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Clashes with teachers are just 'a high school thing,' students say

By Grace Rubenstein
Staff Writer

NORTH ANDOVER -- Contrary to the complaints of a School Committee member who plans to start home-schooling her daughter, students say North Andover High is generally a friendly and respectful place -- even if some rules and teachers are too strict.

The school has "a very good atmosphere," said junior Travis Breen. "It's kind of like a family in there."



MARK LORENZ/Staff photo North Andover High School students Kara Caffrey, left, and Annie Strout talk about the school's teachers as Daniella Bordanero, right, listens in.

said.

Committee member Darlene Rose Torosian announced yesterday she is pulling her daughter, 16-year-old Mandy L. Marquis, from the high school because she believes some teachers and administrators there are too eager to discipline and use a harsh tone in doing so. The treatment makes students feel belittled and unhappy at school, she

Students outside the school yesterday said teachers sometimes react too quickly or single out particular students for discipline. The teenagers find it excessive that they can't go across the street to McDonald's for lunch, or that revealing an inch or so of midriff -- in keeping with current fashions -- can get a student in trouble. But they said when a student is disciplined, there's usually a reason, and the climate there is nothing out of the ordinary for a high school.

"I think they basically treat everybody the same," junior Kara Caffrey said. Her friend Annie Strout, also a junior, agreed, although the two said they might not be familiar with all the

school's discipline practices because they haven't been in trouble.

"There's always a couple teachers people don't get along with, but I don't think it's a huge problem," Annie said.

However, junior Julia San Filippo said she has seen a shift in the climate this school year. When she arrived as a freshman, she found adults there "more willing to help students instead of get them in trouble." Now, adults patrol the halls to catch students misbehaving and sometimes seem to discipline them for discipline's sake, creating a tone that reflects more of a "boot camp for students" than a high school, she said.

Principal Susan M. Nicholson declined to comment on the students' statements. Superintendent Harry K. Harutunian maintained his previous position that high school staff members do "a very good job" and work "very hard as advocates for the children."

The students said they don't know why Mandy, Torosian's daughter, would draw heavier discipline than others, as she feels she does. They don't see her as a troublemaker. Some guessed that her style of dress, which is sometimes revealing, galls adults and makes them react negatively toward her.

"She's a pretty easy person to get along with," said Kara, who knows Mandy but said she is not a close friend.

Mandy said she comes home "run down, tired and sometimes sick to my stomach" from constant clashes with adults at school over how she dresses, where she eats lunch and when she can go to the bathroom.

"One of my teachers actually called me a hoodlum" for being in the hallway after class had started, sophomore Brandon Sabet said. Brandon, who said he has been in trouble before, finds it frustrating when adults come down on students for what he sees as minor transgressions, but he believes it is nothing unique to North Andover.

"That's a high school thing," he said.

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