

## Discipline Problems: The Root Causes

“A moment ago the children were calm, working,” says Joe David in describing his experiences in Washington, D.C., public schools: “Then, suddenly, without warning almost, the classroom spins into action. All the teacher sees is children, huddled in a circle, and an occasional fist which flies into the air, then lands with remarkable speed somewhere in the circle.

“‘Hit ‘em good,’ someone shouts.

“‘Yeah,’ the crowd chants. ‘Hit ‘em good!’

“The teacher, who was working with a slow learner at his desk, now braces himself for combat and descends on the fighters, shouting, ‘All right now. Break it up!’

“At the other end of the room, while the teacher is pulling apart the fighters, another fight rages; the teacher, still struggling to separate the first group, shouts helplessly to the others: ‘All right you two. Enough!’ But the noise is too loud to be heard across the room.”

This was only a classroom scuffle; David writes also of fires, beatings, serious knifings, and shootings. In his five years of teaching he never felt successful. Many teachers, he says, just leave for the suburbs because of discouragement encountered in urban teaching. In one junior high school eight frustrated teachers walked out in the first semester.

Once David was instrumental in preventing a problem child from smashing a chair on the principal. Just to have a child return a borrowed pencil can present enormous difficulties; preventing disputes from enlarging takes much skill. In the process of trying to settle conflicts David has been attacked with bats, chairs, fingers, and whatever else was available.

David says that corrective measures—suspension, talks with psychologists, or conferences with parents, principals, or counselors—were ineffective. Principals simply brought the unchanged child back into the classroom; frustrated teachers often heaved the problem child back into the hall. These rejected children then roamed the school in gangs and terrorized students and teachers. Teachers protected themselves by locking their doors.<sup>1</sup>

For years Vincent Rubertone had a dream. He wanted to become a school teacher. He lasted three months—he returned to his former job of

working with prison inmates.

At 37 years of age he entered Brooklyn College. After much sacrifice he finally graduated cum laude at the age of 51. Referring to his graduation ring he said, "This means more to me than the Hope diamond. It took 14 years to earn it."

After receiving his teacher's license, he continued to take graduate courses and three years later was appointed to Edwin Markham Junior High School, Staten Island, as a seventh-grade math teacher. Leaving his job in the Brooklyn House of Detention at an annual salary of \$16,500, he became a teacher earning \$9,600 a year. His school was located in a middle-income neighborhood where 85 percent of the 2,300 students were white.

The students, however, gave Rubertone a difficult time. "Every time I turned my back to the class I'd hear a piercing yell," Rubertone said. "I was new. They were taking my measure. I talked to other teachers and found they had similar problems.

"They advised me to write to the parents. I was writing 10 letters a week. A few replied, and said they'd discipline their children. If they did, it didn't make any difference in class. When I asked that one nasty kid be transferred, nothing happened."

He had 20 math students who made it a point to talk when he was talking or throw paper when he turned around to write on the blackboard. After three agonizing months in the classroom, he left without even finishing the term. "They made it impossible for me to teach," Rubertone said. "In three months they destroyed my dream."

The principal wanted him to stay until the next term, when he would receive new classes, but Rubertone felt the atmosphere would persist. "I was getting sick," he said.

His wife became furious over his decision to leave a job that made all his education useless. But he told her, "Do you want to see me in my grave? I didn't study and struggle all these years to be a juvenile correction officer in a classroom."

Rubertone returned to his former job, working in the storeroom in the Brooklyn House of Detention. There he has ten assistants called "time men. Working with these criminals, he said, "In the 12 years I've been there I never had a moment of trouble." Then he added, "They're always respectful and obedient."<sup>22</sup>

Schools can provide the best educational programs, but unless there is an orderly environment, **effective learning cannot take place.** Some

schools have orderly classes; many achieve partial order; and at others, discipline is so lax that it can be best expressed by a former teacher's reply when someone asked how long she taught: "I haven't taught a day in my life, but I served a three-year sentence in junior high school X."

