

Understanding the School Environment

Most of us think of schools as places where the young go to learn how to work out their lives in a particular society. As such they are not thought of as settings for action and life, but as settings for preparation and training. However, for the students who inhabit them every day, schools are more than just training grounds. They are places where the business of life is actually being carried out, and the normal things students do there are probably done more in the name of immediate needs, expectations, and desires than in the name of unspecified future events. Of course, preparation and training do take place, but probably more as a result of what actually occurs than of what might be intended as long-range educational goals.

If one accepts this, he can best begin a study of schools and students by examining those students' daily activities. Since they, like all individuals, carry out their actions not in a vacuum but in relation to some definite situation, the logical place to begin is with an examination of the school environment. Of course, these adolescents also carry on activities in other places, and throughout the book references will be made to out-of-school activities, but this book concerns students and their high school and will, therefore, begin with the school.

The School District

Horatio Gates is the central high school of the Hillsborough-Cowpens¹ School District. Encompassing an area

¹The proper names of people and places have been altered to insure anonymity.

of 105 square miles, the district is located near a medium-sized metropolitan area, and its 14,000 inhabitants are regarded as an integral part of that area. Within the district are three distinct towns: Hillsborough, which has a population of 6000; Cowpens, with a population of 2500; and Winnsboro, with 800 inhabitants. Hillsborough is adjacent to the metropolitan area's industrial complex; in fact, a traffic sign is the only indication that one has even left the central city. Immediately past Hillsborough the two-lane country roads begin and one must travel a number of miles before reaching either Winnsboro to the east or Cowpens to the north. Cowpens is an attractive rural town with its own churches, lodge halls, and coffee shops, while Winnsboro consists only of a cluster of houses around a few streets off a secondary road. A former canal port, Winnsboro has probably changed very little in the past one hundred years.

Generally the inhabitants of all the towns are employed in the factories, offices, and businesses of the metropolitan areas. Some are professionals, some semi-professionals or skilled craftsmen, many are laborers, a few are self-employed, and a number still run the family farm, though most of these work a night shift in one of the factories. Both Hillsborough and Cowpens were once regarded as "railroad" towns, but railroading has declined and today provides only a small percentage of the available employment.

As a legal entity the school district was formed in 1963 when the schools of Hillsborough and Cowpens consolidated. Winnsboro, which formerly had its own elementary school, was already sending its high school students to Hillsborough. Presently the district has five elementary schools, grades K-5 with a total of 3000 pupils; one middle school, grades 6-9 with a total of 1800 pupils; and one consolidated high school, grades 10-12 with an enrollment of 1100. Following the practice of other districts which were encouraged by the state to consolidate, the elementary schools remained in the same neighborhood and served the same families, while the middle school and the high school were planned and constructed in centralized

areas with students bussed to them from the entire district.

The budget for the district is \$7,257,000, which means that approximately \$1230 is spent per year per child, an expenditure which compares favorably with similar districts throughout the state. Of this amount, 50 percent is collected in property taxes while the remainder comes from state support. The district is administered by a superintendent, business manager, personnel manager, assistant superintendent for curriculum, and a director of secondary education, all of whom share a central office complex in Hillsborough. Governing the operation of the entire school district are the eleven members of the popularly elected Board of Education.

The School

Horatio Gates Senior High School is located on a large tract of land between Hillsborough and Cowpens. It is a modern, well-equipped building completed in 1965 at a cost of \$4,500,000. In front of the school is a large well-kept lawn; to the south, the teachers' parking lot; to the north, the students' parking lot; to the rear, the athletic area dominated by the bleachers on either side of the football field. The area immediately surrounding the property is taken up by farm land, some of which is presently being transformed into building lots.

Figure 1 shows a floor plan of the school which is a single story structure planned to house various interest areas and academic disciplines in different wings. Administrative and guidance offices are in the A wing, English and social studies in the B wing, industrial arts in the C wing, sciences in the D wing, and physical education in the F wing. At the center is the library which includes a main reading room which is 30 × 85 feet and carpeted, one conference and three listening rooms, an office, special workroom, 10,000 volumes, and a collection of periodicals. In addition to the walls of bookcases, the furnishings include a check-out counter, card catalog file, a number of tables and chairs, and two metal bookracks containing a small paperback collection.

