

Principal's Day Begins on Busy Note---and Then Grows Hectic

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At 7 a.m., a small silver-haired woman, in her late 50s, a fast walker, briefcase weighing her down, climbs the steps to Hamilton High's main building.

Josephine C. Jimenez, native of Cuba, naturalized American, graduate of Jefferson High School in Los Angeles and UCLA, a teacher and administrator in the city schools since 1937, believes in an early start.

She is in her second year as principal of Hamilton High, to which she was first assigned as a Spanish teacher in 1954, then (after a year at two other assignments) as girls' vice principal in 1960.

She says she has not been absent in 18 years, and one tends to believe her.

A 12-hour day is not unusual for her but she never tires, or at least never shows it. She is quite sure of herself, unflappable despite any number of interruptions.

She is invariably cheerful (though when displeased, she will treat the object of her displeasure in a fairly peremptory manner).

She is under no illusions about the Los Angeles city school system, but it is harder to tell what illusions she may have about Hamilton itself.

She is intensely loyal to the school, has brought stability to it and is more sensitive to and under-

standing of what troubles her students than they give her credit for being.

She rules the school with an iron hand (she will, in a joking moment, laugh at what she calls "my autocratic ways").

She is respected by most of her faculty, and admired by some. But her autocratic ways rankle more than a few of them, often the most capable and most aggressive teachers who have the imagination to do things but feel squelched.

"She is too dictatorial, uncompromising, and she has her finger on everything," says one of her critics. "But the school is better for having her here."

On this day, Mrs. Jimenez has begun sorting through the paperwork on her desk when a teacher, obviously upset, stops to lodge a complaint.

Mrs. Jimenez is requiring teachers who intend to use outside speakers to fill out a form, and this teacher is calling it "just another erosion" of faculty authority.

(Later, Mrs. Jimenez defends the form on two counts: the school secretaries, she says, need to know who will be visiting the campus, and she wants to know if some teachers are being overly dependent on outside speakers.)

By 7:15 a.m., more teachers are checking in at the main office, and Mrs. Jimenez starts setting up her day by cornering a few for appointments.

There is much chatter, questions about this project and that, who is sick, who is recovered and how is her back (Mrs. Jimenez took a nasty fall two days earlier and her back is still bothering her).

Now Mrs. Jimenez is questioning a physical education teacher about a boy and his gym clothes. Mrs. Jimenez has had a complaint from the boy's parents, apparently about pressure on him to buy a gym suit.

"He comes out with everything under the sun except gym clothes," says the teacher, in defense.

The questioning is not going too well. There are constant interruptions by other teachers, and the physical education teacher is obviously wary of what Mrs. Jimenez seems to be leading up to.

"Do you want us to eliminate requiring gym clothes?" asks the teacher.

"I don't want you to eliminate requiring gym clothes," Mrs. Jimenez replies. "I want you to eliminate insisting it's going to be this uniform or none else."

"He's coming out in walking shorts. Walking shorts aren't gym clothes," says the teacher.

The issue is unresolved, and Mrs. Jimenez says she will look into it further.

Now, advising another teacher who apparently has administrative aspirations, she says: "When you're an administrator you can't be ambivalent. You have to be very, very sure about your philosophy . . . You can't equivocate."

By 8:10 a.m., most of the teachers are gone. She has talked with at least a dozen, carrying on two or three conversations at once.

She starts her morning tour of the school, first into the girls' vice principal's office, then a quick sweep through the attendance office, 18 students pleading their cases across a long counter.

In and out of the nurse's office, through the corridors, here and there swooping on a piece of trash, and a quick check of the girls' lavatories along the way.

At 8:35 a.m., her inspection tour finished, she is back in her office. She meets one teacher for an evaluation session, fields a protesting phone call from the physical education office over the gym suit issue and muses briefly over a memo from downtown that puts in doubt Hamilton's status as an inner-city school.

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HAMILTON'S PRINCIPAL—Josephine C. Jimenez has worked for eight months to find out more about a proposed change in the rules that determine how schools qualify for inner-city status.

