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**'Up the Down Staircase'  
to have weekend shows**

*'Staircase' is the story of  
one teacher's struggle to  
win her student's respect*

By **Tammy Salzman**  
Freelance Reporter

Sylvia's first teaching job out of college had to be at a high school in a Bronx neighborhood. Undisciplined students, a shortage of school supplies and general frustration greet her at Calvin Coolidge High School.

Today and Saturday Churchill High School will present "Up the Down Staircase," a play set in 1964 and based on Bel Kaufman's novel about a young teacher's struggle to win the respect of her students despite their lack of interest in school and resistance to authority.

According to John Muellner, the play's director, "Up the Down Staircase" symbolically represents Sylvia's metamorphosis from a tentative newcomer to someone who becomes passionately involved in her job.

Going up the down staircase means she is going against the current to fight the nonsensical authority, he said. She receives mixed signals from faculty members and finds herself fighting with a discipline-over-everything administration.

Though getting through to the students challenges the inexperienced Sylvia, she eventually earns their trust and inspires them to take responsibility for

their lives. Along the way she becomes deeply involved in her students' problems and the problems plaguing the high school.

The play may seem somewhat dramatic, but Muellner said some parts are more lighthearted. He believes the audience will find certain moments humorously realistic.

"This is one of those 'I've been there' plays," he said. "It appeals to instructors; it appeals to students. Everybody can identify with this at one time or another."

Muellner, who said this is his first year at Churchill, believes the play not only entertains the audience, but also serves as a good opportunity for high school students to learn about discipline.

He encourages his student actors to have fun, but at the same time they must adhere to his rules regarding schoolwork. If students are failing a class, they have one week to raise their grade to passing or they cannot be part of the production.

"This is more than just acting. I'm teaching them about life," he said.

After some grueling rehearsals and rewriting the script six times, Muellner feels the cast is outstanding.

"These kids are damn good," he said.

Tickets for the two shows running on Feb. 13 and 14 are \$3 for students, \$4 for adults. Both showings will begin at 7:30 p.m.

*"This is more than just acting. I'm teaching them about life."*

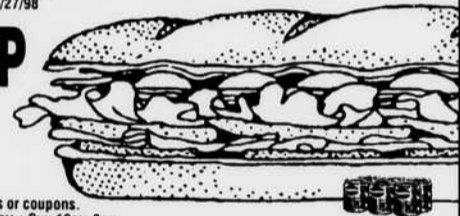
**John Muellner**  
Director

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