### **Discipline Issues Unrelated to School**

In examining the root causes of the discipline crises, let us first look at those for which schools are not responsible. Students' home life is an important factor. Children who enter schools undisciplined present much greater difficulties than children from disciplined homes. Today there is a serious deterioration of the American family, not just among the poor and minorities but also among the middle class, and it affects children's school behavior. Urie Bronfenbrenner, professor of family studies at Cornell University, states, "In terms of such characteristics as the proportion of working mothers, number of adults in the home, single-parent families, or children born out of wedlock, the middle class family of today increasingly resembles the low-income family of the early nineteen sixties."<sup>3</sup>

Violence on television is another important factor. An investigation by the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, after a three-year exhaustive study, reveals, "The more violence and aggression a youngster sees on TV, regardless of his age, sex, or social background, the more aggressive he is likely to be in his own attitudes and behavior. The effects are not limited to youngsters who are in some way abnormal, but rather were found in large numbers of perfectly normal children."<sup>4</sup>

### **Every School a Disciplined School**

Because of such factors, many would simply dismiss the failures of schools to maintain a disciplined environment and blame the effects on parental apathy, TV, courts, standards of society, lack of sufficient funds, and the prevailing ills of society, which schools are just mirroring. Certainly these issues have an important effect on the children—there is no substitute for a good home, loving parents, and a stable society—but when children are permitted to enter first grade yelling, fighting, spitting, defying, and showing complete disrespect for teachers; schools themselves must share the blame for the discipline breakdown. They must insist on disciplined classes, even when the children are from undisciplined homes; otherwise the entire educational experience deteriorates. One of the most important duties of educational administrators is to supervise schools so

that every school maintains a disciplined environment.

Teachers recognize that some classes are much more difficult to handle than others. What makes them difficult is a small core of defiant students who ruin the entire class because imposed board of education regulations prevent the teachers from exercising effective discipline. In consequence, discipline problems are increasing, in spite of school personnel efforts to maintain order. And many educators leave teaching because of frustrations involved in trying to keep order.

It has been estimated that 80 percent of teachers leave after their first year because of their inability to maintain classroom discipline.<sup>5</sup> William C. Morse, professor of education and psychology, School of Education, University of Michigan, says, "No one is surprised when new teachers list classroom management as their number-one problem. But today many seasoned teachers echo the same thing, and some leave the profession to avoid the daily hassle. No one can expect fewer problems in the days ahead."<sup>6</sup>

A high school principal cited as one of the major causes for the increase in school difficulties "lack of power on the part of the principal to remove disruptive students from the school setting." In my survey of principals, 92 percent favored "more authority should be given to school administrators to handle discipline problems." When there is a suspension at the superintendent's level in New York City, Dr. Howard L. Hurwitz points out that it takes at least 40 hours of the principal's, assistant principal's, guidance counselor's, teacher's, dean's, security guard's, and secretary's time.<sup>7</sup> A student who is being suspended certainly should be given a fair hearing as to the reasons why, but when the procedure is so elaborate as to take 40 hours of school personnel time, such methods only hinder effective action.

### **New York City's Discipline Standards**

On July 8, 1974, I was gratified to read this account in the newspaper:

The new and unanimously elected president of the City Board of Education has announced his determination to rid city schools of goons, terrorists and hoodlums.

The boss of the restructured, seven-man board says he's going to crack down hard on assault, theft, extortion and other crimes that have disgraced New York's public school system.

“What we’re going to try to do,” he says, “is to combine peace of mind with good learning.”

There’s no way a child can concentrate on study to achieve maximum performance if he, or she, is in daily fear of being mugged, robbed or beaten by vicious punks.<sup>8</sup>

I wrote a letter to the new president expressing my delight at his election and his desire to battle school crime. My understanding was that one could not physically apprehend misbehaving students who refused to show their identification, so as a teacher and an assistant dean of boys, I asked what authority I had to apprehend a defiant student. Our school has approximately 4,000 students, I explained, and since many of these students are unknown to us they just ignore us by walking or running away. Our only recourse is to hope to see them in class and in this way apprehend them.

