

Chapter Five
A Different Alternative:
The Hoffman-Boston Program

Community efforts to reform Arlington's Public School System did not stop when the proposals for the Woodlawn and Drew Programs were accepted in the Spring of 1971. For the first time ever, traditional education in the county was publicly criticized for its strict rules, regimented curriculum and institutional environment. The neglect of the county and school boards to integrate Drew Elementary was made public. The issue of relevancy in the classrooms, first raised by proponents of the New School, was now questioned by a broader base within the Arlington community.

Independent of the school board, parents conducted a survey of the curriculum in the junior high schools in the Fall of 1971. For months they studied all six of Arlington's junior high schools and finally submitted a report to the school board on March 16, 1972. The Progress Report on Curriculum in Junior High Schools argued that junior high schools were not well suited to the needs of their students. "The schools were incredibly strict. They were very rigid, joyless, dour kinds of places. Kids felt trapped."¹⁷¹ They resented hall passes, lavatory passes, and attendance taken in each class every day. Many students simply did not enjoy the schools which regimented their academic needs and "did nothing to meet [their] emotional needs."¹⁷² Parents wanted to make the junior high school experience a positive place, and given the existence of alternatives at the high school and elementary levels, the group proposed an alternative junior high school as well.

In an informal setting Woodlawn encouraged responsibility, self-motivation, and self-discipline in its students. Drew created a warm and caring place where children were valued for their individuality, and both programs fostered fun and excitement in the learning process. At the junior high

¹⁷¹Michael Versace, interview by Christy Mach, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2 April 1996.

¹⁷²Ibid.

school level, parents, students and teachers sought to combine aspects of the two existing alternatives and create another new school.

The school board received letters from parents, students, teachers and community members supporting the proposal.¹⁷³ In some cases these were people with children or siblings at either Woodlawn or Drew. Michael Versace, who ran a teen center in the county, was dedicated to helping students. He worked with students at Woodlawn, he was aware of the "prison-like" atmosphere at junior high schools in the county, and advocated the establishment of an alternative at that level.¹⁷⁴ Many parents were dissatisfied with the structure of the traditional junior high schools. One parent found the learning viewpoint at Williamsburg Junior High too narrow. "Examinations in history consisted not of analyzing what were the major historical events of an era and what influenced them, but instead of memorizing such details as what name Pocohontas took when she married John Rolfe. The teacher dished out something and wanted it dished back the same way she had dished it out."¹⁷⁵ Focusing on what they termed "unsuited" curriculum in the junior high schools, students and parents pressured the school board for another relevant educational setting in the county.

In the wake of the dramatic New School movement and the equally intense first years of operation at both Woodlawn and Drew, the proposal for the model junior high school lacked controversy. It was not ground-breaking and conservatives did not oppose the concept. The establishment of Woodlawn removed the "trouble-makers" from the traditional schools, and the same result could be expected at the junior high level. The school board, still dominated by liberals, could not deny the demand for an alternative at the

¹⁷³Minute Book No. 10, County School Board, Arlington, Virginia, March 16 and March 23 1972, pages 415 & 419.

¹⁷⁴Michael Versace interview.

¹⁷⁵Bart Barnes. "Turned-Off Students Get Alternative - In The System." *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1975, page F1.

junior high level, and it "readily approved" the new proposal.¹⁷⁶ Budgetary implications were the only roadblock. Final action had to be given to the County Board which accepted the proposal on May 6, 1972, at which point the model junior high school became a reality.

