Hyde School's strict philosophy spreads

● The Bath private school's program of character growth has been chosen as a model for an urban public system.

By JOANNE LANNIN
Staff Writer

BATH – Danielle Santanelli, 15, was "pretty much desperate" when she came to the Hyde School from Millington, N.J., three years ago. By the age of 12, she had run away from home and tried to commit suicide.

Today, Santanelli is a vibrant, outgoing teen-ager who takes pride in her schoolwork, the friends she has made and the goals she has scored on the Hyde soccer team.

"I've definitely changed. I've learned that I should have confidence in myself," Santanelli says. "It's still a hard place to be. But I know it is helping me. If I hadn't come here, I don't know what would have happened to me."

After 24 years of selling its program of character growth and parental involvement to thousands of underachievers and troubled adolescents from across the country, the private boarding school has been chosen as a model for a new kind of public school.

If all goes well, a Hyde-like public high school will open in Springfield, Mass., in September 1992.

The Hyde-Springfield union is part of a growing awareness within the education reform movement that America's public schools are failing large numbers of students and may need outside help defining and implementing new choices.

In Massachusetts, the Chelsea school system in 1988 turned over its operation to Boston University's education department for 10 years. And Dade County in Florida has contracted with a private group in Minnesota to run one of its elementary schools.

THE SPRINGFIELD project is also Hyde School founder Joseph Gauld's first shot at making a 30-year-old dream come true.

Since he started the school in 1966, Gauld has touted his philosophy of tapping into each student's unique potential through character growth – and involving parents intimately in the process – as the answer to education's vast ills.

As dropout rates at some urban schools reach 40 percent and educators search for ways to reach disaffected youths, Gauld is getting a chance to share his vision.

Staff photos by Doug Jones

Ian Bertrum, a student from Vermont, works with coach Gary Kent as the wrestling team practices in the Hyde School field house.

"They're realizing they can't reform education," Gauld says. "You've got to start all over again."

Hyde's philosophy is based on Gauld's belief that intellectual growth follows character growth and cannot be fostered in a vacuum.

Hyde takes youths who run the gamut from truants and school dropouts to lawbreakers and drug addicts, and helps them develop character through rigorous self-examination and adherence to a strict code of conduct.

Critics of Hyde have compared the school to a religious cult because of the school's insistence that students turn in peers who break the rules. Others compare Hyde to boot camp because of its demanding schedule and relentless pursuit of its goals.

"Hyde's a very demanding place," explains Malcolm Gauld, Joseph Gauld's son, a Hyde graduate and the school's current headmaster. "As one student said, 'Hyde tastes like spinach but makes you feel like Popeye.' It's sort of an academic Outward Bound."

WHATEVER THE metaphor, there is no denying the intensity and resultant camaraderie that pervade the 180-student campus.

Words and phrases such as "truth, attitude, responsibility, standards, conscience and commitment" reverberate through the halls as teachers and students push each other to achieve "personal excellence."

The school insists that every student be involved in athletics, performing arts and community action as well as a full college-prep academic load. In so doing, Hyde educators believe students can develop their unique potential and, in the process, gain confidence by challenging themselves in new ways.

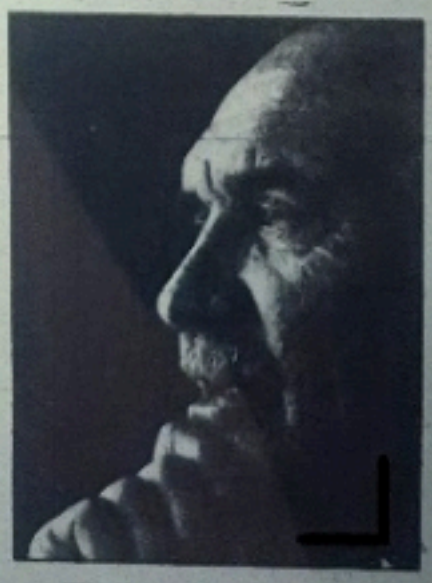
"They're pushing you to do your best," adds Ian Bertrum, a senior from Montpelier Vt. "You get all stressed out but once you realize you can deal with it, it's unbelievable."