I told of an incident when I was in the dean’s office that concerned a girl who had been molested. After she described the attacker, some of us deans scanned the building looking for the molester. While searching in a stairwell, I detected someone who met the description. When I asked for his identification, he ran away. I pursued him and saw him enter a room. A teacher was in the class, so I asked whether she knew the boy. Fortunately, the student had acted foolishly—he ran into his homeroom and the teacher gave me his name. There was no need to run away, I told him, for now I knew who he was. When I took him to the dean’s office, the girl immediately identified him as the molester. My question to the president of the city board of education was: “Did I have a right to physically stop him?”

I never received a reply. So I wrote to the board of education’s chancellor to ask about teachers’ rights in breaking up student fights. The chancellor gave the letter to the director of the law office of the board of education. In his reply he quoted one of the bylaws of the board of education: “No corporal punishment shall be inflicted in any of the public schools, nor punishment of any kind tending to cause excessive fear or physical or mental distress.”<sup>9</sup>

The law office director added that a teacher should not violate this bylaw, but in case of being assaulted should try merely to restrain the assailant. In regard to stopping misbehaving students physically, he noted that school authorities have an obligation to maintain order; however, school disruptions can usually be handled by taking a very firm and

definite stand and “proceeding through the reporting and suspension route.”

His answer indicated that a teacher could use only the reporting and suspension route to apprehend students. To make sure, I wrote again, asking specifically whether I could use physical force to take an unknown student to the dean’s office, or hold him if he refused to come. Receiving no reply from the law office director, I wrote again to the chancellor asking the same question. He replied that the director had sent me a letter explaining the necessary procedure and that “I do not see what more you can be told concerning the use of physical force.” He believed the director’s letter had been “quite explicit.” That ended the matter. Unless there is an assault or a fight, teachers cannot use physical force. How does this stricture work out in practice?

One day while I was on hall patrol an unknown student came walking nonchalantly down the steps during class time.

“Do you have a pass?” I called out. She maintained the same pace, walking toward the door.

“Do you have a pass?” I repeated as I went toward her.

“No!” was her indignant reply.

What did she do? She knew her rights well. As if nothing had happened she continued on her way.

I cited the authority vested in me by the board of education of the City of New York, but there I stood, helpless. I could only watch this defiant student walk away.

One day a student nearly knocked me over as he raced down the hall chasing someone. Both students stopped running and began to return, so I called them. When one became arrogant and continued walking, I asked for their identification, intending only to give them a warning about the danger of running in the halls. When one refused to stop, I stretched out my arm against the wall.

“Man, don’t touch me!” he indignantly demanded.

Though my arm was out to stop him, he kept pushing, while repeatedly referring to me as “man.” His friend had his identification ready to present to me, but he told him, “Don’t give it to him.”

Then the assistant principal came. He also tried to get their identification. The same student still walked away. The assistant principal likewise put out his arm against the wall to block him, but the student ordered, “Man, leave me alone.”

The assistant principal identified himself, but he continued to call him

“man.”

The boy could easily have walked away, for the assistant principal was just as powerless as I was. However, this student finally submitted and went to the office.

A dean in our school once saw two students cutting classes while he was outside the school. He grabbed them by their arms and had them turn over their notebooks for identification. By board of education standards, this dean acted illegally. What he should have done when they refused to listen was to memorize their faces, then hope one day in a classroom to find them among the thousands of students.

I asked a school security guard, “What do you do if a student refuses to go with you?” He answered, “We are not allowed to put our hands on a student.” Did this rule apply only in our school or were all guards so instructed? “We can only put our hands on a student when he is involved in a crime or a fight,” he replied. “If a student doesn’t want to show his ID card, the best we could do is to remember his face and try to follow him over to his classes.”

