

**THE PLAIN
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Magazine
SUNDAY, NOV. 14, 1982

**THE SPLIT
IMAGE
OF CLEVELAND
TEACHERS**

America's
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Page 32





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SUNDAY, NOV. 14, 1982

FEATURES

Tales out of school 6,7

First they deal with problems involving discipline, security, theft, vandalism and busing — and then, if there's time and if they still care, they teach. Peter Jedick, a substitute teacher in the Cleveland Public School System, asked himself if the fault was with the new generation of students or with the Cleveland system. You may not like what he discovered in comparing the city's schools with the suburbs', but it's worth reading. Meanwhile Bill Sones, on Page 6, acknowledges that teaching is a lot more difficult and complicated than it once was, but discovers that Cleveland schools can boast of many talented, dedicated and motivated teachers, and introduces six of them.

Cleveland Brewers 8

When NFL players went on strike, the Brewers of the National Women's Football League gave us the only "pro" game in town. Players are paid only \$5 per game, Plain Dealer reporter David Beard says, but they give it their all.

Romare Bearden 32

He grew up in Harlem when jazz was king, and his paintings reflect the improvisational techniques he learned from jazz musicians. Writer Dick Wooten, a former arts reporter for the Cleveland Press, reports on the New York artist as he opens his first Midwest art show here today.



Cover illustration by Geoffrey Moss

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Fashion. Page 48

Tom Feran *Editor*;
Norma Conaway and Edward A. Wilson *Assistant Editors*;
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Robert Nemecek *Advertising Production Manager*

OUT OF SCHOOL

Those Who Sub, Babysit High Noon in the Old Homeroom

Free-lance writer Peter Jedick has been a substitute teacher in the Cleveland Public School system for the past two years. In that time he has taught in all the junior and senior high schools on the city's West Side.

By Peter Jedick

I was substitute teaching at West Tech, my old alma mater, and was hoping the experience would be beautiful and nostalgic. Instead it became a disaster when I tried to stop a student from walking out of the homeroom five minutes

after the period began.

We scuffled. He dropped a doughnut and in anger I stepped on it and kicked it under a locker. The student returned to the classroom, picked up an iron bar and began beating on desks and radiators. He told other students he would bust my head if I did not pay him 30 cents for the doughnut, which did not belong in the classroom in the first place.

I tried to ignore him.

"Put down the bar and there won't be any problem."

He walked out of the room again and I went after him. He returned as the bell rang, iron bar still in his grasp. The other students left and the door locked behind them. No one could enter.

We stared each other down in the quiet of the empty classroom.

"Put the bar down or you're going to find yourself in trouble."

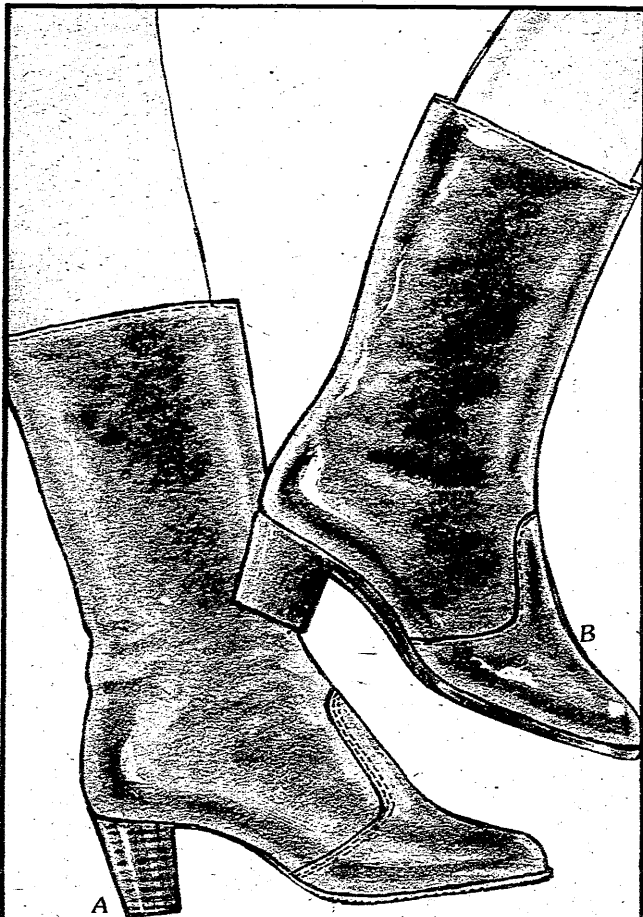
Students gathered outside the glass door. "Hit him, hit him," they chanted.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



The front of West Tech is not exactly a garden spot.

