

# 150 Students Stage Walkout

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About 150 students walked out of Rice Memorial High School Monday morning in protest of the Rev. Ronald Soutiere's abrupt departure from the school.

The walkout was planned to show students' disagreement with how Soutiere's resignation as principal was handled.

Soutiere, who became principal last fall, said at a public gathering Friday that he had not resigned. He had sent the School Board a letter of intent to resign, hoping to get leverage for changes he wanted to make at the school, he said.

Instead, the board accepted the letter as his resignation and immediately assigned an acting principal to replace him, Soutiere

said.

Student Bruce Richardson, a junior at Rice, said the walkout was not a good indicator of Soutiere's support among students. Fewer than a third of the 552 students left because many were afraid of repercussions.

"I'm worried, the way the students walked out, how they're going to be treated when they go back," Richardson said. He said a large majority of the students and parents back Soutiere and want him reinstated.

Acting Principal John Lemon said the student absences will be excused if each student has a written excuse from parents, otherwise the time will have to be made up.

Lemon said he told students before the walkout if they wanted

to go, they could. "Basically I indicated that I respect them as individuals and if they have a statement they want to make, fine," he said.

Richardson said he does not think the protest will end with the walkout. Many parents and teachers plan to write letters of protest to area newspapers and to Roman Catholic officials in Boston.

The student said Bishop John Marshall should have stepped in long ago to set straight the problems, but instead has taken a hands-off attitude. Marshall asked Soutiere not to show up at the meeting last week, although Soutiere was not forbidden to attend, Richardson said.

The issue is coming down to one between teachers and students, with teachers saying last Friday they were glad the principal had been removed, and students saying privately teachers have been getting away with too much too long.

Students said teachers do not like Soutiere, a former religion teacher, because he was trying to use his position as principal to make some changes and was taking control away from teachers.