

Orange County Perspective

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Swift Action Fitting After School Brawl

■ Need for Improved Racial Awareness Becomes Apparent in Changing South County

When Aliso Niguel High School opened two years ago, it had the bright feeling of promise in which new schools excel. The sprawling facility cost \$45 million and symbolized the hope of parents in fast-growing South County that their sons and daughters would have a future as bright as the buildings.

But this month 20 students were involved in a school lunchroom brawl that investigators said appeared to have racial overtones. The outbreak stunned parents, faculty and students.

Reaction to the fight was swift and proper. The Orange County Sheriff's Department interviewed more than two dozen students to see if the melee qualified as a hate crime. A lieutenant said an African American student was struck with a soda can and cut beneath his eye and the suspected assailant was white. The lieutenant

said members of rival black and white gangs might have been involved.

A Capistrano Unified School District spokeswoman said 19 students were suspended and several might be expelled.

Days after the fracas, the executive director of the Orange County Human Relations Commission, Rusty Kennedy, visited the campus to

see how racial tension could be reduced and similar incidents prevented. Kennedy has had long experience working for human rights in the county and was a good choice to meet with the school community.

Several parents also came to the right conclusion about the fight, say-



Rusty Kennedy

ing it showed the need for more racial awareness programs in the school. It is in grammar school, junior high and high school that people need to be made aware of the different races and cultures that make up this society and of the necessity of respecting each other and getting along.

A school district official and parents agreed that demographics have changed in South County. No longer can racial problems or gangs be considered something that happens somewhere else. Parents need to teach their children how to function in a society of many hues and beliefs, and the schools need to reinforce those teachings.