



STEVE SARTI



COVER STORY

# No More SCHOOL DAZE

At a unique New York City high school run in collaboration with Syracuse University, students are expected not only to follow the system, but help create it.

BY KEVIN HAYNES

Does anyone know what public policy is?" Her question posed, Syracuse University senior Sarah Reich scans the blank faces of seven high school freshmen who have pulled their desks into a circle in the corner of a New York City classroom.

It's a Thursday morning in mid-September, the first week of classes in a school of many firsts—including the school itself.

Sarah Reich, a Syracuse University senior, leads a discussion at the High School for Leadership and Public Service in lower Manhattan. Students at the first-year school spent the fall semester defining policy issues to tackle.

The High School for Leadership and Public Service is in its rookie season. Conceived by SU graduate Donald Schupak and run with ample help from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, it is one of 30 small, theme-based public high schools to sprout in the city this academic year.

The school has 124 students, all ninth graders, and will add a similarly sized freshman class in September. They're pursuing a traditional education with a twist. They'll bone up four days a week on such basic academic fare as math, science, English, and Spanish. But for four years these students, mostly from the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, will fortify their

studies with classes in leadership and public policy. They'll learn how government and the business community operate, how leaders lead.

Best of all, they'll apply these lessons every day in their own school—and, it is hoped, back home in their own communities.

For most students, that first step was taken when they applied for admission to the High School for Leadership and Public Service. Now, they're setting the school's agenda, putting their plans into action, and taking responsibility for the outcome. They are considered "stakeholders" in the new school, along with teachers, parents, and Syracuse University.

"What Syracuse brought to the table

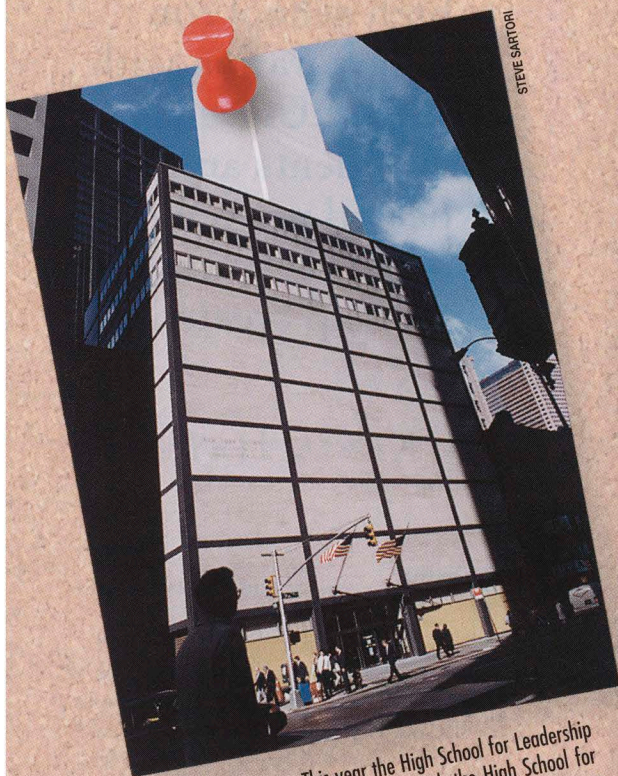
was that the University and alumni would extend themselves," says school principal Helen Cohen. "SU made a commitment to be a partner to a small school that would develop this theme of leadership and public service."

That theme is the main topic every Thursday, when public policy team meetings are held. The 20 groups meet separately, each headed by a teacher, volunteer, or intern from SU.

So, can any of Reich's student "stakeholders" define public policy at the outset?

Jeanette, 13, ponders the question while tracing a spit curl with her forefinger. Christopher stares down at his gleaming white Fila high-tops.

"That's okay," says Reich, a policy



Temporary quarters: This year the High School for Leadership and Public Service is sharing space with the High School for Economics and Finance in lower Manhattan. Administrators hope to secure a permanent home before September.

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# ABC's

## of the High School for Leadership and Public Service

- Address: 100 Trinity Place, New York, New York 10006.
- Mission: Promote leadership skills and a commitment to public service. Provide academic and career preparation for success in college and in the workplace.
- Sponsor: Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.
- Students: 124 ninth graders. Similar-sized classes will be added each year and the school will go from ninth to 12th grade.
- Staff: 11 teachers and administrators; 3 educational assistants; 1 aide; 2 secretaries. More will be added as future classes begin.
- SU liaison: William Coplin, director of the Maxwell School's public affairs program.
- Subjects: English, leadership, math, science, social studies, Spanish (each class meets four times a week); physical education, writing (twice a week); public policy team meetings are held every Thursday.

studies major interning at the school for the semester. "We want you to help decide what's going to happen here so you can help shape our school."