Photos by Jess Pliszczor



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SUBS FROM PAGE 7.

"If you know my name, you know I'm crazy enough to use this." There was hatred in his eyes.

The tension grew.

Then a security guard came walking down the hallway and the students outside the door hollered a warning. The student threw the iron bar in a trash can and ran out the door.

Of course, such incidents are not commonplace. But in the last six months of the 1981-82 school year, I had one student take a swing at me, another attack me with his belt, and a class stuff my sweater in a trash bin and spit on it when I stepped out of the room.

I also took a switchblade away from a junior high school girl and heard enough verbal threats to last a lifetime.

As a substitute I expect to see the unruly side of classroom behavior, but this is ridiculous — and most teachers can rattle off lists of such incidents. It is impossible for them to teach properly under these conditions.

When I was in school, only 15 years ago, a substitute teacher was a rare treat, a break from the routine. Today in Cleveland, I have found, it is not unusual for a student to have at least one, and maybe two or three subs a day.

Why?

"The teachers are literally burning out," a music instructor at Lincoln Junior High told me.

They are burning out because teacher welfare has become a low priority in the Cleveland school system. Education is no longer the primary concern of the schools. There is no time for it.

Today's teachers must first deal with discipline, security, theft, vandalism and desegregation — busing.

It wasn't always that way. In 1972-73 I substituted in the Lakewood and Berea systems and remember only one class giving me a major disciplinary problem; I never had to call the office or a security guard for assistance.

Today that "worst class of the year" could be any class in the Cleveland system. But do you blame the new generation of students or the Cleveland system? I substituted again in Lakewood to find out, and the answer is obvious:

You blame the system. Not the entire system, of course. There are exceptions; John Marshall High and Joseph Gallagher Junior High would be considered fine schools in any community.

But most of the system is choking in a cloud of apathy and despair. Cleveland's teachers were forced to stand idly by as millions of dollars were bestowed on lawyers, consultants, buses and security systems.

Meanwhile, they teach in deteriorating classrooms without adequate supplies, pay

raises or a sense of security. It has left them bitter and cynical.

The gap I found between the Cleveland and Lakewood systems is so great it cannot be defended with cries of poverty, discrimination or a new generation. The differences lie in such areas as student's work habits, responsibility and respect for teachers.

In Cleveland, a substitute teacher passes out meaningless work sheets or tests. Most of the class does not even attempt to do the assignment. As soon as students discover there is a substitute they either cut out (high school) or invite their friends to visit (junior high). The students are well-rehearsed at conning the sub.

In Lakewood, a substitute actually can teach. I take over the class, answer questions, work with the students, do all the things subs did in the past when it was a training ground for new teachers. Education does not skip a beat.

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In a typical Lakewood class only one or two students are missing and they are actually absent. If I substitute a shop or science class the students work on their projects as if their regular teacher were there. Certain students are responsible for passing out equipment, collecting it and cleaning up.

In Cleveland, shops and labs are always off-limits to subs. "Too many tools were missing each time we had a sub," a John Marshall teacher explained. Like most teachers, he preferred not to be identified.

Teaching in Lakewood is fun. Teaching in Cleveland is a headache.

In Cleveland, depression sets in almost as soon as the teacher enters the building. By the end of the school year many Cleveland buildings resemble the inside of a New York sub-
▶

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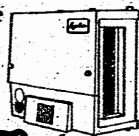
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Peter Jedick and students who are not quite inspired.

SUBS CONTINUED

way. Holes are knocked in walls, glass doors are shattered, graffiti is everywhere, restrooms are closed for repairs and lockers are in shambles. Most classrooms are barren. Even chalk and blackboard erasers are in short supply. Equipment is kept under lock and key.

Lakewood's three junior highs are older than most of Cleveland's. Yet I taught in clean, even carpeted classrooms with energy-efficient windows and pleasant hallways. Television sets, computers, lab equipment and other teaching aids are scattered around the classrooms for ready use.

"People like to blame Paul Briggs (former superintendent of the Cleveland Schools) for the condition of these new buildings," a maintenance worker told me. "But the problem is vandalism. The same architects built schools in Parma and Berea and they are in great shape today."

