

IN OUR SCHOOLS EXPULSIONS: Are Black Students Targeted?

By KAREN M. HANNON
Chronicle Staff Writer

After Leonard Patterson was expelled from two middle schools within the last year, he was determined not to bring along any negative labels to Petree Middle School.

After getting kicked out of Cook and Paisley middle schools, Leonard, 13, was sent to Petree as a last alternative. Since enrolling at the optional school in January, he says he now has a positive attitude about school and hopes someday to become an airline pilot.

Leonard does not fit the mold of some of the students assigned to Petree. He is shy, articulate, and doesn't seem to be a slave to fashion like most of his peers. He's also a quick learner. In fact, he said, when he did his schoolwork, he got As. The problem? He seldom did his work.

"I just didn't want to do it," said Leonard, atypically dressed in normal-fitting jeans and a shirt in the dining room of his house one recent Saturday morning. "I had already done it and I already knew how to do it."

Since enrolling at the optional school in January, he says he now has a positive attitude about school.

Leonard, his older brother and mother recently moved to Winston-Salem from New York where, he said, he had already been taught what his teachers at Cook and Paisley were teaching. That's why, he said, he refused to do his work.

But his mother has helped him realize that that wasn't a good

excuse for not completing his assignments.

"I have a child that I know is capable of doing the work," Francesta Patterson said. "But when you can take a test without doing homework, without studying, going to sleep in class and passing, then you know something's wrong."

Patterson said a school official had recommended that she take her son to Charter Hospital for a mental evaluation.

"I knew my son didn't have a mental problem," she said. "He just wasn't doing his work."

But Patterson said she wasn't aware that her son was not doing his work until he had gotten suspended. She said she did not hear anything from school officials at Paisley Middle School until Leonard was sent home. And after that, she said the principal was calling her every day about him.

"I don't think they tried to figure out what was wrong until it was too late," Patterson said. "If they tried to reach the kids and keep them in school, stop suspending them, maybe he wouldn't be so far behind. A child cannot get an education sitting at home."

Patterson said that one of Leonard's teachers at Paisley showed that she didn't care.

"One teacher told me, 'When Leonard went to sleep in class, I let him because I was glad he was asleep so he wouldn't disturb anyone else,'" Patterson said.

Leonard said the reason he didn't want to do his work was because he thought the teachers didn't like

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Leonard Patterson

him. "They didn't like me because if one person was doing something and I was doing the same thing, she would single out me and I would get in trouble," Leonard said. But he said there was one class at Paisley where he did do his assignments. It was a math class

taught by a black instructor.

"I never got in trouble in her class," Leonard said. "I liked her, so I did my work in her class. I didn't do my work in my other classes."

Leonard said things got so bad at Paisley before his expulsion that he was retained and was told he had to repeat seventh grade.

But three after he was evaluated at Petree, he was re-assigned to eighth grade.

Patterson said she called Tony Burton, who was then a teacher at Petree, and asked how Leonard was doing in school.

"He asked me why Leonard was even there," Patterson said. "He said he had to go back and look at Leonard's records. He said Leonard is a jewel to him and to all the teachers. He finishes his work quickly and he helps the other students. Everything that Paisley said about him, they were saying the opposite."

The difference was that teachers at Petree showed they cared.

"I like the teachers at Petree," Leonard said. "And they act like they like me."

Leonard participates in a program he said was implemented by Burton called "WOW," or World of Work. It is a mentoring program that provides youths skills in finding jobs.

Patterson said that although she had heard some negative things about Petree, she considers the school a turning point that has made Leonard change his attitude.

"I went there with a chip on my shoulder, but after an hour after I blew off my steam, I shut-up because it was completely different from what I was told," Patterson said. "I really liked it there and I left there happy."

Leonard will be in the ninth grade at Mt. Tabor High School next fall. He said he plans to join the Junior ROTC program and hopes to become an airline pilot.

Meanwhile, he said he's going to be a better student at Mt. Tabor.

"I'm not going to get in trouble, and I'm going to do my work," Leonard said. "I'm not going to do anything bad to get into trouble."

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White Teachers Frightened By Black "Mannerisms"

By MARK R. MOSS
Chronicle Staff Writer

A reason why African-American students are disproportionately expelled from schools across the country is because white teachers feel threatened by black "mannerisms," a Wake Forest sociologist said.

"One reason certainly has something to do with the mannerisms of black youths," Sociology Professor Willie Pearson Jr. said. "The way they walk; the 'wolfing' they do."

White teachers, he said, "are not very well tuned into that subculture. They see (black mannerisms) as a sense of defiance."

Most problem students, he said, often are placed in special-education classes and are therefore "labeled" throughout their school life.

"The more negative a child's experience is with the educational system, the less likely that child will be empowered by the system," he

said.

In the first half of this school year, 206 of the 286 students in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School system who were recommended for expulsion were black, and an overwhelming majority were black males.

Thomas Thompson, a professor of education at the University of South Carolina and who has studied male adolescence, said society, teachers and the students themselves should share the blame. "We're finding black males and females are exhibiting more antisocial behavior," said Thompson, who is authoring a study for the National Urban League on black males and the school system.

"They're being more violent. They are bringing the behavior they're exhibiting in the community to the schools", he said.

This, he said, "is due to a lack of expectation on the part of parents."

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