

Chapter Two
The New School Movement

PROPOSAL AND PUSH FOR THE NEW SCHOOL

*Arlington can no longer be content to rest on its laurels and continue to take pride in the faded press clippings that once heralded our once-exemplary school system. The fact is, no significant experimentation or innovation has taken place in Arlington in years; we seem to believe that we have now achieved the ultimate in education. Yet the citizens are rapidly losing faith and patience with our school system; the feeling that something better is possible gets stronger every day. The School Board can go a long way toward restoring Arlington to its former position in education and toward renewing citizen confidence in our educational system by specifically recommending this very small first step toward a modern, creative, and successful school system.*⁵⁴

On March 17, 1971, the Arlington School Board received a memorandum which proposed an "Experimental 'Free High School' to be created by [the] County."⁵⁵ A solution to the growing unrest of the community appeared to have been found. The proposal drafted by Ray Anderson, a history teacher at Wakefield High School, was submitted by the Arlington Educational Association.⁵⁶

Ray Anderson came to Arlington County in 1968. After graduating from Penn State, he had worked at the Central Intelligence Agency for four years until he quit after his boss told him to ignore data and "write what the men upstairs in the CIA wanted to hear."⁵⁷ Anderson returned to school, earned a master's degree in International Studies and History, and became a certified teacher. He began teaching history at Wakefield during "an intense time at the school."⁵⁸ His first year there, he was not very involved. However, during

⁵⁴Jeff Kallen, Chairman, Citizens' Committee for the New School; Memorandum to the Arlington County School Board, April 1, 1971, page 2-3.

⁵⁵Ibid., page 1.

⁵⁶The AEA had always been involved in liberal politics and it had a strong voice in the local Democratic party. Its submission of such a proposal was therefore in no way shocking, as it might have been in places like Philadelphia and New York, where teachers' unions resisted educational experimentation.

⁵⁷Ray Anderson, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia, 26 January 1996, page 9.

⁵⁸Ibid.

his second and third years, he became very active. During the 1969-1970 school year Anderson sponsored the student government and began to lead the faculty administration council.

His experience at the CIA prepared Anderson to "tend to distrust and want to change authority."⁵⁹ Influenced by the Kurcis report and by what he saw in the halls and classrooms of Wakefield, Ray Anderson helped to organize the teachers and initiate educational experiments in the school. Not all students benefited from the EFFE initiatives, and this concerned Anderson until a colleague pointed out that the "idea behind the projects was for people to participate. They may fail, but the value of their participation was judged more informative and instructive to the students than whether the experiment worked or not."⁶⁰ It was a valuable lesson.

Alleviating student unrest and dissatisfaction at Wakefield became a priority to Anderson. Some students needed more structure than the school was currently providing them but others were not yet given enough control over their own education. In December 1970, while driving home from a trip to Pennsylvania, Anderson dictated a four page memo to his wife. "The first half was addressed to Wakefield's principal stressing the need for more structure in the school. And the second half suggested the creation of a new school."⁶¹ This school would be for those students who wanted control over their studies, and instead of being run by a principal, the new school would be governed by students and teachers collectively. When the county announced that several elementary schools would be closing and left vacant the following school year, the timing was optimal, and the proposal was submitted to the school board.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., page 10.

⁶¹Ibid.

Those in the community who sought educational options embraced the proposal immediately. Jeff Kallen and Jean Lichty, a student from Yorktown, were present at the meeting when Anderson announced the proposal and suggested the board take advantage of the closing of small neighborhood schools to set up smaller alternative schools that would cater to alternative demands. Kallen and Lichty were "completely surprised."⁶² This was what people had been talking about. The new school would offer students freedom from censorship, freedom to wear their hair long, a smaller and more personalized atmosphere, and a voice in governing the school. Teachers and students would be equals in the learning experience, and flexibility would allow students to design their own courses of study. The demand was there, the desire for educational reform was there, and Ray Anderson had just proposed the means by which to accomplish it.

The following day Jeff Kallen called a meeting of the students, teachers, and parents with whom he had been working throughout the county, and he invited Ray Anderson to join them in discussing the possibility of the "New School." Through the group's political contacts, Anderson's network of teachers, and a "simple hunch that parents of some of the active students would be sympathetic supporters," a mailing list was created, the proposal reworked, and the Citizen's Committee for the New School established.⁶³ Plans for the experiment grew at a rapid pace, and the energy and excitement of those involved permeated the classrooms of the county. In two weeks, the ad hoc citizen's group organized a base of support and submitted another, more elaborate memorandum to the school board on April 1, 1971. The new proposal challenged Arlington's "once-exemplary school system." It outlined the necessary organization for the implementation, curriculum, and economic

⁶²Jeff Kallen, interview by Christy Mach, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 22 February 1996, page 3.