For the moment, it is a school without roots. The High School for Leadership and Public Service is temporarily sharing space with the fledgling High School for Economics and Finance in a nondescript yellow brick building in the shadow of the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. A search for permanent quarters is under way. By the time this charter freshman class graduates in 1997, officials estimate the student body will have grown to approximately 500.

Current students range from challenged to gifted. That's no accident. The only requirement for admission to any of the special schools is graduation from eighth grade. But state guidelines require the schools to enroll an intellectual cross section of the students who apply: 16 percent must have better than an eighth-grade reading level, 16 percent must have less than an eighth-grade reading level, and 16 percent must be at that level. The remaining applicants are randomly accepted by computer.

Ten students are taking an honors math class. Ten others scored among the bottom five percent of the nation in a recent standardized math test. All applied to the High School for Leadership and Public Service for a variety of reasons. Some liked its intimate size, others were drawn by the prospect of trying something new. Many were lured by the SU connection, whether it be a fleeting link with a big-time university or a possible springboard to the campus admissions office nearly 300 miles away. Parents hope the connection—and the college-prep curriculum—will open college doors at SU or elsewhere.

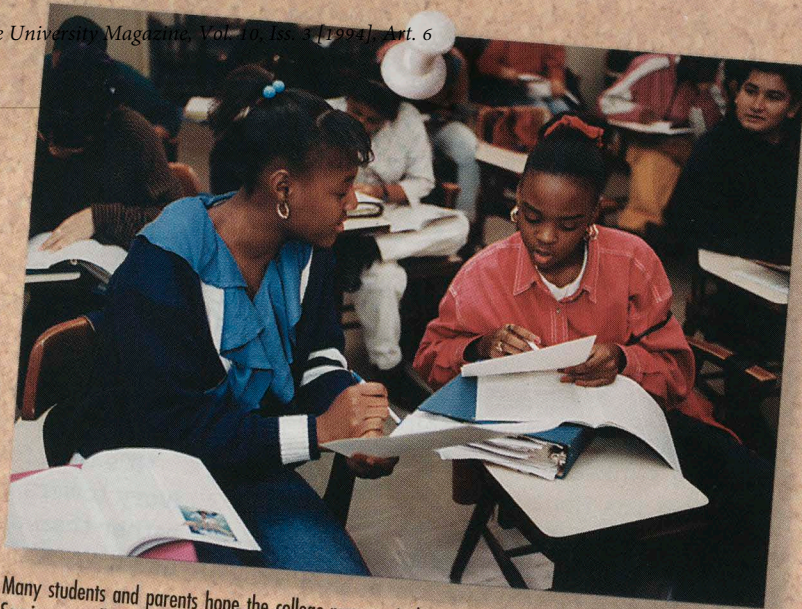
**T**he influx of small, theme-based schools in New York City is part of the Board of Education's plan to modernize education without compromising its basic goals. "We want to make urban education as relevant to students' environments and personal needs as possible," says Dom Capone, execu-

tive assistant to the New York City superintendent for high schools. "We want the new schools to serve as a bridge between the school community—youngsters and parents—and the business and college communities, which are much more global."

The High School for Leadership and Public Service, or HSLAPS, exists largely because of the efforts of people like Syracuse University Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw, Associate of the Chancellor Mary Ann Shaw, and John Allen, executive director of university relations in New York City. No one, however, has played a more crucial role in the new school's development than Schupak, a New York City investment banker who graduated from SU's College of Arts and Sciences in 1964 and College of Law in 1966.

Schupak proposed the idea several years ago when SU's Metropolitan Advisory Board was trying to devise a way to bolster the University's profile in New York City.

Many students and parents hope the college-prep curriculum at the High School for Leadership and Public Service—as well as its affiliation with SU—will be a springboard to a college education. Others like its small size.



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"It's nice to root for the football team," Schupak notes, "but that doesn't really affect the quality of life or the important social issues responsible adults think about."

