

# Providence-St. Mel: 90% to college

By Jacqueline Thomas

More than 90 per cent of the 1979 graduates of Providence-St. Mel High School are bound for college. One will attend the University of Chicago, and the others will head for campuses around the nation.

That's not a bad record for a school that attracts most of its students from the impoverished West Side of Chicago. Or for a school that was supposed to close last June when the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Chicago withdrew financial aid.

But supporters of the school, which graduated 36 students Sunday, rallied to raise almost \$200,000 to keep Providence-St. Mel open another year. They said the community needed a high school that, by stressing discipline and academic achievement, prepared young adults for college and the working world.

THE SCHOOL'S financial picture is not yet rosy, principal Paul Adams said recently. He estimates that \$300,000 is needed to repair the school's leaky, aging roof.

Yet Adams, who doubles as the school's live-in caretaker, is optimistic that "with a little luck," better days are ahead.

Declining enrollment was one of the reasons the archdiocese cited for withdrawing its support of the school. But Adams isn't convinced the answer to the enrollment problem is to relax entrance requirements and academic standards.

Providence-St. Mel reopened last September with some 300 students. Not all lasted the year. Although Adams said the school could have used their tuition, nearly 30 students were asked to leave in midyear. Principals

because their grades didn't measure up. "Why waste our time or their parents' money?" he asked.

"MAYBE MY expectations are too high," Adams said. "But I've found that if you expect nothing, you get nothing.

... Our approach in the long run, I think, will pay off."

The school's reputation for toughness also doesn't help it attract students. "The permissive environment out there makes it very difficult," Adams said. But he is pleased

with the caliber of student accepted for next year's freshman class, which he expects to number 80 to 100 while over-all enrollment hovers at about 300.

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## St. Mel's newspaper ad pays off

PROVIDENCE-St. Mel High School, 119 S. Central Park Av., formerly run by the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago but dropped in June, has received a check totalling \$25,349 to help meet its expenses as a separate, private school.

The funds were collected through an ad placed by the school earlier this year in the Wall Street Journal, detailing its need.

Paul J. Adams, the school principal, received the check Monday at a brief ceremony at the Community Bank of Lawndale, 807 S. Homan Av., where the donat-

ed funds were held in escrow. The Alliance of Catholic Laity, which set up the account, presented the check.

THE ALLIANCE is a group of Roman Catholics who believe their church gradually is lessening its presence in Chicago's inner city since the mid-'60s. The group founded its organization in 1976 to provide an alternate method for raising funds than the Chancery office.

The \$25,349 check brings to \$190,000 the amount of cash raised by the ad and other sources to keep Providence-St. Mel open under its own charter.