



# Whassup With Suspension? The Real Scoop

An ARGUE Publication of the Community Literacy Center

Fall, 1992



THE ARGUE TEAM: Front (L to R): Writers Christina Mott, Curtis Davis, Phil Foxx, Shay La Burke, and Tammy Calhoun. Back (L to R): Project Leader Lorraine Higgins, Mentors Anna Catone, Don Tucker and Laura Neville; Writers Isaacc Hall, Mark Howard.

## **The ARGUE Team Presents: What's Wrong (and Could be Right) With Suspension**

For eight weeks, a group of students, teachers and writing mentors from the Community Literacy Center met to discuss what's wrong and what could be right with school suspension at Oliver High School. This ARGUE team talked about alternatives and suggestions for suspension and wrote their ideas in this document. We believe this document is important for everyone involved with schools.

# Miscommunication

by Mark Howard

The purpose of this rap is to tell what really happens in school between students, teachers, and vice principals, and what causes suspension.

It started with two students in the class talking out of place  
The boy starts getting rude and got all up in the girls face  
The girl didn't like it so she got up and yelled back  
The teacher told the girl, Get up and sit down in the back  
She got up with no problem and then sat in the back chair

He had to be a pest so he started to look and stare  
At the girl to test her and try to make her mad  
He said, *Respect me girl - - and treat me like your dad!*  
She stood up and said, *Don't play... my dad got shot last year*  
The teacher turned around just as the girl broke out in tears

The teacher kicked her out and said, *Go straight to the VP*  
The boy started laughing as the girl said *It wasn't me*  
The teacher didn't listen, even harder the girl cried  
When she got to the office she found out the teacher lied

She talked and talked and tried to tell him what's going on  
The VP wouldn't listen but she kept going on and on  
The VP said, *You're lying 'cause that's not what I heard*  
*The teacher wouldn't lie so I'm going with the teacher's word*  
*The teacher said you tried to start a fight in the classroom*  
*She said you threatened her then you said you would leave the room*  
*She also said you tried to pick a fight with another kid*  
*So don't sit there and lie now, tell me what you really did*  
She said, *It's hopeless, every time I tell you you say I lied*  
The VP didn't listen and slowly the girl cried  
The VP said, *You're going home for about three days*  
She shook her head as he said, *You'll learn from your wrong ways*

The point of this story—nobody pays attention  
To a student 'cause they young, now I may mention  
If the teacher would have took one minute and act like she cares  
She would have saved a lot of time and a lot of tears  
Teachers prove students right just about every day  
They automatically think their way is the right way

Same for the Vice Principal they don't listen too  
*You're guilty, you're suspended* is the only thing they do  
On the other hand the girl was also wrong in her actions  
She didn't have to get up and scream for satisfaction  
She could have told the teacher or even the principal  
Instead she's in trouble suspended and sitting out of school  
The point of this story is lost communication  
Make sure it's always there or you'll be on a vacation

*Note: Mark and this project is discussed in Peck, Flower, and Higgins, "Community Literacy." See Community Literacy Bibliography. Mark is also a creative contributor to Street Life and Rsk & Respect*

# Commentary: Complications Between Students, Teachers and Vice Principals

by Shay La Burke

In this section, I will tell you about communication in response to Mark Howard Communication Breakdown rap. I will tell about different perspectives of the people in Mark's rap. I'll be summarizing feelings and suggestions.

## **Different Feelings Between The Student, Teacher, and Vice Principal**

The student and the teacher misunderstood each other because the student didn't get a chance to explain to the teacher what the problem was on why she outburst in class with the other student.

THE TEACHER probably felt it was the right thing to get the student suspended before the girl started to scream at everybody and cause more trouble. The teacher wasn't sure of what happened because she was doing something else and not paying attention to what was going on. So, the teacher's reaction towards the girl was not too happy with her attitude because she distracted the class. The feelings towards the VP from the teacher was that it was too much trouble to send the girl to the VP when they could've worked it out. The teacher feels bad about getting the girl suspended for something she didn't know anything about and not talking to the girl after the teacher found out what had really happened. Unsurprisingly, it was too late for the teacher to talk to the girl and the girl to talk to the teacher.

THE STUDENT probably felt that the teacher didn't give her enough chance to explain her problem with the other student and why she said what she said. Before the girl could explain to the VP, she was suspended and probably thinking that the VP took the teacher's side and was not listening to her problem. Now she has an attitude with the teacher and VP because she's missing out on the work she has in her classes.

THE VP feels that the student and teacher should've talked it out one-on-one to work out the problem. In addition, the VP is thinking that he should've given the girl a chance to explain what was going on in her own words. The VP is confused on who to believe since he wasn't there when it happened, He wants to believe both, but he can't.

## **Five Suggestions For Better Communication**

1. THE STUDENT should've let the teacher know what was happening before yelling at the other student.
2. THE TEACHER AND VP should ask why when someone is upset—not just react inappropriately to the situation.
3. Both THE TEACHER AND VP should try to explain why they are sending the student out and why what she did was wrong so it doesn't happen again.
4. THE STUDENT, TEACHER, AND VP should sit down and have a conference about how to work out the problem in the future. If the problem should happen again, then the VP should give her a warning. If it may happen a third time, then in-house suspension should be for a whole school day.
5. THE TEACHER AND STUDENT should write out some plans on what could work out if the problem occurs and what to do to prevent it from getting worse.

## Our Comments and Suggestions

- Although the students have different feelings about cutting, we think they SHOULDNT be suspended because that's what they want. It's a reward. When you suspend them you just send them out to the hustling spot where they get in more trouble than they were in school—like going to jail for selling drugs. Also, if you get suspended too much you could fail school.
- It's not fair to fine parents—they're not the ones who do it and it just takes money away from them.
- We agree that students SHOULD'N'T be suspended for stupid things. Students get suspended for the simplest reasons such as hats, wearing sun glasses, sleeping in class, referrals for the dumbest things. These are things that are not necessary to be put out of schools about, and nine times out of ten the most of the students do it so they can get out of school and the principal doesn't seem to realize it. I mean really, wearing a hat can get you three days. That is like saying "no school" for three days. We really believe that there are other things that we can go through in order to make the students not wear their hats. Here are some other ideas:
- Use detention more, because they're still in school, they won't miss work and can still get it done.
- Use student/teacher conferences so teachers can know the problem the students have. In suspension teachers don't get a chance to work it out with the student. Some teachers don't want to be bothered with kids so they send them out. It's easier on them because without the interruption they can get the lesson done. Every teacher has a free period. They could take time out and talk then. There's got to be reason for students to act the way they act and the teacher has to find out.
- Time out keeps you from getting suspended. You can work with the team leader there.
- In In House suspension they don't work it out either. They should have discussion groups with students and talk about why they get suspended, not just sit alone and work all day. It should only be 1/2 day. They should let you go to lunch and your academic classes so you won't miss out.



Curtis thinks people should get in-house instead of out-of-school suspension.



Isaac feels that a student should be kept in in-house the day he gets suspended.



Shay La thinks there should be in-house suspension so students won't miss out on their work.



Mark feels that in-house is a lot more punishing because out-of-school is a vacation.



Phil thinks suspension should be used as a last resort, not first resort. Suspension should be only for repeat offenders.



Christina thinks kids should not be suspended for stupid things. Instead they should go to in-house because you can get behind in your classes if you stay home.



Tammy thinks suspension should be abandoned because it doesn't solve the real problems and the trouble is still there.

Note: these comments grew out of discussions with faculty, VPs, and 106 responses to the teams' student survey.