One old-timer on hall patrol in a Bronx high school told me how he handles defiant students: “You have to humor them.” Students were cutting classes and roaming about the halls, but he could not use any authority. If he did, they would react with violent anger. The secret? Use authority by gently patting them and asking them kindly to move along to where they belong. Educational leaders have put school personnel in such a position of despised weakness that many students become intensely angry even when commonsense authority is utilized.

## **Concealing Discipline Problems**

Educational administrators must show a much greater concern over muggings, teacher assaults, rapes, and even deaths that are taking place in the schools. Amazingly, it creates difficulties for some teachers to try to convince principals and administrators that such problems exist. “Most principals are big cover-up artists,” said Sonya Richman, vice-president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers.<sup>10</sup> William H. Simons, president of the Washington (D.C.) Teachers Union, called the number of unreported crimes “incredible.” He disclosed that many teachers are pressured by principals not to report crimes.<sup>11</sup>

Teachers in Nevada have been trying to implement programs to fight the “increasing incidents of violence, vandalism, and general school disruption,” noted the *NEA Reporter*. “Unfortunately, the situation here is



somewhat typical of many school districts where the fact that problems exist are denied by the administration and the school board.

“In Wooster, Nevada, teachers were compelled to write an open letter to the community through the newspaper, citing repeated instances of threats, fights, vandalism, and obscenity, after their appeals had been ignored by the administration. The administration’s response was that teachers were using the discipline issue as a political football and that ‘the situation is really nothing out of the ordinary.’”<sup>12</sup>

## **Investigating Schools**

But let someone try to investigate some of these undisciplined schools and he will meet solid opposition. My first attempts to investigate were extremely frustrating. I had to receive approval from the board of education, every school district, and every school I planned to visit. My intention was to observe the general atmosphere of the school and to interview the principal and some teachers when they were unoccupied during their lunch period. No lengthy tests or surveys were involved; the whole procedure, I estimated, would take between one and two hours. Hopefully, I could contact many schools.

The board of education readily gave me preliminary clearance, but on my first effort to visit a Brooklyn school district the deputy superintendent refused my application. She could not let me visit these schools for an estimated hour or two without first receiving a detailed analysis of my activities, which would then be submitted to the school board for approval. Assuming that this was just a diplomatic refusal, I conferred with one of the district community school officials, who advised me not to pursue the matter further. At another school district I submitted the necessary papers but never received a reply.

This resistance led me to plot an alternative course: I would interview parents and teachers outside the schools. The first school I investigated was the Brooklyn district that had required a detailed analysis of my activities. Here I met a concerned grandmother who waited daily to take her sixth-grade grandchild home for fear of her being molested. The granddaughter was the only white member in her school. During the previous term children had thrown bottles at her as she walked home, and for no reason at all some older girls from another school had tried to assault her.

The grandmother related how this term her granddaughter’s teacher was having trouble with a girl in his class. When the teacher corrected



the girl, she called her two brothers. The brothers came to school and plunged a knife into the teacher's back. A paraprofessional who had for many years worked in an elementary school in this district told me that children jump, run, and scream, turn somersaults in the halls, and fight in the classes—even to the point of throwing chairs at one another.

Standing outside the school and trying to interview teachers proved very unfruitful. Though I presented my board of education identification card, teachers were extremely reluctant to discuss school conditions. Slowly I realized that schools are one of the most difficult institutions to investigate. Even as a teacher within the system, I had much difficulty entering. My request for permission from a high school superintendent to visit four of his schools for an hour or two brought this answer:

While I am certainly sympathetic to your needs with respect to your book, I find it most difficult to provide permission for you to enter our schools at the present time.

I am certain that you are aware that the school personnel are under a great deal of tension during these most trying times. It would be most unwise for me to permit any additional burdens to be placed upon our personnel.

