

# Mutual student-teacher respect key to success

"The day was kind of nice. I was late for two classes, but did what I had to do in school. Last week I was late for a lot of classes."

— Eugene Lee, for the Schools of Hope diary writing project

**By Andy Hall and Phil Brinkman**  
Wisconsin State Journal

Hear the voice of Eugene Lee. His teachers certainly do. So do his classmates.

Lee is a freshman at Memorial High School, where he exasperates some of his teachers by disrupting classes with loud comments or by disappearing mid-class. Smart, alternately charming and insolent, Lee, who is African American, contends some white teachers are racist and haven't earned his respect.

"If a black student asks a question, it takes a lot longer (for the teacher) to answer," Lee said. He also says teachers prefer to call on whites, so he has decided to blurt answers out instead of raising his hand.

"They try to keep us down, to keep us from getting what we're going to get."

His rationale for rebellion:  
"If they don't want to help me, I'll just help myself."

And when conditions are to his liking, Lee eagerly learns and participates. During a recent math quiz, observed by a reporter, he got every answer right.

Right or wrong, Lee's opinions matter. They are clues to why the Madison School District still is failing to reach the majority of African-American students, who tend to have a higher dropout rate, lower grade point average and higher suspension rate.

His view of life was shaped in Chicago, where he grew up in public housing on the city's south side. Two years ago, his mother, worried about the effects of gangs, sent Lee to Madison to live with his aunt.

But after a year, Lee, chafing at his aunt's supervision, moved out. He bounced from group homes to foster homes.

He'd found a pleasant arrangement in a well-kept ranch style home when he began

**GET INVOLVED:** To comment on issues facing the Madison School District, you can call Superintendent Cheryl Wilhoite at 266-6235. To leave a message on the district's 24-hour tele-access line, call 266-6233. To write to School Board members, address letters to: Board of Education, 545 W. Dayton St., Madison, WI 53703-1995. Comments can also be filed electronically. Send faxes to 266-6253. Address e-mail to: comments@madison.k12.wi.us. If you'd like information about volunteering in the district, or about involving your business with schools, contact Audrey Lehman in the community partnerships office at 266-6011.

writing a Schools of Hope diary in February.

At that time, Lee said he enjoyed going to school. He said teachers cared about the students, but complained that some teachers and administrators "put down" students and held grudges. He reported that gang problems and racial tensions were problems at school, albeit not as severe as he'd seen in Chicago.

Overall, Lee said he was impressed with the Madison School District. He gave it a B rating.

His own grade point average hovers between a C and a D.

He hasn't escaped his past; he claims that about the time he moved to Madison he joined one of the gangs whose gunfire had rattled outside his elementary school in Chicago.

He said his affiliation is loose and doesn't involve breaking the law. However, he has been involved in so many incidents that he's required to wear an electronic monitor on his ankle so authorities can track his movements. He's been charged with five counts of disorderly conduct and one count of obstructing an officer.

"Some officers, they just mess with you for no reason," Lee said.

He complained, too, that his Afro hairstyle — which he considers to be a prideful statement of his heritage — marks him as a target for police who pester him and ask whether he's dealing drugs.

In his diary, Lee comes across as an outsider who doesn't feel welcome at school. He doesn't feel school is crucial to his success. A February passage:

"The day was so messed up. I was late for all my classes. I got suspended for being late for class seventh hour. They said I was trying to skip class. I don't get it. If you're going to skip class why have books; that's stupid."

"But anyway, the next day was unbelievable. I got in trouble because I told a teacher that it's wrong to show black slave movies every week. I feel that it's wrong."

"We went through enough slave talk in grammar school about how blacks are dirty and poor with no education in life. But they're wrong. I'm getting mine and have a nice deal of money to keep me with food to eat and a house over my head. And a family to be with all the time."

A month ago, Lee reverted to old patterns, ones that had landed him in trouble before.

He began skipping more classes. He stopped coming home some nights and got into arguments with his foster parents. His foster parents kicked him out.