⁶³Kallen interview, 22 February 1996, page 4.

considerations of the new school that would ensure its purpose to: "make the individual student responsible for his own education."⁶⁴ Years of student activism paved the way for a willingness within the now liberal Arlington administrative community to consider such a proposal.

On April 1, 1971, a more elaborate proposal submitted by Jeffrey Kallen, Chairman of the Citizens' Committee for the New School, advocated plans for an "open-attendance experimental high school."⁶⁵ All students and teachers interested in a less rigid and more experimental situation would be encouraged to transfer to the school. The school community would consist of the students and teachers of the school, and it would regulate and direct its own activities through a governing council. The governing council would create curriculum objectives, coordinate in-school and out-of-school activities, and carry out those duties normally assigned the principal of a high school. The curriculum would meet all state and county regulations, although the course offerings within required disciplines would offer choices.

Led by Kallen, the committee tested the School Board's historical resolve to reform. This young kid was coordinating and leading a group of adults in Arlington. He was moving an entire county to momentous action. On April 15, *The Washington Post* ran a story highlighting Jeff Kallen, the audacious student activist, and the community's push to reform local education. The article quoted students in favor of the New School and revealed student boredom in traditional classrooms. "Sitting in an 11-by-15 foot classroom for 56 minutes each day for certain students was just not educating a person. At most, it just produced a high school student with 16 credits for graduation."⁶⁶

⁶⁴Jeff Kallen, Chairman, Citizens' Committee for the New School; Memorandum to the Arlington County School Board, April 1, 1971, page 1-2.

⁶⁵Ibid., page 1.

⁶⁶Nancy Scannell. "Students Work Work Program." *The Washington Post*, April 5, 1971, page G2.

The article was clipped, made into a flyer advocating the New School, and distributed throughout the community.

The Committee continued to meet at Kallen's house, and support for the New School continued to grow. Advocates of establishing a Model Elementary School at Drew joined forces with the Citizens' Committee for the New School. Similar to the proposal for the new school, the alternative for elementary school students stressed "a continually changing curriculum in response to children's needs."⁶⁷ Both groups sought a more personalized education in a more humane atmosphere. The activists in favor of educational reform supported one another and formed a strong coalition of opposition to the existing school system.

In addition, parents on the Citizen's Committee used their political clout to lobby School Board members. "They played a significant role in finessing the politics and networking to get the board to approve the proposal."⁶⁸ Jeff Kallen and Ray Anderson lobbied Superintendent Chisholm and Associate Superintendent Wilson, whom they hoped would support their proposal. Familiar with the inner workings of the school system, Anderson organized the preparation of draft documents to start the school. A complete packet containing advertisements for job vacancies, student applications, and a list of locations to house the school was taken to the Administration Building and given to the Superintendent.

On April 23, 1971, Superintendent Robert Chisholm sent a memorandum to the members of the school board, endorsing the proposal to establish an experimental high school. The Citizen's Committee for the New School had told him their plan and provided a packet of necessary information as to how they would implement the school if it was approved. The Superintendent described

⁶⁷Nancy Houghtaling. Status Report on Alternative Schools, Arlington, Virginia, June 15, 1979, page 2.

⁶⁸Anderson interview, page 32.

the "establishment of a small, open-attendance, experimental high school as interesting for at least two reasons:

- a. those students admitted to the new school would be committed to making it successful, would probably work harder at the process of education, and quite likely would be better satisfied than with the more conventional program.
- b. the small experimental school might model some activities and processes that could be incorporated into the regular high school."⁶⁹

Superintendent Chisholm added a few suggestions to the proposal. He recommended the establishment of a "quota from each of the existing high schools to be filled by lottery ... to best assure an open school,"⁷⁰ and the recognition of a head teacher who would be responsible to the county government and take on responsibilities similar to those of a school principal. Finally, Chisholm recommended that "as much latitude as possible be afforded the new school" and effectively handed his comments to the members of the School Board.⁷¹

The preliminary word from the school board was favorable, and promotion for the school continued throughout Arlington. Yet resistance loomed large. The initial conservative response was to oppose the idea of a new school. If passed, it would spell victory for the opposition, and perhaps a new program would threaten the existing high school structure. However, conservatives began to see the establishment of a new school as a convenient way to rid the traditional schools of the trouble-makers, or "longhairs as they were often called," and leave the mainstream schools to be full of more mainstream students.⁷² If the trouble makers did attend the new school as

⁶⁹Robert Chisholm; Memorandum to the Members of the School Board, Arlington, Virginia, April 23, 1971.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Steve Kurcis, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia, 8 March 1996.

expected, the traditional schools would have time to regain control over the student population. The new school was an attractive alternative after all.