Instead, Schupak challenged SU to tackle what he calls "one of the most pressing social issues in the city and, indeed, the country"—what to do with urban teens who wallow in bloated mainstream schools only to emerge "uneducated, unmotivated, and angry." The cost to SU? "Actually, very little," claims Lansing G. Baker, SU's senior vice president for university relations. "It's primarily an investment of time and personnel."

SU's dollar-figure contribution can be counted in the "tens of thousands," says Baker. The New York City Board of Education picks up the \$650,000 tab for personnel and building costs. The \$5,200 spent per student is slightly higher than the New York City average because the school has a special education teacher and two assistants who work with six students with learning disabilities.

“It's like being a big brother or sister...

it's only complicated in that

you could get involved with someone for life.”

# Educational Aid

Donald Schupak helps his alma mater reach out to the community.

If the High School for Leadership and Public Service were Yankee Stadium, it would probably be nicknamed The House That Schupak Built.

For years, SU alumnus Donald Schupak harbored what he calls "a community-service interest" in improving public education in New York City. "I don't think it's fair for kids from the inner city to be excluded from opportunities because they're not educated," says Schupak, who believes many kids wallow in overcrowded mainstream schools. "It's such a tremendous social drain to have a generation of uneducated kids who become angry, unproductive, and anti-social adults."

When SU's Metropolitan Advisory Board met a few years ago to develop a plan for enhancing the University's presence in New York City, Schupak issued a challenge. "I suggested the University take its strongest asset, which is educational technology, and apply it to what I saw as the city's biggest problem: the lack of educational opportunity."

His proposal for a small school run in collaboration with the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs was eventually endorsed by Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw and embraced by a host of SU personnel, both on campus and at Lubin House, the University's New York City home.

Education has been the cornerstone of Schupak's robust career. He attended SU as an undergraduate, earning a bachelor's degree from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1964, then completed SU's law school, graduating in 1966. He subsequently picked up a master's degree in taxation from New York University and worked for three different law firms before opening his own practice in 1970. Ten years later, he shifted to investment banking.

Ideally, says Schupak, the High School for Leadership and Public Service will establish itself as a model for small, theme-based high schools throughout

the country that are "designed and nurtured" by private universities.

"It's time for universities to step out of their ivory towers and become part of the solution rather than observers of the problem," says Schupak. "Lots of schools are fighting to turn out presidents and senators. Well, we don't need more presidents and senators. We need more good citizens and block captains, nurses, assistant county clerks, and sanitation department foremen."

"We need a citizenry educated in the principles of democracy who participate in the process and benefit from the system."  
—K.H.



Donald Schupak and his son, Philip, at the old Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan, one of the original sites considered to house the High School for Leadership and Public Service.

The school also benefits from Friends of HSLAPS, a network of New York City-area SU alumni who have volunteered to help. Dozens of people have already offered to tutor students, speak to classes, chaperone field trips, and provide summer jobs and internships. The group's most ambitious project, a mentoring program that will match students with alumni in one-on-one relationships, will be launched in September.

"The mentoring program extends beyond academic counseling," says Ann Gilligan, the school's liaison with SU alumni. "It's like being a big brother or sister. It's as simple as being an adult friend to a student. It's only complicated in that you could get involved with someone for life."

The new school's link to the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs is especially vital. Maxwell professors are serving as consultants and three SU undergraduates spent the fall semester as interns. As the High School for Leadership and Public Service grows, as many as 10 internships are expected to be made available to SU students.

"Maxwell has national prestige," says Schupak. "I also thought Maxwell could bring a focus to the school by teaching inner-city kids the principles and skills of leadership and public service."

During their weekly policy team meetings, students focus on public service problems. In their freshman year, students work on projects relating to the school. As sophomores, they'll learn how to do a survey for a community agency. During their junior year, they will focus on city government, and as seniors, they will concentrate on projects involving state and federal government. The intent is to instill a desire to help society while exploring career possibilities in public service.

"If student interest is kindled, they can go back to their own neighborhoods and use those skills to take charge of the system," says Schupak.

"The real benefits of this innovative arrangement won't be immediately obvious," says Chancellor Shaw. "However, I can't imagine a better way

to increase the strength of the nation's public service than by fostering its development at an early age."

Next to its affiliation with SU, the High School for Leadership and Public Service's biggest asset may well be its small size. Of course, that may also be its greatest handicap.

"Overall, small is better because a youngster can't get lost in the system," Cohen explains. "We can get on his or her case very quickly if there's a need for that. The disadvantage is that we can't offer the kinds of extracurricular activities a large school can."