It was surely a bit humorous that a short visit from a high school teacher would produce such a strain on the staff. Hampered from investigating the schools, I fortunately discovered another method entrance as a substitute teacher. Since I was on a leave of absence without pay to write this book, I could receive a substitute's license. No longer would I have to be "approved" by district superintendents and principals to gain entrance; the school secretaries called the needed substitutes. The suspicion I encountered in interviewing teachers outside the school changed dramatically when I interviewed them inside. Now that I was one of them, they freely shared their feelings.

As a substitute teacher I had the unique opportunity to roam the halls freely and observe students and teachers. A regular teacher, who is usually assigned to a room or a few rooms in a certain area, would hesitate to wander around areas of a school where he or she did not teach. But since I was a new substitute, there was not that suspicion when during my free period I would walk through the corridors of the entire school with my substitute assignment sheet in hand. When on a few occasions I was questioned, I replied, "I'm a substitute," and I just kept on walking.

After investigating schools throughout New York City, I readily understood why administrators eagerly blocked my attempts. In a modern junior high school located in lower East Side, Manhattan, with an enrollment of 1,200, I stopped a boy taking a trash can to the rear of the room to play ball. When other students wanted to play cards, I forbade them, but one student just laughed and said they always played cards. With that they sat down and began their game. Into the class walked the assistant principal, but the students continued their card game. He left without saying a word.

Students could be seen roving the halls, playing ball in classrooms, fighting, climbing on desks and lockers, and harassing teachers trying to teach. In schools like these even the boys' and girls' lavatories are locked; in this school they had only one opened for each with an aide checking passes.

In a junior high school in Brownsville, Brooklyn, I observed only four pupils in class while the teacher was debating with other students in the hall. For some reason the teacher refused to let these students enter his class, but one just pushed his way through. The teacher closed the door; the others kept banging and kicking it. Students were scattered everywhere in this minority school. In one smoke-filled section on the top floor about 35 were congregated.

While walking through the halls during the first period in a modern South Bronx intermediate school, I noticed that already students were roaming the halls. In one large, beautiful, carpeted classroom there was a regular social studies teacher with a noisy class of students. Across the hall a math teacher had a class of chattering pupils, with two boys in the rear playing cards. Though this school was just eight months old, the art room lockers, walls, and ceiling were heavily marked with crayons.

I was substituting for the science teacher. In the modern science room two hanging wall units, apparently to hold vials for science experiments, were broken. The classroom had five sinks, but the water fixtures and various jets were missing; within two months the classes damaged all the water fixtures. Students told me what transpires with their regular teacher: They fight, climb on desks, knock over desks, and throw chairs while the teacher is teaching. They also play cards and basketball. (In classroom basketball one student sits by the sink on one end of the science table while another sits at the other sink; they shoot into each other's sink using a paper ball.) No one from the outside can observe what is going on because the door window is conveniently blocked with paper.

One science class I taught, or tried to teach, was the SP (special students): the bright seventh-grade class taking the normal three years in two. Though work had been planned for them, they did whatever they wanted; they jumped on one another, ran around the room while pushing chairs in the pathway of whoever was chasing them, and had wrestling matches, which I tried to stop. A group of boys and girls sat on the science table and loudly sang, “La la, la la,” while rocking back and forth with the music. At first I was unsuccessful in getting them off the table. After a bit of persuasion they finally obeyed, then sat on a desk and sang again.

This special class of bright students returned for another period. Although I again had work prepared for them, some emptied desks and began a paper fight. Others began to run around, while some wrestled. It was bedlam I called for the dean, but before he came I made a mental picture of the serious disturbers so I could report them. When the dean appeared, I asked whether he wanted to know the troublemakers.

“There’s no reason for it in this class,” he replied. He ignored the disruptions and nonchalantly walked out.

A boy who did not belong in my class came into the room. When I spoke to this six-foot-tall student, he retorted, “Shut up.” When I reprimanded him for talking this way to a teacher, he said he came from Harlem and I should meet him there. He finally left the room in his own time.

Invariably, students could be seen meandering about the halls during class time. Although on one occasion two deans were in the hall, nothing was done about these roaming students. Once I saw a student run and fall. I thought he had tripped. I was mistaken; other students were also running and falling—they were running and sliding on the new tile hallway as though they were on ice.