While the proposal was gaining support in the conservative camp, tensions arose between the members of the Citizens' Committee for the New School. There was dissent as to how far the group was going to go in implementing an alternative system. "How extreme of an alternative was there going to be?"⁷³ The 'radicals' wanted extreme experimentation, as opposed to the 'conservatives' who simply wanted an option to the existing structure. The group successfully masked its division and continued to unanimously support the proposal, but its consensus was lost and the committee would eventually split.

On May 3, 1971, the Citizens' Committee sent another revised proposal to the School Board. Three days later, May 6, they followed it up with an oral presentation. Ten members of the Citizen's Committee, including four students, three parents, and three teachers, spoke before the School Board of the need to establish a program of alternative education in Arlington. The Board accepted the "concept of a small new experimental high school and requested the Superintendent to present recommendations concerning the establishment of this school at its next meeting."⁷⁴

Four days later, on May 10, the Superintendent drafted a 12-point memorandum to the School Board recommending the New School be considered. There were several stipulations to the Citizens' Committee's proposal: New School had to meet requirements of the State Board, the School Board, and the regional accrediting association with regard to curriculum and graduation. These requirements limited the experimental nature of the

⁷³Anderson interview, page 18.

⁷⁴Robert Chisholm; Memorandum to the Members of the School Board, May 10, 1971.

proposed program, but they were embraced by the conservatives and certainly accepted by the advocates of the New School.

Once the right wing was satisfied and the school managers agreed on finance, the School Board was able to return to its liberal inclinations, and it accepted the proposal. On May 21, 1971, Associate Superintendent Harold Wilson drafted the News Release. The Arlington County School Board approved the proposal for a non-traditional "experimental" school by a 5-0 vote. It would open in September of the following academic year. Wilson announced:

The excellent school system that Arlington has enjoyed for two decades was not achieved by resting on past accomplishments. The future of the Arlington County Public Schools must rest on continuing efforts to keep in touch with the changing needs and goals of society, and to relate classroom experience to the life the student will lead after graduation.

Recently, strong public support has emerged for the theory that the traditionally structured classroom approach, while satisfactory for many students, is not necessarily the only approach to obtaining a basic education. Partially in response to many requests for alternative learning approaches, Arlington will offer in 1971-72: THE NEW SCHOOL, A CHOICE.⁷⁵

At last the months of community meetings, lobbying, and propaganda were over. The New School was going to become a reality. Woodlawn, as it would be named, was to begin in the fall of the coming school year.

In just two months time the board accepted the proposal for the New School. The years of Youth Council meetings and experiments in education laid the groundwork for the proposal of the New School when its time came. The citizens of Arlington County, Virginia, mobilized themselves at the local level and reformed their system of education. Woodlawn was the result of their combined grassroots efforts and the national trend toward change.

In the Spring of 1971, the school board passed the proposal that established Woodlawn, and the courts approved the desegregation plan that established Drew Model School. Designed to meet the needs of the students,

⁷⁵Harold Wilson, Associate Superintendent of Public Schools. News Release, Arlington, Virginia, May 21, 1971.

each was a laboratory to test new educational methods, strategies, and curricula. For the first time ever, Arlington offered alternatives to its traditional system of education. In an era where change was the tradition a new one began.

Preparation for Woodlawn began immediately. Flyers advertising the program circulated in the county high schools, and Superintendent Chisholm searched for a head teacher to run the project. Ray Anderson was an obvious choice, and by the first of June he was hired for the job. He had been involved with the project from the very beginning and was a prominent figure in seeing his initial proposal through. His experience teaching history and government at Wakefield, and his participation in EFFE projects made him a viable candidate as well.

Administratively, Anderson's role as head teacher was not unlike that of a school principal, yet the title did moderate "the fear that many had of an ordinary principal at the school."⁷⁶ The head teacher was the one person to whom people both in and out of Woodlawn turned for administrative matters. Past experience with double entry book keeping and mutual funds helped Anderson maintain the financial accounts and budget reports that he would be responsible for once Woodlawn began. It was also his duty to take care of the day-to-day logistical problems and report to the Arlington School Board Administration.

