High, suspended 22 students during the first month of school, compared to three in September 1979. But he thinks the "general attitude" of students is better than in the past.

Shupe and other principals bemoan legal confusion they say surrounds suspension-expulsion procedures, which contain many safeguards to protect students from disciplinary actions for spurious reasons or the personal prejudices of administrators.

"The law has tied our hands," Shupe said. "Suspensions are all we have left, short of expulsion. The law says we have to do thus and so, and it's terribly time-consuming."

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