

Joe Clark, the baseball bat-wielding principal who inspired the movie 'Lean on Me,' dies at age 82

By Laura Ly and [Joe Sutton](#), CNN

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Joe Clark, principal of Eastside High School in Paterson, New Jersey, poses for a photo in the school hallways in February of 1988.

(CNN) — Joe Louis Clark, the hard-charging high school principal who inspired the movie "Lean on Me," has died at the age of 82, his family said in a [statement Tuesday](#).

Clark was the principal of Eastside High School in Paterson, New Jersey, and his efforts to improve standards at the school earned him national attention. Clark's approach was heavy on discipline. As the family statement noted, he expelled 300 students for "fighting, vandalism, abusing teachers, and drug possession" in one day.

"Roaming the hallways with a bullhorn and a baseball bat, Clark's unorthodox methods won him both admirers and critics nationwide," the statement said.

He appeared on the cover of [Time magazine](#) in 1988 and the movie, "[Lean on Me](#)," starring Morgan Freeman was released in 1989. Clark also published a book, "Laying Down the Law" about his educational strategy at the Paterson high school.

Clark was a longtime resident of South Orange, New Jersey, but he moved to retire in Gainesville, Florida, the family said.

Clark was at home and surrounded by his family when he succumbed to his long battle with illness on Tuesday, the statement said. The family did not specify the illness.

"Paterson has lost a legend," Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh said. "Joe Clark spoke strongly and carried a big stick. If anyone needs to see what type of positive impact he had on his students then I suggest they watch, 'Lean on Me.'"

CNN's Ganesh Setty contributed to this report.

 

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