In each of Arlington's high schools, all rising eleventh and twelfth graders in Arlington received a leaflet on the program from their guidance counselor. When a student and his/her parents decided to apply for admission to the new school, they filled out a parental permission form and teacher discussion form, and the student's name was entered into a lottery. The

⁷⁶Jeff Kallen, Chairman, Citizens' Committee; Memorandum recommending the New School to the Arlington County School Board, May 3, 1971; page 3.

parental permission form acknowledged that the parents had been fully informed about the new school, that they understood its highly experimental nature, and that they allowed the student (if selected) to attend the school starting the following academic year. The teacher discussion form indicated that the student had discussed his/her interest in and understanding of the new school with three teachers and a guidance counselor, all of whom signed the form indicating that the discussions had taken place. The attention given the application process was not an administrative initiative to protect itself should a student perform badly at the new school. Rather, it was implemented to ensure a student population that sought educational options. Students were not sent to Woodlawn, they wanted to go there. When both forms were complete and returned to the guidance counselor, the information was forwarded to Anderson in anticipation of the Superintendent's stipulated lottery.

In theory the lottery would assure an equal proportion of students from each of the three high schools. Fifty students were to come from Wakefield, fifty from Washington-Lee, and fifty from Yorktown. An additional thirty spaces were left open specifically for minority students to ensure a student body that would be representative of the community at large. However, in practice, the lottery system was not implemented. By June 7, 1971, 191 applications were received for the 180 student spaces, and all applicants were allowed to participate in the program, without regard to home school affiliation or minority status.⁷⁷

Students at Woodlawn would retain affiliation with their home schools. Officially they were Wakefield, Washington-Lee, and Yorktown students participating in the Woodlawn Program. The alternative was smaller than its

⁷⁷Fewer than five minority applications were received. Though this was not an issue in 1971, it would be addressed by the community and the school board in the late eighties.

traditional counterparts, and students would return to the home schools for drivers education, chemistry, band and other extra-curricular activities. Woodlawn was not an accredited high school in Virginia, and so class rank and an official diploma were also processed at the traditional schools. Though no rivalry existed between Woodlawn and the traditional high schools, an "us" and "them" mentality was apparent from the very beginning of the 1971-1972 school year.

With the student body selected, Ray Anderson wasted no time in planning the organization of Woodlawn. A master filing card system to facilitate communication with the students was prepared, and a plan of operation for the summer months was developed.⁷⁸ The urgency was the result of circumstance. Ray Anderson was to leave the country with his wife Sarah on June 21 - August 4, for a trip to the Soviet Union. They had been planning the trip for two years, and the travel and room accommodations had been paid before Anderson was selected as the new school's head teacher. Therefore, to keep his job and still make the trip he had to work quickly.

Associate Superintendent Harold Wilson afforded Anderson flexibility. The new school was developed in informal connection with the county administration and the school board. Harold Wilson was one administrator who could have stopped the proposal if he had wanted to. Yet he did not oppose it. To the contrary, Harold Wilson was a long-time, behind-the-scenes supporter of the alternative program. He had discussed the possibility of setting up various types of schools in the community with Jeff Kallen before the proposal for the new school existed. Once it was written, his was a powerful voice in support of the program. No doubt his influence helped speed the school

⁷⁸Ray Anderson. Letter to Associate Superintendent Wilson, Arlington, Virginia, June 11, 1971, page 2.

board's acceptance of the new school, and Wilson would continue to support Woodlawn and its head teacher throughout his career.

Wilson and Anderson worked closely with one another over the proposal for the new school, and the administrator "trusted the head teacher implicitly."⁷⁹ Anderson said that he would make all of the necessary preparations for Woodlawn before he left for the summer, and he did. By June 14, he hired the seven other teachers who came to Woodlawn the first year: Paula Banta, Amos Houghton, Ellen Kurcis, David Lloyd, David McIntyre, Doris Pulliam, and Adelaide Rusch. "All had teaching experience in the county, all were excited to be involved in something new," and all of the teachers were chosen because they wanted to be there.⁸⁰

That the head teacher alone selected the teachers suggests not only his relative control over the program, but also a staff with educational views similar to his own. This is not to say that the teachers were mere puppets of Anderson. Rather, the staff as a group shared the belief that they could create a better program of education than currently existed in Arlington.

Teachers at Woodlawn were willing to view their students as partners in education. To that end, they accepted the First-Name Policy which stipulated that students call the teachers by their first names. The staff also supported Town Meeting where everyone - students and teachers alike - had one equal vote in the decision making of the school. Beyond these symbolic gestures, teachers had high hopes for creating a curriculum with their students once school began.