The ease with which this new proposal sailed through the school board is a result of county politics at the time. Though the backlash against liberalism was in full cry on the national level, reactionary conservatism had not yet trickled down to the local level in Arlington. In the early-mid seventies progressives maintained a majority on both the county and school boards. Until the end of the decade, they provided a block of support for the alternative programs which allowed Drew, Hoffman-Boston (the model junior high school), and Woodlawn to establish themselves without conservatives challenging them every step of the way. Furthermore, the existing "alternative programs required no preparation from the school system," they helped to alleviate student unrest, particularly at the high school level, and they were a source of favorable publicity for the county. The same results were expected of a model junior high school.¹⁷⁷

After it was accepted, the model junior high school was assigned to the Hoffman-Boston building. Hoffman-Boston had been an all-black school in the days of segregation. When the integrated Thomas Jefferson Junior High School (T.J.) population grew so large that the school could not accommodate all students, the seventh grade was moved to the Hoffman-Boston Building, which was then renamed the Thomas Jefferson Annex. A new Thomas Jefferson Junior High School opened in the Fall of 1972, and when the seventh graders left the Annex, the new model junior high school occupied the

¹⁷⁶Don Brandewie; Memorandum concerning a proposal which would combine 10th grade Woodlawn students with Hoffman-Boston Program, Arlington, Virginia, Spring 1972, page 1.

¹⁷⁷Michael Versace interview.

building. "The first thing the Program did was revert back to the school's old name, Hoffman-Boston."¹⁷⁸

Immediately following the May 6 announcement parents and students organized into various committees to help facilitate the planning of the program. The initiative was an attempt to ensure the sort of school these groups wanted. 'The Student's [sic] Committee on The Hoffman-Boston Program' submitted a five page report to the school board. Students wanted freedom of movement, attendance, and scheduling. "With parents' permission," students argued that they "be allowed to leave school grounds during optional activities or unscheduled time."¹⁷⁹ They believed that "attendance at classes should be optional for all students performing satisfactorily (passing) in that course," and they wanted "scheduling to be as flexible as possible, with no course scheduled more than three times per week."¹⁸⁰ Students also made policy-making, course credit, evaluation, and curriculum recommendations. Though they may not have been as high-powered or well spoken as their high school peers, these students had concerns, and they had their own ideas about how their school should operate.

Parents wanted learning to be a positive experience. They wanted their children to be encouraged to take responsibility for their education, and they wanted their personal as well as academic needs to be met. To that end, the 'Committee on Teacher-Principal Selection for the Model Junior High School' published a report which was given to the school board to help the selection process. Given the age of the students involved, parents agreed that a principal rather than a 'head teacher' would best suit new program. In the "final analysis" the committee believed that the "climate of the model junior

¹⁷⁸Mike Lipske. "Alternative Junior High Offers 'An Individualistic Approach.'" *Northern Virginia Sun.*, March 23, 1974.

¹⁷⁹Recommendations of the Student's Committee on The Hoffman-Boston Program, Student's Committee, Arlington, Virginia, May 28, 1971, page 5.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, page 1.

high would be determined by the caliber of the principal selected."¹⁸¹ It therefore suggested that widespread publicity be given to the position of principal, and that the job be filled before the end of the school year to allow the appointee to observe applicants for the teaching positions in a teaching situation.

The board disregarded most of Committees' suggestions. It already had a candidate in mind. Don Brandewie was the current Assistant Director of the Arlington Adult Education Program, he had served as a classroom teacher at Swanson Junior High School, and he was the Secondary Intern in Administration during the 1970-1971 school year. As an intern, Brandewie worked with principals and administrators throughout the county. He also spent half of that year working with Dr. Lloyd Trump in the office of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). At NASSP Brandewie learned what principals around the country were doing, which in theory, would help him better serve the Arlington community. His work with Lloyd Trump, who was at the forefront of alternative education at the time, also exposed Brandewie to the operations involved in that type of learning. Once the proposal for a model junior high school was accepted, Brandewie seemed the perfect man for the job. He had an administrator's perspective on alternative education, "he had a good reputation with the County Education Center, and he worked well with the county administration."¹⁸² On May 18, 1972, Brandewie was hired for the position of principal at Hoffman-Boston. He was a "terrific choice to start the program," and he served the school well during its first and most vulnerable year.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹Report of the Committee on Teacher-Principal Selection for the Model Junior High School, Arlington County Virginia, Spring 1973, page 1.

¹⁸²Randy McKnight, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia, 23 February 1996.

¹⁸³Ibid.