Junior highs everywhere present the greatest challenge to a teacher. In Cleveland, however, a junior high assignment is like contracting herpes. It may not kill you, but you wish someone else had it.

Despite the millions of dollars spent on integration, the typical junior-high class I find

in Cleveland is composed almost entirely of black students. If there are two or three white students they usually sit together in a corner and do not participate, much like blacks in the pre-civil rights era.

About half the kids do not bring paper, pencils or books to class. Yet there usually is at least one radio, a few packs of playing cards, a Rubik's cube and a good supply of candy, gum and potato chips.

Many students wear their jackets to class for a quick getaway between periods. And there is almost always a group of students roaming the corridors and hanging around the outside of the buildings.

The high school classes, except at Lincoln West, are better prepared, better behaved and slightly more integrated.

"You should see the students when they come here in the 10th grade," a Marshall science teacher told me. "It takes half the year to teach them to behave."

Meanwhile, in Lakewood, almost every junior and senior high student brings paper, books and an assortment of pens and pencils to class. No food, no cards, no radios and few jackets. The halls are empty between classes and, except for Lakewood High, there are few students outside the building.

The typical Cleveland class has one other ingredient lacking in Lakewood and it accounts for many of the differences between the two systems — the adult posing as a junior or senior high school student.

"We have a lot of 19-year-olds in the 10th grade," a West Tech assistant principal explained. "These kids know they can collect Social Security as dependents until they are 22, so they come to school just long enough for the welfare department to check up on them, then withdraw. Next fall, they'll be back.

"It used to be that if a student wasn't achieving and over-age we could force him to go to night school," he said. "Maybe he'd benefit from the adult environment. But today everyone must pay for night school, the state will no longer subsidize a student's night school fees. And the state says everyone has the right to a free education until they're 21."

At Thomas Jefferson Junior High I passed out report cards. A quarter of the homeroom, 8 of 32 students, failed every subject. They are also the chronic absentees.

These are the students destroying the educational process and the system's statistics. They show up just often enough to distract the students who do want an education.

Last year, Cleveland's new school board brought in local pro athletes to stimulate student attendance. "Stay away, let 'em go," a junior high teacher laughed when he heard about the program. This is the attitude of most Cleveland teachers. They hope the problem students will leave so they can work with the ones who want to learn.

In Cleveland, the textbooks, new and old, are battered beyond belief, from being thrown as often as carried. Few are allowed to leave the classroom. The school libraries seem relics from a previous civilization.

At Horace Mann Middle School in Lakewood, the librarian complained that students take out only 50-100 books a day. In Cleveland, I subbed for the librarian at Clara Westrop Junior High. Less than a dozen kids visited the library all day, most of those to play cards and watch television. The students checked out three books.

"Kids don't read like they used to," West-Tech's librarian said. "Hardly any books are taken out for research and almost none for pleasure."

Since the students do not read they have trouble writing.

When a fellow substitute and former English teacher said, "Every year we graduate another generation of illiterates," I decided to test her observation, and surveyed the work turned into me by the students.

The sad fact I discovered is that 6th-graders in Lakewood can spell and write better than many of Cleveland's high school seniors, many of whom cannot write a complete sentence.

High school teachers blame the junior highs. The junior highs blame the grade schools. They all blame the great amount of time which must

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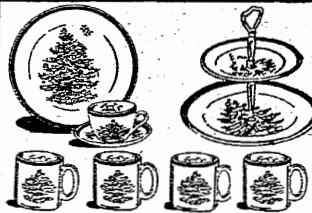
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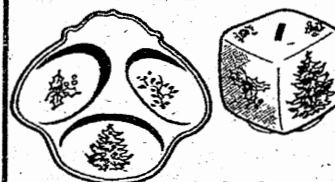
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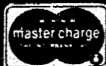
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SUBS CONTINUED

be spent on discipline instead of education.

"The newspapers criticize us for not motivating the students," a West Tech English teacher said. "But motivation cannot be turned on with a switch. It must be taught in the home."

One school which epitomizes the deterioration of the Cleveland Public School system is West Tech, once one of the finest schools of its kind in the country. Thanks to a dedicated faculty, it still is one of the friendliest schools in the system. Substitutes hope for an assignment there. But many present and former teachers lament the school's decline.

