



40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION of
UNIVERSITY CITY HIGH SCHOOL
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'One Big Party' Is Over for Pupils at University City

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Davis Martin, principal of University City High School, erupted as he walked the circular corridors of his year-old, \$14 million institution.

Asked about charges that gang violence and lack of discipline plague the school, he snapped:

“Do you see any students taking over? Does this look like a disruptive school?”

“We have our problems but they are no different nor worse than any other inner city high school. We are vulnerable because this is a new facility,” said the short, stocky 42-year-old principal.

But the modern facility located at 36th and Filbert sts., despite Martin’s claim, does have some problems.

The major factors complicating the administration of the school, only in its second semester, are:

- THE SCHOOL feeder pattern draws students from all over West Philadelphia, including the Cobbs Creek and Mantua areas that are infested with violent and active gangs.
- THE PHYSICAL make-up of the building, with its circular design and nine exits, giving students and unwanted visitors free and easy access compounds the discipline problem.
- THE SCHOOL’S curriculum which was to have 75 percent of the students participating in individual study programs, was changed with little orientation to pupils or teachers.

The situation is the reverse, with more than 75 percent of the schools [sic] 2100 students being taught in the traditional class room setting.

A young social studies teacher characterized the situation in the school last year as being “one big party.”

The teacher, interviewed while her class of 25 was quietly doing work assignments from text books, said that last year she flunked 40 percent of her class.

“This year things are much better and I am glad to be here at University City,” said the young woman.

Martin repeatedly and emphatically printed out that things are better this year as he toured the three floors of his school.

“WE HAD A completely chaotic situation last year. Students and teachers alike were not orientated,” said Martin.

“If these charges were made last year about my school I could not defend them.

“We are well on our way to getting things straightened out and there are a lot of good things going on here.”

Martin said that most of his students want to come to school and learn.

He pointed to statistics that indicate his school’s average monthly attendance ranks 6th among the city’s 20 high schools, reflecting what he termed “stability” in the gang problem.

Martin’s assertion that the gang problem at his school is no worse than at other schools is supported by a check of incidents that have occurred at the following schools:

WEST PHILADELPHIA HIGH—There have been several violent incidents around the school this year. On several days as many as 20 to 30 extra police cruise the area to avert gang violence.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HIGH—There were two stabbings outside the school on the very first day. It is not unusual to see police squad cars escorting boys to and from the school located at Broad and Green sts. every day.

MARTIN LUTHER KING SCHOOL—This Germantown school opened in September and extra police and school district personnel have been assigned there since that first day. The first day that security was relaxed, there were stabbings inside the school.

Students, teachers and the community around University City High School express great concern over an ever-present threat of gang violent—and violence that has occurred in and around the school since it opened.

One woman, a 34-year-old mother of two who lives on a street, 3600 block of Warren st., which borders the school, said, “When the weather was good this fall boys and girls were leaving the school at will and teenagers and older youths hung around the school at all hours.”

The woman, who asked that her name not be used, said that she and others in the block were thinking of circulating a petition to have something done about the situation.

Walter Palmer Jr. a 16-year-old student at the school, said that the gangs cause disruptions in the school.

“THE GANG situation here is getting worse and when something does happen students run around the building trying to find out what happened,” said Palmer, who has been a student at the school since it opened.

Martin himself enforces tight discipline. During a half hour tour of his three story school building he caught six girls cutting class and sent them to the disciplinary office.

By ACEL MOORE

Of The Inquirer Staff

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