Bertrum dropped out of school after getting into trouble with the law and being kicked out of his home. He especially disliked having to go out for wrestling at Hyde.

"I still don't like it very much," he says. "But it's a huge step of growth for me. It taught me I could do things I didn't want to do."

Even English classes have a flavor of personal challenge and show just how much truth is valued at Hyde. One day last week, for example, students in William Cox'

Please see HYDE, *Page* D2



Joseph Gauld, Hyde School founder, has long believed his philosophy offers solutions to education's ills.

HYDE

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senior English class gave oral presentations on how a book they had read over Christmas break affected them personally.

One senior's eyes filled with tears as he related the struggles of the book's main character to his own. When asked to evaluate his talk, several students said his presentation could have been better organized.

"You need to put more effort into the focus of it," agreed Cox.

"Only you know how hard you've worked," he told the group. "Go to the next level. Challenge yourselves."

PARENTS GET involved in the process of change when they participate in three Family Learning Center weekends each year.

These are rigorous, marathon group therapy sessions in which parents are called upon to look at their own lives, their values and the effect they have had on their children's behavior. Parents also meet as groups within their region once a month.

"I feel like I've gone to Hyde for three years," says Patricia Pauly of Lake Forest, Ill., whose 19-year-old son Doug is a Hyde senior who entered the school as a sophomore.

"You can do all you want at school but when they come home, things will be the same," she adds. "The whole family has to say, 'What's wrong? What can we do to make it better?' "

Students at Hyde say they have seen tremendous change in their parents, as well as in themselves.

"My mother does a (suicide) hotline now," says Santanelli. "She never did anything like that before."

"They started out being involved because there was a problem with Megan," says Megan Coolidge, a senior from Lexington, Mass. "Now they are here for themselves. Their growth totally inspires me."

Hyde's family component especially drew Springfield officials to the campus. School officials heard about Hyde from Dr. Harold Raynolds Jr., formerly Maine's commissioner of education and now the commissioner of education in Massachusetts.

"The Hyde model is a wonderful model," Raynolds says. "It's the development of a climate, a culture where schoolwork can develop and thrive."

"The parents' interest has an awful lot to do with a child's success," says Dr. Lorraine Plasse, director of English for the Springfield school system. "This would give parents an opportunity to work with the school."

SPRINGFIELD is an urban, racially mixed community in western Massachusetts. Officials say they hope to reach some adolescents at risk of dropping out and others who are not performing as well as they could.

"They're the ones who have the ability but don't have the motivation," says Plasse, who is in charge of adapting Hyde's program to Springfield. "This would plug them in and give them an identity."

While details of how Springfield would adapt the Hyde concept have not been worked out, Plasse expects that students would go to school from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., rather than 8 to 2, to afford time for athletics, performing arts and community service requirements.