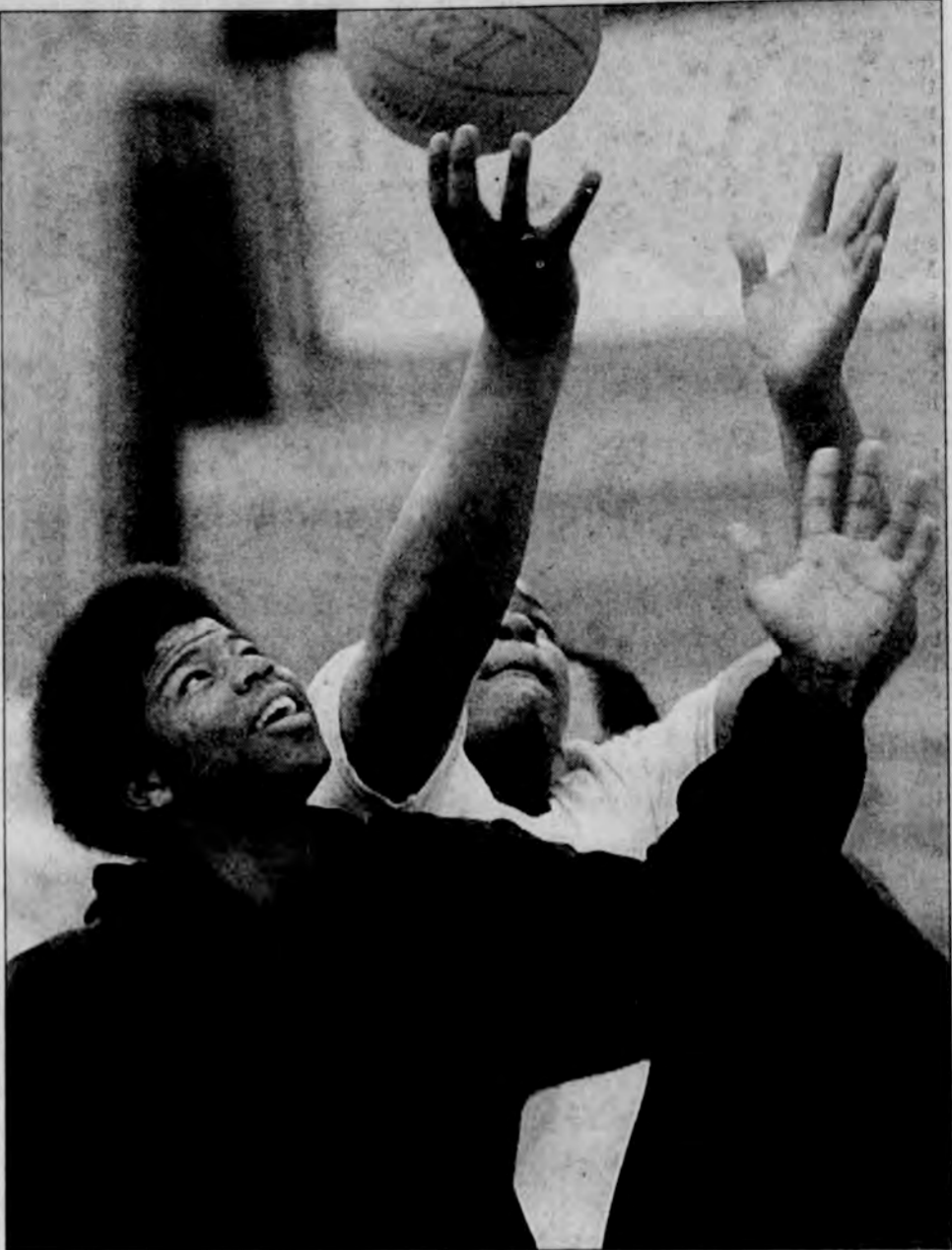
He now lives in a shelter for delinquent youth on Madison's East Side.

About the only place he feels at home anymore is on Memorial's basketball court, where he moves with rugged grace during pickup games. His friends, nearly all of them black, share his love of basketball and his frustrations with teachers.

His time at Memorial may be running out.

This Wednesday, a day that may help determine the course of the rest of his life, Lee is scheduled to attend a court hearing on the disorderly conduct and obstruction charges. The hearing will determine whether he remains under the control of juvenile authorities — or whether he's locked up with adults.

He's 16 years old.



State Journal photo/CRAIG SCHREINER

Eugene Lee plays basketball with friends in the Memorial High School gymnasium.