In another school, someone kicked my classroom door. I opened the door and looked out, but no one was there. The act was repeated. When I related this incident to a teacher, he shared with me this nugget: Do not open the door at the first knock; if a student really wants to enter, he will keep knocking.

While teaching in the South Bronx, two fourth grade boys were arguing. Then a girl in the class pushed one into the other and a fight began. I intervened and stopped the fight. One boy then raised a chair over his head to strike the other, so I quickly went for the chair. He picked up a serving tray, and in trying to grab him I ripped his shirt sleeve. A guard and teacher appeared, but he continued his violent resistance as

they removed him. When he returned to class, he threatened to bring his sister the next day because I had torn his shirt. Since I substituted only one day in each school, I had nothing to fear.

Shortly thereafter two girls began a fight. When I attempted to stop them, one girl twice stomped on my toes. While being removed by the guard, this fourth-grade girl put up a fierce struggle.

In a Queens middle-class neighborhood a principal had all elementary pupils lined up orderly and quietly outside as he addressed them. This appeared to be a well-disciplined school. The area has been changing, and the school was now approximately half Spanish and half white. The principal warned me about disciplining the children: Do not “touch them.” Though the teacher was going to be absent until the end of the term, more than three weeks away, the principal had no material to offer to teach the class.

One of my third-grade girls warned me that the class was noisy, and knowing the importance of starting right I determined to obtain immediate control. After children put away their belongings, they were at once to do “class news.” The assignment consisted in writing five sentences about the class. Some pupils, however, could barely write. When I asked one of the girls to write, a nearby student said, “She don’t know how.”

I had a spelling lesson with these third-grade children, who in a few weeks would be advanced to the fourth grade. One girl had received permission from the teacher to write only the first and last letters of each word: for the word *bat* she wrote *bt*; for *fox*, *fx*; and for *train*, *hn* (this she misspelled). Another girl wrote only the first letter for each word; even then she made many mistakes.

At the beginning of the class the students were quiet and busy. The principal came in to observe, and commented as he left, “Fantastic!” However, this success was short-lived. Soon the class became disorderly. I told the children to be quiet, but my voice just echoed off the walls. The principal walked in and restored order. When I reported that a girl had refused to work and was causing constant problems, he said she had learning disabilities and I should do the best I could. A number of times he appeared and regained order, but as soon as he left the class would misbehave. Finally he asked whether I could handle the class; otherwise, he would have to divide it. It was an embarrassing position: Here I was as a professional teacher and being made to feel incompetent.

(I like to point out when I was a high school teacher and dean, students who knew me would immediately come to order. On one

occasion, on the school's Senior Day, a teacher lost control of her class, but when I walked into the class, there was silence. Although I did not yell, the students knew that if anyone caused trouble I would not hesitate to take immediate action. Mentioning to a dean I had worked with of the disorders I experienced while substituting, called forth an astonished "This is happening in *your* class?")

The elementary school principal waited for my response to whether he should divide the class. Wishing not to be defeated, I said I would continue to try to teach. Since I was a substitute just for one day and not be returning to this school, I complained to the principal that *he* should do something about the defiant children.

"It's your responsibility, my friend," the principal replied.

I walked around the class and pointed out five students who refused to do the assigned work. He walked out of the room and did nothing.

One girl was the class scapegoat. While she was crying at her desk, another girl came from behind and hit her in the back. I had seen what happened and told her I would report the incident to the principal. She twice stuck out her tongue at me. When the principal arrived once more and heard what had transpired, he just scolded her. As the principal left, she sneered at him.

After breaking up a fight between a boy and a girl, I told the girl, "Sit down."

"No! I don't have to," she said as she walked away. On another occasion I had two fights going on at the same time.

Someone knocked on the door and two girls opened it. A third grade boy reached in and grabbed the private parts of one of them. One girl told me the boys do this often.