In each of Arlington's elementary and junior high schools teachers and guidance counselors informed students and their parents about the new alternative. Hoffman-Boston was described as "a program with varied strategies and environments for learning through which all pupils, regardless of differences in individual talents and interests, would proceed with gains."¹⁸⁴ Curricula materials were to be individualized and organized to provide self-direction, self-pacing, and self-evaluation by the pupils themselves. Similar to the admission procedure at Woodlawn, any student who was interested in the Hoffman-Boston Program filled out both a parental permission form and teacher discussion form and all applications were held in anticipation of a lottery. Enrollment opportunities for each junior high school were as follows:

Gunston - 40 (10-7th, 15-8th, 15-9th)	Stratford - 50 (14-7th, 18-8th, 18-9th)
T.J. - 50 (14-7th, 18-8th, 18-9th)	Swanson - 40 (10-7th, 15-8th, 15-9th)
Kenmore - 60 (16-7th, 22-8th, 22-9th)	Williamsburg - 60 (16-7th, 22-8th, 22-9th)

A lottery would determine admission should the number of applications from any one school exceed the number of spaces available. For the three hundred available spaces only one hundred and eighty student applications were received, and all applicants were admitted to the program.¹⁸⁵

Like Ray Anderson at Woodlawn, Don Brandewie hired all of the teachers at Hoffman-Boston himself. Announcements concerning teaching positions were posted throughout the county after the proposal for the program was accepted. All teacher who were interested in transferring to the new school made their wishes known, and by July 1, 1972, six full-time and seven part-time teachers were hired to complete the Hoffman-Boston staff.

¹⁸⁴H.L. Mack, Director of Secondary Programs. Letter to Parents, Arlington, Virginia, May 24, 1972.

¹⁸⁵Similar to the Woodlawn Program, very few minority students ever attended Hoffman-Boston.

Most came from inside the county. Brandewie had known English teacher Randy McKnight at Swanson, and he knew French teacher Mary Flynn by her reputation in the county. The principal sought energy and creativity in the teaching staff, and like Anderson, Brandewie wanted teachers at his school who wanted to be there.

The teachers were "thrilled to have the opportunity to break away from the traditional structure and start something new."¹⁸⁶ Most believed that junior high school students needed a less structured and more individualized learning environment than the county was providing. Randy McKnight believed that the traditional junior high schools "were too lecture-centered and too linear. They were unsuited for students who needed to get up and move around and be doing things other than sitting at a desk, listening to a teacher, and doing worksheets."¹⁸⁷ The staff looked forward to creating a more personalized atmosphere at Hoffman-Boston, and they began to plan ways in which to do it.

Throughout the summer students, parents, and teachers met informally to discuss goals and give direction to the program. The existing alternatives did give the group some ideas. Hoffman-Boston would adopt a first-name policy and flexible schedule as used at Woodlawn. Drew's personalized school setting, where feelings, values and emotional and social needs were given as much attention as academic pursuits was also adapted to the model junior high school. Developing a curriculum proved more challenging. Students did not want lecture-style classes. Instead, they preferred educational methods such "learning games, field trips, independent study, participatory seminars, and small group work."¹⁸⁸ They wanted to design their own independent study

¹⁸⁶Judy Mayeux, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia, 26 January 1996.

¹⁸⁷McKnight interview.

¹⁸⁸Student Committee, Recommendations of the Student's Committee on The Hoffman-Boston Program, page 3.

projects, they wanted outside teachers, and they wanted choices. To meet the curricular needs of students, parents, and the county, Don Brandewie introduced what he had learned while working with Dr. Lloyd Trump.

The Trump System of Alternative Education stressed the "individualization of education to all students."¹⁸⁹ In theory, it sounded great. Students would work one-on-one with teachers all day long, they would receive a totally personalized education, and each year the program would adapt to the changing student body. Hoffman-Boston would emphasize individual differences among students in their talents, interests, and goals. Decisions about study would be made individually by each student with a teacher-advisor (TA), and the teacher in charge of the subject area. State and county requirements for junior high school students would be used as guidelines, but the people of the program would take precedence over the structure. The students and teachers would create the structure of the Hoffman-Boston Program as they went along.