Of course some sort of planning was required of the teachers before September. Over the summer a file of potential internship positions for

⁷⁹Harold Wilson, interview by Christy Mach, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2 April 1996.

⁸⁰Ellen Kurcis, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia, 23 February 1996.

students was prepared and the staff discussed the possibilities for the program. Teachers "came for the opportunity to create new educational programs without the usual restrictions of the traditional high school."⁸¹ Most had participated in the county's EFFE projects, and they drew on those past experiences when outlining Woodlawn's curriculum. Doris Pulliam, an English teacher who had worked with Anderson at Wakefield, suggested that the elective program created at Wakefield be used at Woodlawn. David Lloyd advocated innovative ways of studying physics and math, and David McIntyre had his own ideas about the foreign languages courses. Naturally each teacher had his/her own idea about how to creatively run his/her own classroom. None, however, were limited by their own ideas, and all of the teachers waited to establish the course offerings until September when the students arrived.

Naturally, students like Jeff Kallen remained involved after the proposal was accepted. However, there was a temporary lull in activity. Six days before the proposal for the new school was accepted, on the night of May 15, 1971, Jeff Kallen and Ellen Shuman, both of whom would attend Woodlawn, were on the Mall when they struck down by a hit and run driver between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. The accident was tragic, and "the two were lucky to survive."⁸² Some speculate that the incident gave an impetus to the school board to accept the new school proposal, stating that "it probably would have taken them longer if it hadn't been for the accident."⁸³ What is certain is that the most visible figure in the movement for the experimental high school lost his political momentum. Students lost their recognized leader. The Citizens' Committee for the New School finally

⁸¹Ray Anderson and Jeff Kallen. *The Woodlawn Program: Report on the First Year of Operation*, Arlington, Virginia, August 17, 1972, page 5.

⁸²Ann Broder, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia, 9 March 1996.

⁸³Ibid.

split when Anderson, who was a member of the conservative majority of the group, became Woodlawn's head teacher. He then left the country, and with Kallen in recovery further planning for Woodlawn was temporarily shelved.

In August preparations resumed. Ray Anderson returned to Arlington, Jeff Kallen recovered from his accident, and the energy and enthusiasm that was manifested in the movement for the new school proposal returned as well. School was about to begin. No one knew what to expect, and no one knew if the Program would be successful, they all wanted Woodlawn to work. The first step was to send a 'greetings' letter and Woodlawn Program Handbook to all incoming students. Then, an initiative was launched to involve everyone in organizing the physical aspect of the school building. Some of the teachers, with contributions from students, painted their classrooms, and others helped Anderson "build partitions and pick up donated pianos and potential library materials."⁸⁴ A significant part of the Woodlawn population participated in the start-up activities, and this set the stage for the sense of community that developed during the school year.

Twenty students were lost before school began. Some moved out of the county over the summer, and others decided to stay at their 'home' schools. One Wakefield High School student who dropped out of the program during the summer wrote a letter to Jeff Kallen explaining her decision:

Jeff -

I dropped the Woodlawn Project for various reasons. As I explained to Mr. Anderson - my parents unwillingly signed the form last spring hoping that I would change my mind during the summer. Since I didn't completely change my mind they recommended that I reconsider. So part of my withdrawal reasons was that I don't want my parents' disapproval hanging over my head all year.

My other reasons are that I don't want to give up Drama and Nat[ional] Honor So[ciety] at Wakefield. Also - I am unimpressed with the amount of organization at Woodlawn. One more reason is that college admissions officers were unimpressed with "any experimental high school!" Lastly - the people at Woodlawn are not the people I would seek out to associate with at Wakefield. I prefer the broader cross section at Wakefield.

⁸⁴Kallen interview, 26 February 1996, page 2.

The example indicates the different pressures that the alternative program faced. Parents were worried that their students would have difficulty getting into college if they attended an experimental school. To some the program did not seem to be well organized, and they may have doubted its success. Because of its small size, Woodlawn was not able to offer all of the classes and extra-curricular activities that the traditional schools had disappointing some students. Others felt they would be more comfortable in a mainstream social setting. Many students who may have opposed the rules at the traditional schools were not willing to leave the security that an established structure provided them. Perhaps the pressures against the school would be too great for it to succeed. The "100 student applications for admission that were received after the initial deadline in June,"⁸⁶ suggest otherwise. There was a demand for an alternative high school in Arlington.

⁸⁵Kelly - a Wakefield High School student. Letter to Jeff Kallen, Arlington, Virginia, September 1971.

⁸⁶Ray Anderson and Jeff Kallen. *The Woodlawn Program: Report on the First Year of Operation*, page 2.