When I asked this third-grade class whether they acted so disorderly with their regular teacher, they said they did not like the teacher and they acted even worse. Going home I met another teacher, who said in referring to this school, "It's crazy, it's crazy." She also had problems and her classes were the same. A boy in her class made a fire in a basket, and the principal did nothing about it. I asked her why the regular teacher was not coming back to her class; she believed she had had a nervous breakdown. The teacher of my class had taught for 16 years. Though she really tried to exercise class control, she was unsuccessful. The children were so difficult to handle that she would come to this teacher and ask for advice because she believed she had better control.

## **Schools—Habitation for Criminals?**

In *New York Teacher* Jeremiah Mckenna, director of Policy Sciences Center, Inc., a research foundation organized to improve all public and private decision-making processes, says of New York City schools: “The absence of sanctions against crime outside or inside the schools has therefore transformed some of the city’s schools into sanctuaries for crime. Stated another way, some of the schools are in danger of becoming *places where persons gather for the purpose of engaging in unlawful conduct*. The italicized words constitute the statutory definition of a criminal nuisance found in section 240.45(2) of the New York State Penal Law, a crime classified as a Class B Misdemeanor. There is a clear public policy against maintaining criminal nuisances, and some schools may cross that line if their student criminal element is not brought under control or removed.” Some schools, like our prisons, have become places where crime prone juveniles are initiated into a criminal subculture and trained in criminal skills.”

Not only did some schools become “sanctuaries for crime,” but, Mckenna notes, it was in New York City schools that *drugs became firmly entrenched in the city*. “We know that 1968-1970 was the peak period of the city’s drug abuse epidemic and that the principal contact point for the spread of the ‘American Disease’ was the school system,” he says. “The student addict-pusher found a sanctuary in the school system, free from harassment by the police. The failure to act vigorously against the student addict-pusher exposed a generation of students to the contagion of drug addiction with disastrous results.” Even though drugs were brought into the city from outside, it was primarily schools that became a haven for drug addicts and pushers.

Mckenna reports that a survey was conducted by the board’s Bureau of Educational Research in 1970. It “indicated that drug use was reaching epidemic proportions among the student population. Interviews by Board of Education interviewers of known addicts who had graduated revealed that 75 percent of these addicts admitted selling drugs to their fellow students while in the school system. Nevertheless, the central board insisted on sheltering the addict population in the schools and refused to report suspected drug abusers to the proper authorities.”

The city’s Health Code required all public agencies, including the schools, to disclose all names of suspected drug users to a Central Narcotics Register. This register was strictly confidential, even law enforcement personnel being prevented from utilizing it. The board

refused to submit names of suspected drug abusers. Board of Education Chancellor Harvey Scribner was caught “issuing an unlawful directive to school personnel ordering noncompliance with the Health Code.” When board members were confronted with the issue, they withdrew the directive.

If a student took action to expose criminal elements in school, Mckenna said, it would bring “great personal risk and no results. The clear message from the school authorities is acquiescence toward criminal conduct.” And he warned, “Our schools may be conditioning an entire generation in the perceived futility of positive resistance to the criminals in our midst.”

In concluding his article on “Crime in the Schools,” Mckenna says gloomily, “The goal of a relatively crime-free educational environment seems further off each year. The central board has thus far exhibited dreadful confusion in the goals it is pursuing in this critical area, and the upward trend in student crime makes for a pessimistic prognosis.” He then predicts, “Crime in the schools, therefore, remains a bleak but certain prospect unless radically different policies and policy-making procedures are quickly implemented by the central board.”<sup>13</sup>

The U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency reports, “The last decade in America has been and continues to be alarmingly and dramatically upward.” There were 70,000 serious assaults on teachers in 1973.<sup>14</sup> The *American School Board Journal* says that within the past decade crimes against students increased by 3,000 percent and assaults on teachers by 7,000 percent.<sup>15</sup>

