

[LOG IN](#) | [MY ACCOUNT](#) | [SUBSCRIBER SERVICES](#) | [ADVERTISE](#) | [ABOUT US](#) | [CONTACT US](#) |


36F FORECAST »

WESTCHESTER

MAGAZINE

FREE IN-HOME CONSULTATION 914 . 500 . 1000

WWW.GOTRANSFORM.COM

[Home](#) | [Archive](#) | [Dining](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Nightlife](#) | [Resources](#) | [Party Pictures](#) | [Signature Events](#) | [Calendar](#) | [Best Of](#) | [Weddings](#) | [Westchester Home](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

The Peekskill Brewery
 Serving fine craft beers and
 food designed with a pint in mind

Saturday, February 14th Valentine's Day...JOIN US in our
Lovers & Lover's Dining Room or the Broken Heart Bar
Haters
 Call 914-734-BEER
 for reservations

[EMAIL](#) | [PRINT](#) | [DELICIOUS.US](#) | [DIGG](#) | [YAHOO!](#) | [COMMENTS](#) | [FEED](#)

When the Three Rs Aren't Enough

The safety net in public schools.

BY: **SUSAN HODARA** PUBLISHED JUNE 11, 2007 AT 12:00 AM

When Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic Aren't Enough

Westchester's Alternative High School Options

By **Susan Hodara**

In Westchester County, where many secondary schools regularly make the nation's "top 100" lists and the standard for "high" in "high academic achievement" seems to creep perpetually upward, it's easy to forget that not every student's road is paved with success. Throughout Westchester's 41 public school districts, there are students who struggle and students who fail. There are those who are frequently truant, and others who ultimately drop out. Some are underachievers, unmotivated or unwilling to work up to their potential. Others have special needs—physical, psychological—or learning disabilities. Still others have special interests and talents that educators say can't be effectively nurtured in a traditional high school setting.

Enter alternative public school programs, which are specifically designed to help students who may not be Stanford-bound or, for that matter, SUNY Purchase-bound, or who simply learn differently than their peers. According to data from the Washington, D.C.-based National Center for Education Statistics, during the 2000-2001 school year (the most recent year for which statistics are available), 39 percent of the country's public school districts had some sort of alternative program, resulting in 10,900 such programs across the nation serving 612,900 students. Currently, more than 500 alternative high school programs exist in the state of New York. In Westchester, almost every school district offers students some type of alternative program option. All of these programs share a common goal: to provide an alternative approach to learning within the public school system for those who have not been able to succeed or flourish in the traditional school environment.

Which is exactly what Danny Doran, a senior now in his first year at the LIFE (Learning Independently From Experience) School within Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, has experienced, according to his mom. "I realized that Danny had never been turned on to learning through his 11 years in school," Nina Doran says. "He had been doing what he was supposed to

Subscribe



Subscribe today »

ADVERTISEMENT

edc
 Elemental Design Concepts

**Westchester County's
 Premiere Home Design Center
 Is Now Open!**

**A Fresh Concept in Design
 A Fresh Concept in Color
 A Fresh Concept in Contracting**

neff
 Interior Design | Custom Wood Flooring
 Custom Carpentry | Italian Furniture
 Neff Kitchen Design & Installation | Home Theater
 Bathroom Design & Installation | Lighting Design
 Decorative Painting | Commercial Design

197 East Post Road | White Plains, NY
 914.422.3323 | elementaldesignconcepts.com

be doing in his classes, but it didn't mean anything to him. The LIFE School's approach to teaching makes the information relevant to him."

All of Westchester's alternative high school programs prepare students for the Regents diploma, but the similarities end there. Some programs are housed within the main high school, while others maintain separate school buildings. Other factors, like class schedules, number of students enrolled, selection processes and admissions procedures, vary from district to district. Some programs follow a traditional school schedule while others adjust their schedules according to participants' needs, such as holding classes in the afternoon to accommodate work-study or internship placements earlier in the day. Some programs enroll 200 students or more, while others have barely two dozen. Some select their participants by lottery, while others follow an extensive selection process, involving interviews with students and parents. Admission may be by either voluntary application or referral from a guidance department or Committee for Special Education.