The informal meetings did provide a forum to introduce new ideas, but there was "no time to discuss the practicality nor the reality of them."¹⁹⁰ Brandewie requested planning for the staff several times throughout the summer, but the school board was unresponsive. The Woodlawn and Drew Programs were organized over the summer without county funded planning, and the board did not anticipate such a request from Hoffman-Boston.

Until this issue was raised, most of the preliminary preparation for the model junior high school was lifted from Woodlawn. Applications for admission were filled out, a lottery was prepared, and students, parents, and teachers formed committees to discuss the operation of the program. A crucial difference, however, was the personalities involved. The Woodlawn Program

¹⁸⁹Lloyd Trump. Xerox report on "Individualized Instruction" used by teachers at Hoffman-Boston in 1972.

¹⁹⁰Don Brandewie; Memorandum to Dr. Mack, Spring 1973, page 1.

was created by a high powered group who had worked for years to change the traditional school system. Students led the new school movement, and they were incremental in developing the academic program that made it work. At Hoffman-Boston, students were five years younger than their high school peers. They had no idea how to run a school, and this left the parents and staff to organize the program. Though these two groups had good intentions, they were not fueled with the energy that came from years of battle with Arlington County Administration. They had no clear idea of how to run an alternative school, and they probably did not realize the extent to which the Woodlawn community worked to prepare the program for the first day of school. With regard to planning, perhaps the Hoffman-Boston staff expected too much from a school board that did not recognize the different needs of the new alternative program.

The school board did finally respond to Brandewie's request for a staff meeting in late August when a budget was approved for a five day planning workshop. However, when the staff arrived at Hoffman-Boston for the first time they faced a more imminent problem than developing the program's curriculum. "The building was a mess."¹⁹¹ The school had no books, no supplies, and the desks and chairs were scattered throughout the building. The seventh graders of the Thomas Jefferson Annex left at the end of June, and all summer the county neglected to replenish the building. The week was spent setting up classrooms for the opening of school, not developing an alternative curricula. "Time so desperately needed to plan the Hoffman-Boston Program was lost,"¹⁹² and the few Trump elements that the staff had vaguely discussed were the only tenets that the teachers had to cling to on opening day.

¹⁹¹Mayeux interview.

¹⁹²Don Brandewie; Memorandum to Dr. Mack, Spring 1973, page 1.

The staff had "no clue what to expect" when the school opened on September 9, 1972. On the very first day the entire school, 165 students, Brandewie, and the teaching staff met in the gym for a group activity. "One teacher went to the gym with a long rope in hand. When everyone had arrived, the teacher introduced himself to a student and asked that student who he was. Following the introduction the student held onto the rope and went to find another student. The two introduced themselves and then the first student introduced the second student to the teacher, and the process continued. Slowly everybody was picked up on the rope until finally the whole school was connected. Then everyone made a big circle. The lesson learned was that, although the group was diverse and separate everyone, was part of one thing."¹⁹³ It was a symbolic start to the program.

The teachers at Hoffman-Boston had their work cut out for them. From the very beginning, they were to play a pivotal role in curricula and organizational structures at the school. In addition to his/her teaching duties, each full-time staff member was an advisor to a group of twenty-five students. The TA's classroom served as a base for that teacher's group of students, and the teacher-advisor (TA) went beyond the role of the home room teacher of the traditional schools, to befriend each student as well as guide him/her academically. In addition to organizing the alternative program, the teachers found themselves working as counselors for their students.

The traditional junior high schools used the alternative as a dumping ground. Teachers and guidance counselors at the traditional schools encouraged their 'problem kids' to attend Hoffman-Boston. As a result, the school was loaded with kids who had problems, particularly the first year. Don Brandewie's statistical research from a mid-year study recorded close to 70% of the students as having problems:

¹⁹³McKnight interview.