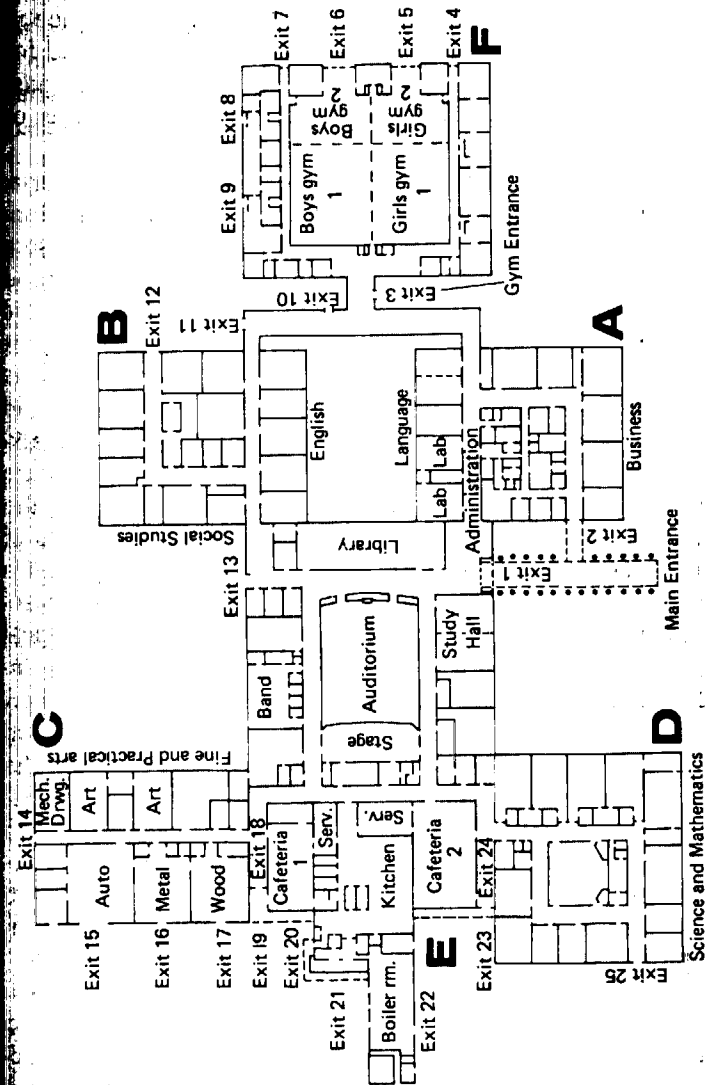


Figure 1

The auditorium, also at the center of the complex, deserves note. With its padded seats, expensive looking curtains, high ceiling and colored lights, it is the only place in the school that indicates extra expenditure. It is used for assemblies, plays, picture taking, other special occasions, or when a class or group wishes to practice dramatics or singing.

The rest of the school, except for the offices, cafeteria, gymnasium, and industrial arts area, is divided into rectangular classrooms. These are all arranged on the principle that the teacher is the one who has the knowledge and skills and, therefore, has the front desk; and students, the seekers after these same sets of knowledge and skills, sit in five or six rows of metal and plastic desks facing the teacher and waiting to be instructed. Across the front and along one side of these classrooms are the green chalkboards and/or bulletin boards, and at the opposite side are a row of windows. In the back are the closets for the teacher's personal things and a simply designed series of book cases or shelves used to store old magazines or extra books. On the walls and bulletin boards, in addition to announcements, the school calendar advertising the local bank, and the ever-present clock, may be found a few instructional aid posters, one showing a famous author, another a historical event, or in the science lab, an atomic weight chart. Otherwise the cinderblock walls show only their green or beige paint. The tile paved halls, which take up roughly one-fifth of the plant's total cubic feet, are clean, broad, well-lighted and completely unobstructed. The lockers which line them are recessed into the walls, and even the drinking fountains are placed in niches to avoid breaking the long, clean even lines.