Alternative school programs are funded through the home school district, with per-student dollars diverted from the traditional school to the alternative program; tuition for out-of-district students is paid by those students' home districts. Neil Gross, director of the Rye School of Leadership, confides that one impetus for the creation of his district's alternative program was the high cost of sending Rye kids elsewhere: \$40,000 tuition for students sent to Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) programs, compared to the in-district cost of \$16,000.

The following is a sampling of Westchester's many program options.

Schools Within Schools

Pleasantville's Alternative Education Program, housed in a room in the high school, looks for students who could fall through the cracks without personalized attention," says High School Principal Ralph Napolitano. Over the past 19 years, the programs's enrollment has fluctuated between eight and 22 students. Napolitano says students enter for a variety of reasons, from academic to social. Placement in the program, he makes clear, does not necessarily have anything to do with ability or intelligence. "We approach students we think are in need of it," he says. "They have a choice." Students can take courses in the main school, and there are a number of options for combining mainstream and alternative classes. "The AE room is kind of a retreat for them, a place that's just theirs."

How successful is the program? "No one's dropped out," Napolitano says. "One hundred percent of our students graduate." And, according to Bob Delle Bovi, the program's director, 93 percent of the students go on to college. "Some go on to Westchester Community College and others go to four-year colleges. One alumna," he says proudly, "is finishing up at Yale."

APPLE (A Place People Learn Excellence), part of the Mamaroneck school system and located on the third floor of Mamaroneck High School, serves 9th through 12th graders at risk of failing in the main high school. Currently in its 27th year, APPLE offers Regents courses in a highly structured program; there are no free periods. Students work on major projects, with an emphasis on in-depth learning. Seniors have internships once a week. The program is limited to 70 students, with a teacher/student ratio averaging 1:10.

Since 1985, Hastings Alternative School Program (HASP) has been providing 9th through 12th grade students, who are struggling academically or are at risk for dropping out, "a place to call home," says Director Gregory Smith. In addition to a structured Regents curriculum, the program offers "life skills, field trips, counseling and a weekly student court." This year, 27 students are enrolled.

The Katonah-Lewisboro School for Experiential Education, located on the campus of John Jay High School in Cross River, was created in 1998 as a full-day academic program for college-bound 11th and 12th graders. "These are kids who are not performing at the level of which they're capable," says Robin Howard, a teacher at the school, which admits up to 25 students. "We work on how to talk to one another,

In the Current Issue

February 2009



Features

20 Great Meals Under \$20.09 »
Westchester's New Restaurateur »

Web Exclusives

Hot Plates | February 9, 2009 »
Wine Dinners »
Bet You Haven't Eaten Here Yet »
Hot Plates | February 2, 2009 »
Love Bites: Westchester's 20 Most Romantic Restaurants »

Departments

Richard and Me »
Letters »
Honoring Our Own »
Just a Tip »
The Matchmaker »
This Month's Winner & Losers »
Sledders Shangri-Las »
Some Inconvenient Truths »
10 Most Romantic Places to Kiss »
Top 5: Carly Phillips »
Things We Love »
A New Twist on An Old Classic: The White Shirt »
New Stores »
To Your Health »
Undercover: A Lingerie Aficionado Bares It All »
Sweet Heart »
Winging It »
Sweet Dominican »
Have a Heart—Eat Oprah's Favorite Cake »
The Accidental Oenophile »
Green with Anger »
Nibbles »
Wine for the Sweet Tooth »
Bar None »
Point-and-Click Gourmet »
To a Tea »
Four-Star French »
Home Theater »
Culture, Etc. »
Factory Master »

how to listen to one another, and how to respect one another so we can work together.”

Chappaqua’s LIFE (Learning Independently From Experience) School, now in its third year at Horace Greeley High School, currently has 43 juniors and seniors. Teacher Jon Hirsch says LIFE was conceived “to serve students who, for a variety of reasons, were no longer enjoying learning as much as they could be and who we felt would benefit from an alternative approach.” LIFE students can take at least one elective and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, as well as art and music classes in the main school. The rest of their education takes place in LIFE’s two classrooms and community room. The program started as “grade-free,” Hirsch says. But students are now graded “at their own behest. This program is absolutely about academic rigor,” he says. “This isn’t a place to slack off.”