West Tech opened in 1912 to provide immigrant children the opportunity to learn a skilled trade as well as absorb American culture and language. As a pioneer technical school it was often visited by educators from across the country and around the world.

"A student helper took attendance for me and I could sit in the back and grade papers without any problems. God, chewing gum was a major offense back then. Look at how we have deteriorated, the verbal abuse we have to take, much less the physical."

It was a magnet school before they were called magnet schools. Any student from Cleveland's West Side who qualified could attend West Tech rather than a neighborhood school. (East Tech provided a similar service on the East Side).

When I graduated, in 1967, West Tech was the largest school in Ohio. Like many other students, I voluntarily took two buses to attend it. It was a school with a reputation for strict discipline and good basic education. Students did not seem to mind the discipline; many of them even attended illegally after the planned construction of I-90 forced their families to move to the suburbs.

Parents loved sending their children to West Tech. There was a list of students waiting to

attend. Employers were eager to hire West Tech graduates.

"If you make it through the next four years you are practically guaranteed a job the day after graduation," a guidance counselor told us at our freshman assembly. (West Tech was the only West Side high school with its own 9th grade).

Students chose a major field of study from a long list of skills which included art, business, electronics, home economics, music, foundry, woodworking and welding. Although most students used a chemistry major as a stepping-stone to higher education, anyone could combine their technical programs with college preparatory courses. A friend of mine who majored in machine shop, for example, graduated from Kent State University with a sociology degree.

One teacher took a survey during those years and discovered that 30% of the graduates at least started college. "I don't know if they finished or not," he said, "but that's pretty good for a technical school."

But it was not all "Happy Days."

West Tech also had a reputation as one of the toughest schools in the city. "Greasers" were king, the squeal of hot rods punctuated the air, and practically every day after school there was a fight in the nearby alleys. Yet teachers from those years — and many of them are still on staff — look back at them as the golden era or the good old days.

I talked with a music teacher at Lincoln Junior High School who taught at Tech when I was a student. Like all the teachers I spoke with about those times, his voice dripped with nostalgia.

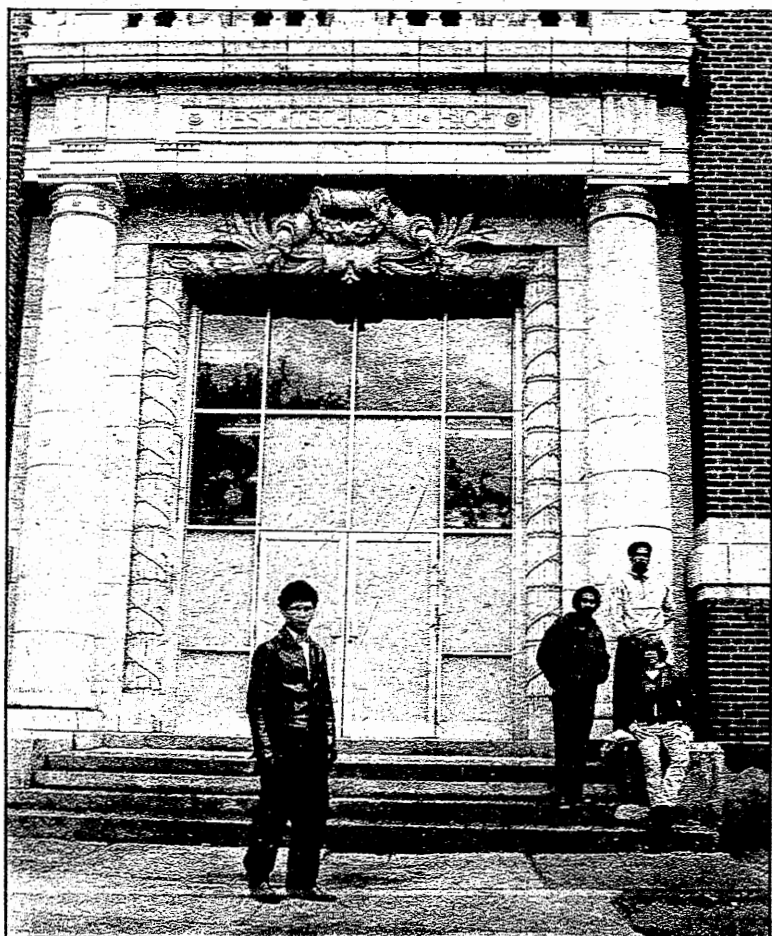
"I missed maybe three days in my four years at Tech. Today that's unheard of, but that's the way it was back then. They used to teach self-discipline there. And a loyalty to the school. They made you feel you were something special.