State Journal photo/CRAIG SCHREINER

Timeka Rumph takes an exam in the foreign language laboratory at East High School. Periodicals from other countries give students a wide-ranging view of world events.

## Excel

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place, as they appear to be for Rumph, school becomes an inviting and rich experience for students.

Rumph has lived in Madison all her life. When she roams the halls of East, she's among friends, warning them of tough tests on the horizon and trading jabs about football loyalties. She's a Dallas Cowboys fan, which prompted her friends to scribble Green Bay Packers endorsements on her locker.

Despite an intensive, college-preparatory class lineup, Rumph maintains a 3.52 grade point average — good enough for induction Wednesday into the National Honor Society. Overall, African-American juniors score a 1.85 grade point average, trailing the white average by nearly a full grade point. But Rumph exceeds the average score for white juniors by about seventh-tenths of a point on a four-point scale.

Rumph refuses to let an additional "risk factor" — the fact that he grew up in a single-parent household — become an excuse or lower standards.

But that home turmoil, which culminated in sixth grade when her alcoholic father walked out or good, helps explain why Rumph seeks stability, and a sense of belonging, at school.

"East High School has always been like my second home," Rumph wrote in her diary of school life.

In turn, she takes any criticism

isms of her school personally:

"My major problem is that everything is centered around the downfall of schools. Why is it that the media can't for once show a headline for a school's excellence? How is our generation supposed to look toward the bright future if we continue to be dragged back into the dark past? No one seems to be able to answer that one."

Rumph said she even sees Calderon as a sort of a mother figure at school.

"She is the greatest Spanish teacher and I can talk to her about anything. She is a teacher that takes interest in her students. Some of them have toilet-papered her house and she never seems to complain...."

For the third time, she's signed up for a class with Miller because she respects his teaching style.

"History is the only class I stay alert in, though. Although Mr. Miller gets on my nerves, he really knows how to make history fun."

After watching the movie "Eyes on the Prize," as part of Black History Month studies in Miller's class, Rumph was so excited, "I actually came home from school and talked about it with my mother."

She spent spring break in Italy with 10 other students on a trip chaperoned by Miller.

"I found a new respect for him over there," she said.

Every morning, she arrives at school early to help Thomas, an assistant principal, prepare an electronic listing of announcements.

"I shot hoops with Mr. Thomas today," she wrote. "First he threw some bricks. And then I threw some.... That man can be so

## WISC-TV (Ch. 3) plans coverage

Watch WISC-TV (Ch. 3) for additional Schools of Hope coverage today:

**8 a.m.:** Wisconsin State Journal reporter Phil Brinkman discusses the issues raised in today's reports with WISC's Roger Putnam on News 3 Sunday Morning.

**5:30 p.m.:** East High School principal Milton McPike is interviewed on the relationship between attendance and achievement.

Other reports will appear throughout the week on "News 3 at Six."

goofy."

As for her friend Kramer, Rumph said, she's also part of her second home at East High School, part of a network that values A grades and meets C's with a frown.

Her lunchtime friends, a racially diverse collection of a half-dozen girls and one boy, can be found together at the Forum, a large lounge that's a quieter alternative to the cafeteria.

## Earlier, a rough time

Although today she's laughing, comfortable in her surroundings, Rumph had a rough time early in school.

"I don't think a lot of people mean to, but they stereotype," Rumph said. "And I think a lot of young African Americans really get caught up in the stereotype. I had a really supportive family and friends who said, 'You can do it.'"

She recalls the criticisms another African-American girl hurled at her in fifth grade.

"I was accused of not being a 'typical black person,'" Rumph said. "Because I got good grades, I lived in a house and I lived in a predominantly white neighborhood. And because I have good grammar, I don't speak in a lot of slang."

"I felt very bad. I would cry and think, 'Why can't I be like everyone else?'"

In middle school, Rumph said, some teachers seemed to "perpetuate stereotypes by expecting her to have bad grammar, live in a low-income neighborhood, earn poor grades and miss a lot of school."

"What I learned is if you know who you are, it doesn't matter what other people think," she said.

She also learned the power of high expectations.

"If they kind of expect more — not too much — then it's not too hard to get an A-minus or a B average, as long as you have those guidelines to go by," she said. "Expect a little more and you may get it."