Keri Moskowitz, a senior enrolled for the first time in Chappaqua’s LIFE School, admits that before she entered the program, she did her work, but “it didn’t really mean anything to me. Now,” she says, “I feel more passionate about my schoolwork, and I enjoy what I’m doing.” Why the difference?

“My teachers at LIFE really care about how I’m doing. I don’t feel like I’m just a name on a piece of paper anymore.” Keri adds: “I’m more motivated today to get my work done, and more enthusiastic about doing it.” She also says she appreciates the opportunities the school has given her, including an internship at the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville and tutoring students at the middle school.

One of the county’s oldest programs, Scarsdale Alternative School or the A-School as it’s called, was started in 1972 when “teens wanted to ‘do their own thing,’” says director Howard Rodstein. “The program began as a refuge for those students who wanted a course of study that was less traditional than that in the public schools.” The A-School is located in an old schoolhouse on an athletic field away from Scarsdale High School. The program’s 75 10th- through 12th-grade students are taught by five teachers. Each student has an advisor for regular one-on-one meetings. Most classes are taught on the premises, but students take electives, APs and other courses in the larger high school. Grades are accompanied by in-depth evaluations, which become part of the student’s transcript. Other components of the program include January internships. All A-School graduates continue on to college.

Somers Alternative High School, a 10th-to-12th-grade program, currently teaches 36 students. Eleventh and 12th graders take Regents classes in two interdisciplinary blocks (humanities and math/science), and students are able to take electives and other classes in the main high school. Eleventh and 12th graders participate in a four-subject interdisciplinary project, and 12th graders can pursue internships. “Initially, our students were academically behind,” says Principal Linda Horisk. “But we began attracting a range of students who were interested in our internship opportunities and flexible learning schedule. Our student body now encompasses diverse interests and abilities.”

The Transitional Alternative Program (TAP), Croton-Harmon Union Free School District’s alternative for, thus far, up to 17 high school students, is designed to meet the needs of “academically disaffected” students, according to the school’s brochure—students who are “unmotivated, underachieving and frequently truant.” It offers small classes, work experience and regular counseling. Currently, TAP is housed in portable classrooms behind Croton-Harmon High School, but will eventually move into quarters inside the school.

Stand-Alone Schools

the academic community for educational Success (ACES), an alternative program for up to 25 9th through 12th graders in the Bedford Central School District, is located on its own campus in a six-room building, seven miles from Fox Lane High School. Operated by an elected student/staff government, the program offers a curriculum that is experiential, often involving travel, and includes a “communication” course developed with Yale University that works on problem-solving, leadership training, conflict resolution, time management and listening skills.

White Plains’s Community School was founded in 1971 because, says Director Dennis Ubriaco, “we didn’t want kids left behind.” The alternative school has an impressive teacher/student ratio of 1:10 (the average class size in the high school is 24). Today, the school serves 100 pupils in grades 7 through 12—out of a high school population of 1,850—and graduates receive a Regents diploma. Each of the program’s 10

FotoFiles »

Taste Maker »

teachers, known as a “family head,” guides a group of approximately 10 students, called a “family.” “What drives this school,” says Ubriaco, “is the dedication and caring the teachers have to offer. Our students just want to be here.”

In a district of 6,200 students, Lakeland Alternative High School, located in its own building on the grounds of Lakeland Copper Beech Middle School in Yorktown, offers up to 40 students in 9th through 12th grade a school of their own. “These are students who might not have been successful in larger classes,” says Principal Marc Gessin. “Here, our optimum class has eight students.” The core Regents curriculum is taught to 9th graders with an extended period for math and science, while 10th, 11th and 12th graders spend a half-day in academic classes and then participate in internships and BOCES vocational programs or work experience. Students are referred to the program through their guidance counselors or the Committee for Special Education.