"I had a study hall in the auditorium, maybe 200 kids, by myself and no trouble. A student helper took attendance for me and I could sit in the back and grade papers without any problems. God, chewing gum was a major offense back then. Look at how we have deteriorated, the verbal abuse we have to take, much less the physical."

How badly has West Tech deteriorated? A quick comparison between 1967 and the present:

In 1967 daily attendance was around 95 percent. Two cuts a grading period dropped a student's grade one letter. Classes began at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 3:30 p.m. but the school remained open until 5 p.m. to accommodate the 26 clubs and athletic programs available to the students.

Most faculty club sponsors were not paid for their services — and often paid expenses out of their own pockets. The administration rewarded them with a late starting time.



Standing in front of the battered doors of West Tech are, foreground: Charles Cortes. Rear: Todd Smith; left, Gilbert Santos. Student seated is unidentified.

Many friendships and romances were forged during after-school activities. Extra-curricular activities are a vital part of any education, revealing many hidden talents and kindling wide interests.

West Tech was a little society of its own. If the football team needed tickets, it went to the print shop. If the senior play needed costumes and scenery, it went to the sewing and art classes. If your car needed a tune-up, you brought it into the auto shop.

The atmosphere fostered cooperation and respect between students and faculty. Students monitored study halls, hallways and lunch rooms. We were the only students in the city allowed to go outside for lunch. Discipline consisted of swats, detentions, suspensions and eventually expulsion. Teachers knew they were backed up by an administration which contacted parents immediately.

The discipline was a legacy of 36-year principal Charles C. Tuck. A substitute who worked in the Cleveland

system for 18 years told me he never met Tuck but heard about him from a great many teachers.

"Tuck was from the era when principals hired and fired," he said. "And he hired big, strong male teachers, ex-athletes who could knock the kids around if they stepped out of line."

What happened to Tuck's legacy?

His shadow began to disappear from the school in 1970 when West Tech became a neighborhood school, no longer drawing students from the entire West Side. With the advent of busing, many of its special classes, such as the college-level chemistry class, were dismantled.

"The federal court decided it was unfair to offer a course unless it was available in at least three schools," explained a former West Tech chemistry teacher who now teaches junior high math. Since the school system couldn't offer the chemistry course in at least three schools — it lacked the funds to offer more courses

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SUBS CONTINUED

and the qualified students to fill them — the course was dropped. "Today," the former chemistry instructor adds, "they have trouble filling the few physics classes they have left."

Today's West Tech students can spend two years preparing for such jobs as salad maker, babysitter and short order cook — skills that can be learned in one week on the job.

"They made the students' goals way too low," a guidance counselor said.

The deterioration of the building, once a well-kept classic brick structure, matches its decline in instruction. Many glass doors are shattered, covered with plywood or plastic. The outdoor steps and indoor stairs are crumbling. Window shades are torn or missing. Paint is peeling everywhere. Many of the student restrooms are closed because of vandalism. By the end of the day the halls usually are filled with litter.

"We stopped worrying about cutting when the administration put the job of enforcement on us. If I called the parents of all the kids who cut, I'd be on the phone all night."

The sheer volume of class-cutting dwarfs anything attempted by previous generations. Attendance has dropped to between 70 and 75 percent, depending on the weather. And this does not include the large number of students who stream out the doors between periods.

As the day progresses the classes become smaller and the hall traffic thins. "Many students just show up for the free breakfast and lunch," an English teacher said. "And no one cares if they leave," a teacher's aide said. "It makes it easier to teach the ones who want to learn."

"We stopped worrying about cutting when the administration put the job of enforcement on us," a veteran math teacher said. "If I called the parents of all the kids who cut, I'd be on the phone all night."

Two years ago, I met the previous principal walking around outside the building trying to combat truancy. "I'm not a principal anymore," he said. "I'm a policeman."

School spirit is practically non-existent and teacher morale is as low as that of the students. "My classes are pretty good this year but I can't believe how far I've had to lower my standards," said a social studies teacher.

"Teachers used to stay here 40 years, but not anymore," said a 25-year instructor. "The pressure is too much." Like most of the teachers I talked with, he plans to retire as soon as he puts in his required 30 years.