- 10% of the student had a record of disruptive behavior
- 6% of the students had severe attendance problems
- 19% of the students were emotionally disturbed
- 1% were children with severe learning disabilities
- 33% had been or were involved in drugs

The categories were exclusive. That is, even if a child had several severe problems he or she was only counted once in the determination of the percentages listed. This accounted for the low percentages of learning disabilities since in many cases the learning disability was of such long standing that other problems assumed a primary level of severity. These figures are startling, unfortunate and unfair.¹⁹⁴ Certainly no other school in the county recorded over half of its student population as having problems.

One might have expected Woodlawn to have been in a similar situation, but this was not the case. At Woodlawn students themselves created the program, and they wanted to make it work. These students sought control over their education and they went to the alternative to get it. They were older, more mature, and better able to take responsibility for themselves than the students at the middle school were. At Hoffman-Boston most students were not interested in alternatives to the traditional system of education, they did not help their teachers develop new courses, and they did not care if the program lasted beyond that first year.

Therefore, the Hoffman-Boston staff was attempting to provide greater self-discipline and self-responsibility to a majority of students who were not capable of such things. Some students were able, and these were generally those who were there because their parents wanted them in an alternative program, but "they were really the minority."¹⁹⁵ Teachers had a double workload. Not only did they have to organize a curriculum and plan the entire

¹⁹⁴Don Brandewie; Memorandum to Dr. Harold Wilson concerning: Statistical Information of Hoffman-Boston Students, Spring 1973, page 2.

¹⁹⁵Mayeux interview.

Hoffman-Boston Program, but they had to work with students who challenged their efforts every step of the way. The reality of Hoffman-Boston was not living up to the ideal of the model junior high school.

The first semester was particularly trying. There were no required courses for the first six weeks, during which time classes operated with virtually no structure at all. Because the teachers had no planning the program bordered on total lack of control. Randy McKnight and Chelly Glassman managed to keep students in their classroom part of the day by having the students make films in the school's Language Arts class. "Kids were divided into groups, all given the same plot, and then allowed to work independently from there. During their group time they would work on their movie, and then the rest of the day they could pretty much do whatever they wanted."¹⁹⁶ For young students who had never experienced this lack of structure the freedom at Hoffman-Boston was too much, and the teachers met frequently to discuss ways of better organizing the school.

The program sought to create an environment where kids would be excited about learning. But the first few weeks proved that good intentions were not enough. The school needed planning and some kind of structure if it was going to survive. The Trump system provided a model of education in theory that was realistically impossible to achieve at Hoffman-Boston. In response to the "chaos" teachers stayed late after school for meetings often two and three times a week until 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. to solve the problem of how to make Hoffman-Boston work.¹⁹⁷ From the very beginning the staff was in a constant state of evaluating itself as well as the educational program they were trying to create.

¹⁹⁶McKnight interview.

¹⁹⁷Mary Flynn, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia, 13 February 1996.

After six weeks, the staff adopted a module schedule that was designed to give more structure to the program. Students did not have a particular class every day or at the same time each day of the week as they had at their home schools. Instead, the Hoffman-Boston schedule consisted of thirteen modules, each twenty-five minutes long, with a five minute break in between. The 1972-1973 Master Schedule illustrates how the 'mod' schedule worked:

TEACHER-PROGRAM MASTER SCHEDULE
HOFFMAN-BOSTON 1972-73

Area	Sci.	Math	Lang. Arts	Soc. St.	Foreign Language			Fine Arts		Practical Arts			Health			
					Sp.	Fr.	Music	Art	Home Ec.	Ind. A.	Wooding	Physical	Health			
Teacher			Blassman	Williams	Rycina	Flynn	Kennedy	Richter	Faumer	Boe	Ja	Carz	Lass	an	Finlay	Sal
Time	M	Daily Meeting with Teacher-Advisor														
8:15																
8:40																
8:45																
9:10																
9:15																
9:40																
		T.A.														
					T.A.											
			Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch			Lunch				Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
		Lunch	Lunch					Lunch				Lunch				
			T.A.												T.A.	
		T.A.														
1:40																
1:45																
2:10																
2:15																
2:45				T.A.												

Teachers were in their classrooms for the shaded modules each day, and "students came in whenever they felt like it to work on various projects with their teachers."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸Ibid.

Teachers developed syllabi for their classes. Some of the instruction was interdisciplinary and conducted in team teaching situations, but for the most part everything that first year was totally individualized. The teacher did not lecture; instead, each instructor met individually with each student. Students developed contracts with clearly defined goals, either on their own or with a teacher. The pair would then meet when the contract was complete, and together they would grade the student's work. There were no classes as such. Instead students would simply come in at the designated time and work independently while they waited to meet with their teacher. Mary Flynn had packets of French materials for her students and each student worked at his/her own pace. "Students would come in and take a Baskin-Robbins number off the wall and wait their turn to meet with [her]. Mary would call them up to her couch one at a time, chart the student's progress, and then two would agree on the next set of assignments."¹⁹⁹ Similar approaches were used throughout the school.

At Thanksgiving time the county budget provided for another staff position at Hoffman-Boston. Jim Schroeder was hired as a part-time math teacher and part-time aide to the principal. He had had four and a half years teaching experience and after briefly selling disability insurance, decided to return to the classroom. He arrived at Hoffman-Boston for an interview with Don Brandewie and found "kids flying all over the place."²⁰⁰ After a tour of the school and an explanation of the Program, Schroeder joined the Hoffman-Boston staff on the spot. Brandewie did not consult one teacher before hiring the new staff member, and though Schroeder fit in well at the school, teachers did not approve of their principal hiring someone without consulting them first. The teachers worked hard to develop a successful program that would

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

²⁰⁰Jim Schroeder, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia 23 February 1996.

work at Hoffman-Boston, and they wanted to have a say in the decision-making policies that governed their school, including staff changes. From that moment on teachers organized interview committees and did participate in the hiring of new staff members.

Things were beginning to fall into place and it was the staff, more than Brandewie, that was making things happen. Brandewie recognized that the teachers needed freedom to develop a successful program. He took care of the County Administration and let the school take care of itself. The teachers were risk-takers. The majority of them were young, most in their mid-twenties, and they were idealistic and dedicated to the idea of an alternative educational program. The staff, perhaps more than anyone else, wanted the school work to work. They devoted countless hours to the organization of the program, and many more to the counseling of its students. Though none of teachers could accurately gauge the amount of learning that went on at Hoffman-Boston the first year, the staff was confident that improvements in the program were made.

The first year at Hoffman-Boston was one of trial and error. "It was an emotional roller-coaster for everyone - students, parents, and staff."²⁰¹ As a result, strong ties were formed between students and teachers and within the staff itself. "There was a real sense of caring" at the school, which perhaps became the primary strength of the Program.²⁰² Many students who had previously loathed school "felt comfortable at Hoffman-Boston, and many parents were subsequently thrilled with the school. For some it was the first time their son or daughter actually liked going to school."²⁰³ Critics of the junior high school concept in the early seventies argued that the "schools did not encourage exploration enough. In fact, they labeled junior highs as

²⁰¹Don Brandewie; Memorandum to Dr. Mack, Spring 1973, page 3.

²⁰²Flynn interview.

²⁰³Mayeux interview.

failures for not fulfilling that function."²⁰⁴ Though unorthodox, the learning environment at Hoffman-Boston did encourage exploration, and as far as meeting students individual emotional needs, the program was a success.

After an unorganized, unstable, and "unbelievable first year," it is perhaps amazing that the Hoffman-Boston Program was allowed to continue.²⁰⁵ However, the school did alleviate problems in the traditional junior high schools which pleased its critics. It did not harm any students in any way, and its "relaxed atmosphere and individualized program helped many troubled students get through a difficult phase of their adolescent lives."²⁰⁶ The Woodlawn and Drew Programs continued to produce positive results, and so the school board could afford to maintain the alternative junior high school despite its inability to gauge students' academic progress. With a year of experience, and continued planning over the summer months, it was believed that the Hoffman-Boston Program could only get better.

²⁰⁴Don Brandewie, Memorandum to Dr. Mack, Spring 1973, page 2.

²⁰⁵Schroeder interview.

²⁰⁶Don Brandewie; Memorandum to Dr. Mack, Spring 1973, page 2.