The Nelson R. Mandela Community High School gives 157 Mt. Vernon 9th through 12th graders a “second chance for success,” according to the school. The goal is to give “at-risk teens” the tools they need to succeed both academically and socially, through small class size and individualized support. Special programs include an extended school period, after-school tutoring, attendance and academic incentives, mentoring and bi-monthly community focus groups.

In Rye, the School of Leadership is housed in the Durland Scout Center on Milton Point and instructs this year 18 high school students, all of whom are expected to go on to college.

Laura Junceau, whose son, Dustin, came into the program from Dobbs Ferry High School where, Junceau says, “he was failing and always in detention,” is a big fan of RSL. Her son, whose behavioral problems, it turns out, have an emotional core (he is, she says, bipolar and has ADHD), is doing well in the program and is looking forward to college in the fall. “He’s not yet mature enough to handle a regular classroom, so he’s going to start at Westchester Community College.” Junceau credits communication “between the parents, the teachers and the students” for the school’s success. “Students are also expected to be good people all the time, not just in school,” she says, “so, if they do something unacceptable at home, the parent can inform the teacher, and the student ‘goes on accountability’ at school with a consequence.”

Yorktown Alternative High School, in the Yorktown Central School District, has more than doubled in size in one year—from 10 11th and 12th graders last year to 26 9th through 12th graders this year. It expects to take in 35 from the high school’s 1,300 students to provide, according to Gene Wolotsky, assistant superintendent for pupil services, “an alternative educational setting for students who require a more individualized and flexible program.” Housed in two portable structures on the high school and middle school campus in Yorktown, the program follows the Regents curriculum.

After-Hours Program

The six-year-old c.l.a.s.s. Academy, housed in Port Chester High School, offers 45 students in grades 9 through 12 Regents-approved classes after school—from 3:30 to 6 p.m. “This is not a remedial program,” says Principal Daniel F. Bologna. “Most of our students are of average and above-average intelligence, but many had attendance problems and were not earning the credits needed to graduate.” Before classes start at 3:30 p.m., students are placed in local work-study jobs. They take four classes each afternoon, including labs and exams, a “rigorous schedule,” Bologna says. “The kids have very little downtime.”

Magnet School

Marguerite Jones, principal of the Westchester Manhattanville Magnet Academy High School, which serves the communities of Harrison, Irvington and Greenburgh and next year, most likely Eastchester, is quick to distinguish her program. “The stereotype of the alternative school student is one who is at risk, not achieving and not motivated,” she says. “That’s not who we are. We are a federally funded school established to reduce racial isolation in the communities we serve.” The school offers its students, Jones says, “the opportunity to reinvent themselves and reach their potential.” The Academy was established at SUNY Purchase in January 2002 with 60 students in 9th grade, and moved this fall to the Manhattanville

campus with 160 students in 9th, 10th and 11th grades. Next year, it will reach its full capacity of 240 students, all selected through an impartial lottery. Its first class of seniors will graduate from their home districts and will receive a diploma from the Magnet School. The Academy's curriculum offers internships, hands-on projects and AP options and college credit courses taught by Manhattanville professors.

Hospital Schools

children who are hospitalized for rehabilitation at Blythedale Children's Hospital in Valhalla attend the Blythedale School, the only public school in the tri-state area established to provide an education for a hospital population. Administered by the specially created Mt. Pleasant-Blythedale Union Free School District, the school, which is attached to the hospital, offers students from kindergarten through 12th grade a traditional state-approved education. "Our enrollment has ranged from 115 to 155," says Superintendent Corinne Bloomer. "Going to school on a daily basis is part of the rehabilitation process. Kids can do that here."

BOCES (Board of Cooperative
Education Services) PROGRAMS

The Putnam/Northern Westchester Boces

Regional Alternative High School (also known as "Fox Meadow"), located on the Fox Meadow Campus in Yorktown Heights, serves 93 students from 9th grade through 12th grade from Northern Westchester and Putnam County in addition to some Southern Westchester and Manhattan students. The award-winning school (in May, it earned the coveted Best Practice program award from New York State, which designated it one of the top five alternative programs in the state) is coordinated by Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES, and offers a Regents curriculum with the pace of instruction and workload determined by individual learning needs. The school's recipe for success, says special education teacher Robert Distasio, one of the school's four original founders, is simple: "We don't give up on our kids."