Extra-curricular activities have all but disappeared from the school. Classes start at 8:10 a.m., end at 2:30 p.m., and by 2:35 the halls are empty. There is no senior play, school orchestra or baseball team. The few clubs or sports teams that are available have trouble attracting participants.

The loss of out-of-class interaction has soured student-teacher relations. Cooperation has been replaced by mutual distrust. Even the coat closet, two feet from the principal's office, is kept locked.

The West Tech Tatler, once a free weekly paper read by almost everyone, today is a 25-cent monthly read by few. Front-page stories on crime, vandalism and truancy read like a big-city daily.

Security guards, armed with expensive walkie-talkies, patrol halls once controlled by little old ladies sitting at desks. Study halls, where a student once could finish most of his homework, are as rare as detentions, mainly because there is little homework.

"You try to do what you can in the classroom," an English teacher explained. "If you assign homework, the kids either say they lost it or they just don't do it."

"For the first time," said another, "I don't have enough textbooks for the students to take home."

To experience what West Tech was like in 1967, I sub at Lakewood High School. It also has a 9th grade class. If teachers must be absent, they often only take half the day off so their classes will not fall too far behind.

A senior assembly opens with a Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. American flags hang from most classrooms. The experience reminds me of what is missing from West Tech today.

"You know what's wrong with this school?" asked a student who transferred to Tech from a small-town school system. "Too many kids won't accept any responsibility."

His comment struck a chord. I realized that when I was a student, West Tech taught not only the basics of reading, writing and math, but also imparted a sense of patriotism, responsibility, citizenship, discipline, punctuality and dependability.

These and all the other intangibles necessary to produce responsible citizens and competent employees are lacking at West Tech and most of

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SUBS CONTINUED

the other Cleveland public schools.

The only prescription for Cleveland's public school system is a good strong dose of old-fashioned West Tech discipline administered at all levels.

Perhaps surprisingly, the schools seem to have reached a similar conclusion. Many junior highs are improved this year over recent years. A new school policy demands an automatic failure for a student with seven unexcused absences per grading period.

Yet there is still a long way to travel before standards abandoned somewhere along the road are restored. Teachers must once again be free to share their education with future generations in a relaxed atmosphere.

To begin this, the school system first must weed out the dangerous, over-age, professional students.

The West Tech student who threatened me with an iron bar, for example, had two typewritten pages of similar incidents in his file. An assistant principal told me, "We've had problems with him all year. But it seems like every time we try to take a kid like that out of school they (downtown) are against us."

Teachers frequently express a conviction that the school board is more concerned with inflating attendance figures, for funding purposes, than protecting the teachers. Whether it is true or not, the teachers feel they have little support. Only the most violent incidents seem to bring action.

The students know it, take a suspension (vacation) and return heroes to their classmates. The teachers become more frustrated. A Cleveland substitute teacher with 18 years' experience expressed the feeling of most I met: "I used to love coming to school, now I hate it."

Another solution is a return of night school as a disciplinary tool. If the schools can afford a Think program, which most English teachers consider useless, they can afford to establish a strong night school program. If the problem student really wants an education, let him come at night during his party time and at his own expense.

The system's new superintendent, Frederick Holliday, has stated that the solution to the school's financial woes is closing more schools. But this is merely an admission of defeat.

A more sensible goal would be to try to bring white students back into

the system. As it is now, much of the city is paying for a school system that it does not use. There is a baby boom presently nearing school age. If Cleveland public schools were to improve dramatically, I believe enrollment would skyrocket — in turn attracting even greater state funding.

But before this can happen, someone from the school board or federal court is going to have to stand up and say

An assistant principal told me, "We've had problems with him all year. But it seems like every time we try to take a kid like that out of school they (downtown) are against us."

out loud what thousands of Clevelanders already know. That school busing to achieve racial integration is a very expensive failure.

Like the war in Vietnam, it is a noble idea that has not lived up to its billing. Rather than achieving racial harmony and quality education for all, student-busing has instead contributed to white flight, declining enrollment, school closings, teacher layoffs, inadequate instruction and fiscal problems.

Instead of harmony, I find today more racial animosity between students and faculty than existed 15 years ago. And until busing is ended, it is likely that many Clevelanders, particularly on the West Side, will continue to send their children to private schools and will continue to vote against increases in funding for public schools.