If such crime increased 100 percent, it would be serious, 200 percent would be outrageous, but figures like these? Can we let these shocking statistics sink into our minds? Must we be told that behind each figure there is a human being suffering? Consider the victims of the 100 murders, 12,000 robberies, 9,000 rapes, and 204,000 aggravated assaults by school-age children in one year!<sup>16</sup> Think of young children who must exercise great bladder control for fear of a toilet shakedown; the apprehensions of those who must walk in groups to protect themselves from gang attacks; the fright of teachers, parents, and children when they hear of muggings, stabbings, and rapings. But what has happened after these statistics were reported? Instead of 70,000 assaulted teachers, by 1979 students attacked 110,000 teachers.<sup>17</sup>

I have tried to show how powerless I was as a teacher in coping with student misbehavior because of policies forced upon me by New



York City school administrators. Though courts have contributed to the breakdown of discipline, the Supreme Court has ruled that teachers can punish misbehaving children, even by the use of corporal punishment. Educators need to reverse the disastrous trend of permitting defiant children to ruin the schools. Teachers have the important function of training children to be responsible citizens. Unless educators insist on their right to maintain a disciplined environment, we will continue to see many children misbehave.

### **Schools—Training Centers for Proper Social Behavior**

Schools have a direct relation to children's antisocial behavior. When children enter school, it is their first direct contact with society. If in school they do not learn that legitimate authorities are to be obeyed and respected, their disrespect and antisocial behavior will be demonstrated outside the school. What kind of picture is presented when teachers stand helpless before defiant children? What are children learning when they observe students cursing, pushing, fighting, and showing disregard for their classmates while a feeble teacher tries to stop them? Might prevails, not justice.

Researchers from the Institute for Juvenile Research of the Illinois Department of Mental Health in a six-year study questioned more than 3,000 teenagers about infractions, from cheating on exams to drug abuse, theft, and violence. In searching for causes of juvenile delinquency, the report noted, "Even adolescents who may say they fully share the values of their parents do not necessarily act on those values when in the company of their peers." Then the report said, "Much of the concern over juvenile delinquency can only be alleviated by changes in the institutions which process youth," and the "high schools and junior high schools loom as fatefully important institutions."<sup>18</sup> Besides providing children with an education, schools can do much to help society train children to engage in proper social behavior. Today, since many educators fail to incorporate proper disciplinary methods, they are in effect training children how to misbehave.

Who are the ones committing much of today's crime? The Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Report stated that 45 percent of the serious crimes were committed by individuals under 18 years of age. These are school age children!<sup>19</sup> And *Newsweek* reports this shocking statistic: "Juvenile crime has risen by 1,600 percent in twenty years."<sup>20</sup>

No longer can children today feel free to walk, skate, bike-ride, or

travel by mass transit system as in former years. Some parks are not safe even in the daytime. In New York City policemen ride subways and stand patrol on train stations. People must carry exact change to ride buses since bus drivers demanded protection from frequent holdups. Cities have better street lighting and sophisticated crime detection equipment, but with all this, juvenile crime has skyrocketed. Has youth changed over the past 30 years, or are parents producing more violent, less intelligent children? Is it their vitamin-enriched diet, their environment, or have their genes and chromosomes been radically altered? The change has occurred in the way our society tolerates misbehavior—particularly in schools.

Something must be done to reverse the intolerable conditions existing in many schools. Criticism of schools by parents and of parents by schools does not lead to solutions. Both parents and schools have their responsibility to train children properly. There is no virtue in just wringing hands while watching multitudes of undisciplined youth being ruined. Much of the rising delinquent behavior is due to the procedures forced upon teachers by administrators. Children deserve a school environment where they can learn in freedom from fear.

American education in many schools has passed the crisis point. It is a disaster. The school conditions that I have observed and partially described are appalling; to tolerate them amounts to a crime against humanity. How many more children must be destroyed before leaders will change? To solve the discipline crises, we need a new, honest look at our schools, with an eye to changing the deplorable situation by incorporating President Truman's motto: "The buck stops here."