Distasio admits that, for some of his students, success doesn't necessarily mean going to college, though he says a good number do go on to higher education. "Last year, 10 out of a class of 24 went on to attend college, mostly a community college. Considering that most of our students never thought they'd even finish high school, that's a good number." Others, he notes, "go to tech school and get jobs right out of school with the help of career counselors."

Lesly Wagner, a Westchester physical therapist whose husband is a physician, has had two children at Fox Meadow, including a son who recently graduated and another who is a junior. "This program is a pearl," she says. "I give the teachers a lot of credit. They earn the students' respect, and they respect the students. In addition, the kids learn to respect themselves."

In Rye Brook, The Southern Westchester Collaborative High School, created in 2002 by SWBOCES in conjunction with the Eastchester and Port Chester school districts, serves up to 32 underachieving, at-risk students in southern Westchester.

Coordinated by Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES for the past 27 years, Walkabout is an academic full-day program for college-bound high school seniors from both northern and southern Westchester having trouble achieving their potential in their district high schools. According to Director Eugene Lebowohl, Walkabout provides its 54 students with "the life skills, confidence and direction to be effective adults in the real world." Interested students apply for admission, and graduate from their home districts. Walkabout derives its name from the Aboriginal walkabout rite of passage to adulthood, and incorporates two one-week backpacking experiences to develop a sense of community within the group. It also combines academic classes with career internships, community service and college and career counseling. One hundred percent of the students graduate and about 95 percent go on to college.

Freelance writer Susan Hodara is the mother of two daughters attending Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua.

This article appears in the *January 2004* issue of *Westchester Magazine* - [Buy this issue »](#)

Do you like what you just read here? [Subscribe to Westchester Magazine »](#)

Add your comment:

Log In

Create an account

Create an instant account, or please log in if you have an account.

Email address (not displayed publicly)

Password

Forgot your password?

Verification Question. (This is so we know you are a human and not a spam robot.)

What is 3 + 5 ?

Post Comment



[Archive](#) | [Dining](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Nightlife](#) | [Resources](#) | [Party Pictures](#) | [Signature Events](#) | [Best Of](#) | [Weddings](#) | [Home & Garden](#)

[My Account](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Advertise](#) | [About Us](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Weather](#)

Copyright 2009 Today Media, Inc. All rights reserved.

powered by [RIVISTA](#) | [A Godengo Technology](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

This site is a member of the [City & Regional Magazine Association](#) Online Network

- ALABAMA
- Birmingham Magazine
- CALIFORNIA
- Alameda Magazine
 - Diablo Magazine
 - Marin Magazine
 - Oakland Magazine
 - Palm Springs Life
 - Sacramento Magazine
 - San Diego Magazine
- CONNECTICUT
- Greenwich Magazine
 - New Canaan Darien Magazine
 - Westport Magazine
 - atHome in Fairfield County Magazine

- DELAWARE
- Delaware Today
- FLORIDA
- Gulfshore Life
 - Sarasota Magazine
- GEORGIA
- Atlanta Magazine
- HAWAII
- Honolulu Magazine
- ILLINOIS
- Chicago Magazine
- INDIANA
- Evansville Living
 - Indianapolis Monthly
- LOUISIANA
- New Orleans Magazine

- MAINE
- Bangor Metro
 - Down East
- MINNESOTA
- Minnesota Monthly
- MICHIGAN
- DBusiness Magazine
 - Grand Rapids Magazine
 - Hour Detroit
 - Traverse Magazine
- MISSOURI
- St. Louis Magazine
 - 417 Magazine
- NEW YORK
- Buffalo Spree
 - Hudson Valley Magazine
 - Westchester Magazine

- OHIO
- Cincinnati Magazine
 - Ohio Magazine
- PENNSYLVANIA
- Main Line Today
- RHODE ISLAND
- Rhode Island Monthly
- TENNESSEE
- Memphis Magazine
- TEXAS
- Texas Monthly
- WASHINGTON DC
- Washingtonian
- WISCONSIN
- Madison Magazine