## Mother credited

Now she's talking like her mother. The last time Carolyn Rumph called in sick was 17 years ago — the day Timeka was born.

"There's nothing you can't do," Rumph, 52, a clinical dietitian for Meriter Hospital, likes to say.

She has tried some unconventional ploys, such as paying her two daughters modest amounts if they excelled in school. But mostly, she has been involved in their school and their lives: She

## Factors linked to success, struggle

Achievement levels of Madison students are linked to a variety of socioeconomic factors, according to research district officials conducted at the request of reporters working on the Schools of Hope project.

The research offers a snapshot of the 3,803 current students — a mix of 10th, 11th and 12th graders — who completed the state's 10th Grade performance test.

THE BREAKDOWN:			ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS		
All students			LOW Percentage below national average (50th percentile)	MIDDLE Percentage between national and Madison district average	HIGH Percentage above Madison average (72nd percentile)
19%	28%	53%			
LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH			
Household income			26	10	2
Poor			74	90	98
Not poor					
Home status			62	75	85
Two parents			38	25	15
Single parent					
Parent education			38	22	6
High school graduate or less			32	27	17
Vocational or some college			18	28	32
College graduate			12	25	45
Graduate school					
School changes per year			26 per 100 students		7 per 100 students
Rate:					
Number of school changes in Madison District			1.5 changes		0.6 changes
Average:					
Suspensions			9 per 100 students		1 per 100 students
Rate:					
Unexcused absences (most recent semester)			4.0 absences		0.7 absences
Average:					

Percentage of students who are poor

26% 2%

Low achievers High achievers

Percentage of students with single parents:

38% 15%

Low achievers High achievers

Percentage of students whose parents have a high school diploma or less:

38% 7%

Low achievers High achievers

## Details on black students

Below is a summary of data pertaining to the 321 black students — a mix of 10th, 11th and 12th graders — who are enrolled in the district and who completed the state's 10th Grade performance test.

THE BREAKDOWN:			ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS		
Black students			LOW Percentage below national average (50th percentile)	MIDDLE Percentage between national and Madison district average	HIGH Percentage above Madison average (72nd percentile)
55%	31%	14%			
LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH			
Household income			61	39	7
Poor			39	61	93
Not poor					
Home status			38	41	56
Two parents			63	59	44
Single parent					
Parent education			41	16	11
High school graduate or less			28	28	28
Vocational or some college			22	28	22
College graduate			9	28	39
Graduate school					
School changes per year			46 per 100 students		12 per 100 students
Rate:					
Number of school changes in Madison District			2.3 changes		0.9 changes
Average:					
Suspensions			18 per 100 students		4 per 100 students
Rate:					
Unexcused absences (most recent semester)			4.5 absences		1.1 absences
Average:					

Percentage of students who are poor

61% 8%

Black low achievers White low achievers

Percentage of students with single parents:

44% 14%

Black high achievers White high achievers

Rate of school changes: (Rate per 100 students)

46 12

Black low achievers White low achievers

Test scores are the battery totals — reading, math, language, science and social studies — from multiple-choice sections of 10th Grade Wisconsin Student Assessment System tests. Poor students are defined as those eligible for free or reduced lunch. Two-parent households include at least one natural parent.

SOURCE: Madison School District research conducted for Schools of Hope

WSJ graphic/LAURA SPARKS

makes it to their plays. To concerts. To school get-togethers and parent-teacher conferences. She tags along on field trips, even if it means using up vacation days. She volunteers as a room mother. She's a former Parent-Teacher Organization president.

It's the family way: Timeka's grandparents drive from southeast Iowa to attend her band concerts.

Carolyn Rumph remembers hearing about the Madison Urban League's report documenting the

disparities in black and white achievement levels.

That was nearly 10 years ago, in the summer of 1987. Timeka was ready to enroll in third grade. But her mother didn't worry.

"I've never had a problem," Carolyn Rumph said. "I've always been at the schools."

When there were rough spots, she called teachers at home and found them to be helpful.

The Rumph family's success heartens Darlene Maynard, an Af-

rican-American parent who's rearing three young children by herself in the Allied Drive area.

Maynard said she has been scared by all the data showing blacks are four times more likely than whites to score below the 50th percentile — the middle point among all students.

She wants to find out how someone like Carolyn Rumph, someone like her, succeeded with the schools.

"I need to know."