There has been almost universal interest in after-school activities and field trips. Already, students have been to museums, to visit the AIDS quilt,

Cohen introduces William Coplin, an SU professor of public affairs and the Maxwell School's liaison to the school. Coplin is in town for the day to help the kids decide—within the next hour, theoretically—the top 10 issues students and staff members are going to grapple with in the months ahead.

A list of 28 potential topics is projected on a white screen. First up is athletics.

"Do you think that's important?" Coplin asks, pacing in front of the center seats. "I don't."

Coplin moves toward the left aisle, working the room like a seminar. "How do I know that's what you really want? Can I get a show of hands?"

Virtually every hand in the auditori-

“If student interest is kindled, they can go back to their own neighborhoods and use those skills to take charge of the system.”

and to last November's SU vs. Rutgers football game at the Meadowlands in New Jersey.

But the school has no sports teams of its own. It could happen eventually if two or three similarly sized theme schools decide to team together. Cohen hopes to introduce a few sports that aren't "terribly expensive," such as tennis, bowling, track, and gymnastics.

"And someday," she sighs, "I'd love a chorus."

Cohen's wish comes true one week later. Sort of.

The shrill din made by 124 13- and 14-year-olds bounces off the brick walls of the school auditorium as the students meet to decide, once and for all, the issues that will define their first year.

Cohen stands in front of the stage, straining to be heard without a microphone. An audio system is on order, she explains. For now, shouting will have to suffice.

um pops high. Coplin waves his arms. "That doesn't show me anything," he says. "First, every team must agree on how we're going to decide."

The auditorium groans. "This is going to take forever," grumbles one student.

"Here's the deal," Coplin announces. "If we don't reach a decision, one that reflects the will of this group, by 1:35, then I'm going to decide."

More groans. "And," Coplin continues, "I can tell you right now that athletics isn't going to make my list."

Gasps all around. The kids quickly reach a consensus. To speed up the process, each team will get one vote, cast by a hastily elected representative.

"This is what happens in a democracy," Coplin points out, adding, "I'm also giving each group a veto. Do you know what a veto is?"

A proposed recycling program is voted down. So is a move to cull information on college scholarships. Next on the list: a paid co-op program. The cries of "NO" far outnumber a few

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whispered yeses, until one teacher explains the proposal would allow students to take a job in the community for class credit—and pay. The voices in the auditorium ring out in unison: “YES!”

That unity breaks up during the discussion of ensuing topics, such as lunch, sports, and after-school activities. A student suddenly objects that one group can kill a perfectly good proposal with one lousy veto.

It is 1:30, five minutes shy of Coplin's deadline. There are 15 issues on the list that haven't even been introduced.

“It seems to me the decision-making process has broken down,” Coplin announces. A roar fills the auditorium. “How can we do a better job?” he asks. “The reason this process isn't working is because you're not respecting one another's opinions. You don't listen. You're not organized. There's not enough time and too many complex issues.

“This is why you have to develop leadership skills. What we have to do as a school is figure out a process.”

A debate ensues. Should the students check off their five favorite topics and tally up the votes tomorrow? Or should team representatives get together and reach some kind of consensus?

As if on cue, the bell rings. The kids bolt toward the auditorium door like thoroughbreds sprung from the starting gate. The High School for Leadership and Public Service remains issueless.

The faculty and group leaders retreat to the main office to review the proceedings. The bad news, of course, is that they didn't accomplish much in the auditorium; the good news is that no one was surprised by the bad news.

“It went exactly as I expected,” Coplin claims. “I wanted to raise their awareness of how difficult it is to make decisions. And I wanted them to feel empowered.”

True, things may have gone

smoother with a microphone (“I couldn't shout loud enough,” Coplin admits). “But now it's in their minds that they have to come up with a way of making decisions,” he says. “It would've been nice if they had agreed on a list, but they didn't.

“I don't think kids are asked to set the agenda in any normal high school. It's a unique opportunity.”

**L**ate October. After weeks of debate, the student body at the new High School for Leadership and Public Service, this young brood of prospective SU students, these future leaders, have finally reached a verdict.

They have weaved their way through the democratic process, discussed their options in work groups, and sought the guidance of educators and counselors. Now, they have agreed to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

Their No. 1 issue: Lunch.

Cohen smiles. “We knew it,” she says. “In a way, we invited it because we asked ‘What do you want to see here? What do you want the school to be like?’ They began to focus on what they didn't have and what they would like to see improved.”

