

The right kind of principal

NICARAGUA AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

"Sandino Vive" (Sandino Lives), film showing the role the Catholic Church has played in the Nicaraguan revolution and reconstruction, June 15, 11 A.M., St. Andrews Community Center, Multi-purpose room. Literature, and refreshments. Presented by Portland Nicaragua Support Committee.



LESTER W. BUTTS

into trouble."

Students at Douglass, like other city schools, are required to carry hall passes when they must be in the halls. At lunchtime, students must remain in the cafeteria until their 30 minute lunch period ends.

Students who violate rules are counseled and punished. Students with drugs and those who get involved in fights can expect to be dealt with swiftly.

In separate letters recently, two former students wrote Butts to thank him for his counsel, which they said changed their disruptive acts at school and is now leading them to more productive lives.

Butts is a soft-spoken man, but his reputation as a hard-nosed, no-nonsense school administrator is widespread. While some schools find themselves beset by outsiders hanging around their campuses disrupting classes, Douglass is not.

Some high-school principals do not have student assemblies because they cannot keep order. Douglass has had as many as three during a week.

Like most other high schools in the city, 70 percent of the students enrolled at Douglass are getting free

or reduced-price meals. Its enrollment ranges from the very wealthy to the poorest. Students at Douglass come from the Collier Heights, the Hightower-Baker roads area, Dixie Hills and Bowen Homes and Bankhead Courts.

At a recent honors program, honor students included students from all those communities.

When the first class graduated from Douglass in 1970, 15 percent of the graduates were honor graduates. Since then, 3,542 graduates have left and more than 20 percent were honor graduates.

The percentages of students continuing their education after graduation has grown from 38.9 percent to more than 65 percent. For the first time this year, the school has a semifinalist for the National Merit Scholarship Program. More than 350 students took the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test this year.

Graduates of the school are now holding down such jobs as doctors, lawyers, nurses, flight attendants, accountants, engineers, teachers, mechanics, professional entertainers, data processors and bankers.

By Peter Scott

It may sound hard to believe, but there are schools that students and their parents are clamoring to get into. One of them is Atlanta's Frederick Douglass High School.

This year, out of about 600 requests from parents in Area One for student transfers, half of them were for Douglass, according to Thomas Rudolph, assistant area superintendent.

"I know a lot of people who live with their grandparents in the area just to go to Douglass," senior Gary Smith said.

"It's the only school I ever thought about going to."

Two Alabama youths, Harronald Alexander of Tuskegee Institute and Raymond Young of Anniston, came to live with relatives for an education at Douglass.

Douglass is an imposing modern three-story, eggshell-colored, air-conditioned brick structure that sits among a row of modest houses and churches at 225 Hightower Road NW, just off Interstate 20 west.

The school is the first so-called comprehensive high school in Atlanta, and it has all the courses parents could want for their youngsters. There are foreign language studies, vocational studies, advanced college studies in English and mathematics, computer studies and remedial programs in reading and math.

But the main attraction of Douglass seems not to be its academic offerings but its academic climate and the man who makes that possible, Principal Lester W. Butts.

Area One Superintendent Moses Norman agrees.

"He's an organized administrator. He has surrounded himself with a competent staff and he keeps the instructional program as his main focus, and all other things that happen are important only in relationship to the leadership he gives," Norman said.

"He is consistent. He believes in following rules and regulations, but he is not bashful about challenging any of them, and he does so in the proper forum."

In the early 70's, Butts found himself challenging Norman's predecessor, Cecil Thornton. A group of white teachers did not want to attend night-time PTA meetings in the mostly Black Douglass High area. Butts said they would come. His area superintendent was asking him to waive his policy. Butts did not budge and threatened to resign if he were not supported. He was.

In another incident, Butts refused to allow a teacher he dismissed to return to the campus. The teacher was sent back to the school by area officials and Butts abruptly left for a brief trip to Florida. His departure produced such a cry from parents that the teacher was transferred and Butts returned to his job.

Butts, a slightly built man standing just about 5-foot-6, looks like he ought to be in some corporate board room poring over stocks and bonds, but for 12 years, he has served as Douglass' only principal.

Butts has been more fortunate in

some respects than other high-school principals in the city. He has many of the same top-notch staff members he had when he opened the school in 1963. Samuel Hill, one of his assistant principals, and Juanita Daniels, the other, have been with him since the school opened.

Two of his key department chairmen, Juanita Long in math and Valeria Lockett in English, also have been by his side since the school opened.

As an elementary principal working at both the Carey and Williams elementary schools, Butts got an early introduction to many of the students he later served as high school principal.

Butts, always neatly attired, can seldom be found sitting in his office.

He walks the halls of the Douglass campus frequently, checking on the education of the 2,100 plus students at the city's largest high school. He is usually the only one in the halls and the only sounds to be heard are those coming from instructors and students inside the classrooms.

It is the discipline and academic atmosphere at Douglass that many refer to when they speak of Lester Butts.

"Mr. Butts is the kind of administrator who will ask you for your maximum effort, and he has established a climate at the school so that you can give it without being bothered with discipline problems," said Moses Scott, an industrial arts teacher.

"You get one or two complaints from time to time, but by and large, I haven't received any," said Jesse Moore, executive director of the Atlanta Association of Educators.

Butts is not the darling of the entire faculty at Douglass or the Atlanta school district, but those who criticize him somehow end up saying, "but, he is fair."

One Butts' detractors said that "the way to measure what he is doing is to see how well students from low-income areas are doing at his school compared to those from middle-income homes."

But senior counselor Bettye S. Smith says there's little difference in performance of the two groups.

"The one thing he does is operate the school as a good father would run a family. He cares about students being totally educated and prepared for today's world," said registrar Lucille Melver.

"Students are continuously going to him for advice. By the time most of them are seniors, he will know them all," Mrs. Ivers said.

Part of that concern involves establishing good discipline, and it is in place at Douglass.

When Butts shows an extra interest in the welfare of his students, it is because he received the same kind of support from a principal. Butts is viewed as strict disciplinarian.

He looks upon his actions as examples of caring.

"I don't think I am a strict disciplinarian. I try to present alternatives to students."

He said the concern at his school for students to be in class and not roaming the halls is simple: "Students who cut class often get

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