> *"Teachers would have mentoring responsibilities. . . . There are a lot of teachers who'd like to have the kind of relationships with kids that the Hyde setting implies."*
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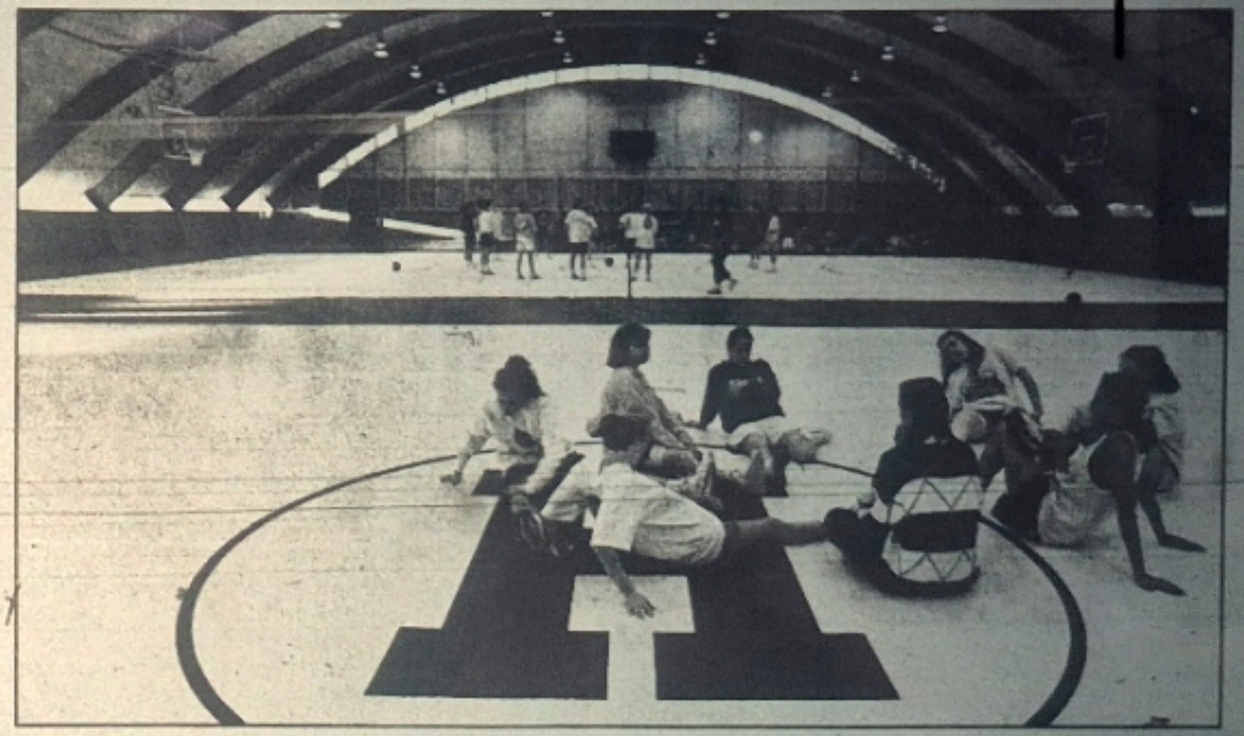
Weekly counseling groups led by teachers – such as those that go on at Hyde every Monday afternoon – would also be part of the curriculum. So would "journaling," the concept of having students respond within their personal writing notebooks to questions about moral issues and personal feelings.

"Teachers would have mentoring responsibilities. That's an important part of the process," Plasse says. "There are a lot of teachers who'd like to have the kind of relationships with kids that the Hyde setting implies."

Plasse isn't so sure Springfield will adopt the Hyde school moral code of conduct – in particular the insistence that students turn in each other.

"They see it as a positive caring behavior (at Hyde)," Plasse says. "That's something we want to talk about . . . We're adapting the Hyde school program and seeing how far we can go in Springfield."



Staff photo by Doug Jones

The Hyde women's basketball team takes a break in the field house. All students at the school are required to be involved in athletics.

Hyde project will add to students' choices

Springfield, Mass., already offers students three high school choices.

There is a high school that emphasizes science and math, a vocational/technical high school, and a business-oriented high school.

Dr. Lorraine Plasse, director of the Hyde-Springfield project for the Springfield schools, says the need to build a new school because of increased enrollment has provided the opportunity to seek out another option for students.

Technical details still need to be worked out before the marriage with Hyde is official, according to Plasse. One stumbling block is getting the school committee to agree to pay teachers extra for volunteering to teach an extended day under the Hyde concept.

Joseph Gauld, founder of the Hyde School, hopes to raise $5 million in foundation money to pay for Hyde officials' efforts in Springfield over the next five years. Gauld says $500,000 has already been donated by foundations such as the William E. Simon, Donner and Smart Foundations.

If all goes well, Gauld and Plasse say a summer program could be in place in Springfield this year and there could be a Hyde "school within a school" next September.

Gauld is obviously buoyed by the growing interest in his concept. He says he has also begun talks with school officials in Oakland, Calif., and Washington, D.C., who are interested in the Hyde concept.

"Once you get people to see it works, it can spread," Gauld says."

– Joanne Lannin

HYDE SCHOOL. BATH.

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Portland Press Herald
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