The High School for Leadership and Public Service has no operating cafeteria. Only cold food was served for the first couple of weeks, until an arrangement was made for hot lunches to be delivered from another school. Alas, deliveries are often late and the food itself reminds no one of home cooking.

Four policy groups want to do something about it.

“It's a viable issue,” says Valerie Spellman, a physical education teacher, health coordinator, and the school's dean of students. “Some students are very unhappy with lunch as it is now. If they want to change it, they'll have to come up with ideas and investigate all

the options. They'll learn something about making proposals and seeing them through in order to get what they want.”

Other groups are looking into establishing school sports, internships, and a performing arts program. Along the way, the High School for Leadership and Public Service is also zeroing in on the qualities inherent in born leaders.

“Some of them feel it's okay to be shrewd and cunning,” reports Susie Andrews, who teaches a class on leadership. “The only characteristics they feel are really negative are lying, dishonesty, or being self-centered.”

Asked to cite specific leaders they admire, students named politicians (the Clintons), athletes (Michael Jordan, Roberto Clemente), and civil rights leaders (Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.). But several kids picked folks closer to home: a deceased mother, a father who works as a scientist, a junior high school teacher.

“Everyone has some potential for leadership,” says Andrews. “It's just as important to be able to contribute as a part of working society, to get things done for yourself and other people.”

The four lunch groups, meanwhile, are divvying up the workload. One team is surveying students to determine menu preferences and asking parents if they'd allow their kids to leave the building for lunch.

Another group is contacting a number of small schools to find out how they handle lunch issues. Still another group is proposing a contract that would set terms for dining outside school. In exchange for the privilege, students would agree to be personally responsible for their conduct and promise to return in time for class. One violation would void the contract.

“Hopefully,” says Spellman, “they'll learn that changes can be made if they take responsibility and do the work.”

Already, an entire freshman class is learning there's no such thing as a free lunch. At the High School for Leadership and Public Service, it's now a matter of public policy. ■

*Kevin Haynes, a 1979 SU graduate with a degree in magazine journalism, is a freelance writer living in Brooklyn, New York.*

# Student Teaching

Three SU interns learned more than they bargained for.

The prospect of spending a semester inside a New York City public school didn't exactly enthrall the three Syracuse University undergraduates who accepted fall internships at the High School for Leadership and Public Service.

"I came in with the expectation that these city kids were all going to be thugs," admits Sarah Reich, a native of St. Louis. "In fact, they're just like the kids I went to high school with in suburbia. They want to do well, they want to go to college. It's been an amazing learning experience."

In fact, Reich and two other SU senior interns—Kristen Miller and Stephanie Pasquale—claim they learned more during their out-of-town internships than they ever would have learned in a campus classroom.

All three major in policy studies in the College of Arts and Sciences. They were recruited to the High School for Leadership and Public Service by William Coplin, director of the public affairs program and the Maxwell School's liaison with the new high school. Coplin worked with the interns last summer while supervising University Reach, a community service program for Syracuse high school students who are at risk of dropping out.

The three interns worked 35 to 40 hours a week at the High School for Leadership and Public Service, sharing a variety of tasks. They headed public policy teams, conducted tutoring sessions

three days a week before school and during lunch, and taught faculty members how to use computers.

They also visited six other alternative high schools—four in New York City, two in Washington, D.C.—to research curricula. In addition, they had coursework to complete.

"The great part was we got to integrate what we were learning with what we did at the high school," says Pasquale, who's from West Boylston, Massachusetts. "We got a well-rounded look at

everything."

Especially the reaction of high school freshmen making the transition from overcrowded schools to a small school where they help shape the agenda.

"At the beginning, I don't think these students bought into it," says Miller, who's from Liverpool, New York. "Now, they see they're not slipping by. Somebody's hunting

them down for tutoring, talking to them in the

halls, calling them by their first names, asking about their cats. It encourages them to work harder because they know somebody is watching."

That includes SU. The interns believe the high school's connection with the University is paying early dividends. "It makes them more aware of college," says Reich. "They're only in ninth grade and they're already talking about college. Most of them are working hard now instead of waiting until they're juniors."

—K.H.



SU students Stephanie Pasquale, Sarah Reich, and Kristen Miller—pictured with Maxwell liaison William Coplin—spent the fall semester in Manhattan helping the HSLAPS get on its feet.

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