Times photo by Joe Kennedy

PRINCIPAL'S DAY

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At 9:22 a.m., she begins a conference with two of her counselors over a new master schedule of classes. There is much detail to be ironed out, and on one issue, Mrs. Jimenez argues for a looser approach to setting a deadline.

"Nothing is final at Hamilton," complains the counselor.

"I have news for you," says Mrs. Jimenez. "Nothing is final anywhere."

Briefly, they talk about the looming problem of a music teacher who is leaving Hamilton. "I have serious doubts we can really afford to replace him," worries Mrs. Jimenez aloud.

By 10:10 a.m., she is out in the quad area packed with students taking their morning break.

She encounters a girls' physical education teacher, and they talk about an upset parent. The Hamilton lettergirls wash gym clothes that turn up in lost and found, then sell them to students.

Use of Money

The money is used for school activities. In this case, the parent of one lettergirl is a black woman who once washed laundry for a living and says her daughter is not going to do it.

Mrs. Jimenez says she can understand the parent's feelings. She will do the laundry at her home, and the gym teacher should forget about the incident.

At 10:30 a.m., Mrs. Jimenez ducks into the faculty cafeteria for black coffee with her two vice principals. They talk over some disciplinary cases and review the security arrangements for an upcoming basketball game.

The gym suit issue comes up, and Mrs. Jimenez says she will talk with the boy before going any further. "I don't think I'm getting through to him," she says of the physical education teacher.

Back to Office

She stops by a class, then heads back to her office to return some phone calls. A student drifts in. He is a senior and wants to enroll in a class at West Los Angeles College, but his counselor will not let him.

"He's stubborn," says the boy. "You mean, he's hesitant," says Mrs. Jimenez, smiling. She promises to check on it.

At noon, she walks over to a meeting of the school's Parent-Teacher-Student Assn. Most of the talk is about an upcoming candy sale. One parent has gone ahead and put candy sale posters in the teacher mailboxes. Mrs. Jimenez is not happy about that.

After the meeting breaks up, she takes one parent upstairs to visit a class, then heads back to her office, pausing on the way to admire a mask being carried down the hallway by a student.

She has the candy sale posters pulled from the teacher mailboxes. "They'll all be in a stew before we have a chance to clarify it," she says.

At 1:46 p.m., she begins a meeting with three teachers who are helping plan a special issue of the student newspaper. She ducks out midway to attend another conference.

By 2:30 p.m., she has reclaimed her office for two more teacher evaluations then a quick discussion with another teacher over a proposed faculty constitution.

At 3:30 p.m., she is back on the phone, trying to reach some fellow principals who are as disturbed as she over pending changes in graduation requirements. She is not having much luck.

Not Available

"The only time you can get principals is first thing in the morning," she says with resignation.

By 4 p.m., the school is quiet. Mrs. Jimenez is working up an agenda for a meeting of principals the next day.

A counselor drops by for permission to send some students to a mental health clinic for a lecture. Mrs. Jimenez wants more details before she will approve. "I don't want then to go just to be going," she says.

At 4:50 p.m., a cup of coffee in hand (she missed lunch), she begins opening her mail. More interruptions: a sponsor getting faculty sponsor for the cheerleaders, a quick conference with the student body president.

Her phone rings. It is the parent of a girl who has been suspended for fighting. The parent is appealing the suspension. Mrs. Jimenez will not budge.

Later, she says: "We don't treat it lightly. We think it is something that needs to be discouraged."

At 5:40 p.m., she reaches by phone the mother of a student who is missing from school, by now a runaway.

"We'll do everything we can to assist," she tells the mother. "I just wanted you to know that we hadn't forgotten."

The boys' vice principal drops by to announce Hamilton has won both ends of a basketball doubleheader with Gardena. He departs, and Mrs. Jimenez renews her attack on the stack of papers atop her desk, irked at the rate at which they accumulate.

At 6:50 p.m., she declares: "That's the end." She hauls some papers, plus the two somewhat tattered bags of dirty gym clothes she has agreed to wash at home, to her car. She is done for the day.