There are a number of other areas in the school which deserve mention. First is the athletic area which takes up an entire wing of the building and in addition to its handsome and well-equipped gymnasium includes locker and shower areas, an exercise room, staff offices, and a large storage area. In another wing are the shops, one for auto mechanics, one for woodworking, and a third used for both ceramics and printing. In addition to the workshops,

there are classrooms where the industrial arts teachers may take the students for study and book work to support their more practical experiences. The school's other important feature is the large group instruction room. It is theatre-shaped, complete with a small stage and projection booth, and designed to hold about one hundred students. All of the school's separate areas reflect the same air of functional, well-maintained, unpretentious severity, and there is little danger of mistaking the building for anything but the modern American high school built to serve good, sensible education to many people at a moderate cost.

The Organization of the School

In order to understand a social institution, one must consider the assumptions upon which it is based, and in the case of a school this will involve a brief consideration of the goals of education. Many attempts have been made to isolate these goals, but those presented by the National Education Association seem to encompass most of them. That organization's Educational Policies Committee suggested that the basic goals of education are: (1) self-realization, (2) human relationship, (3) economic efficiency, and (4) civic responsibility.² These are obviously interrelated; that is, one achieves self-realization by developing satisfying human relationships, contributing economically to his own and society's welfare, and becoming a responsible member of the nation. The school's justification for existence is that it can continually identify and articulate a specific body of knowledge, skills, and behavioral patterns, and as students learn these in the prescribed manner, so they will become able to fulfill the stated goals.

There may be a number of ways to transmit knowledge, but generally public schools are organized vertically. That is, it is assumed that those staff members who possess the needed knowledge, skills, and behavioral patterns are the

² National Education Association, Educational Policies Commission, *Policies for Education in American Democracy*, 1946, pp. 185-253, quoted in Chris A. Deyoung, *Introduction to American Public Education*, 3d ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1955), p. 411.

superordinates; the students, seekers after these items, are the subordinates. The learning takes place as the knowledge, skills, and behavioral patterns are transmitted vertically from above to below, teacher to student. The implied assumption, of course, is that the passing on is best done by the teacher as he actually directs or tells the students what to do and what to know. As the students listen and do, so they presumably learn; the correlation between listening and doing on one hand and learning on the other is assumed to be practically perfect.

At Horatio Gates, as in most other secondary schools, this vertical organization takes the following form. At the top is the principal who is responsible for the entire building and all the activities therein. He is answerable to the superintendent of schools, but visits by the superintendent are few and most school business is carried on inside the building. The principal is directly assisted by a vice-principal who is primarily concerned with student affairs. This vice-principal handles discipline, students' personal problems, and student functions, such as dances, school sponsored events, and other extracurricular activities. In addition, he assumes some responsibility for supervising teachers.

The teaching staff of the school is divided among a series of subject matter departments, that is, English, social studies, language, mathematics, shop, physical education, and so forth. Each speciality has a number of assigned teachers ranging from one in speech to fourteen in social studies. Nine of these departments are large enough to warrant the appointment of a teaching-chairman who is generally responsible for assisting the principal in hiring, assigning, and supervising teachers, coordinating the testing program, and maintaining continuity between the various levels of instruction in his area. Because of their additional responsibility, teaching-chairmen are given a slightly reduced teaching load and slightly more money. Beyond that, teachers are regarded as equal and each is assigned to teach a specific number of students during prearranged periods each day.

Equal to the teachers in the organization are the pro-

fessionals who work in pupil personnel services. These include one full-time vocational counselor who assists students in their college and job placements, four full-time guidance counselors, and a number of staff members who share their time with the other district schools. These include nurses, school psychologists, and a social worker.

Additional school personnel should be mentioned because it will give one an appreciation of the complexity of the organization. To maintain the building and support the organization, there are a total of seventeen full- and part-time people on the janitorial staff, nineteen on the cafeteria staff, and six clerical workers. Thus, in addition to those engaged directly or indirectly in the transmission of subject matter, there are an additional forty-two school employees. And, of course, a number of people assist while seldom setting foot in the building; such as, the bus drivers and mechanics, and the central office staff.

Directly subordinate to the administrative and professional staff are the students, 1100 tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders, all engaged in taking a series of courses leading to high school graduation. These students are undifferentiated within the formal organization. There are class designations, sophomore, junior, and senior, but the highest level senior for instance, the valedictorian of the class, is still subject to any teacher and any administrator and officially has only the rights or privileges given to a first year student. Thus, during the three years they are progressing toward graduation, all are regarded by the formal organization as being equally at the bottom of the vertically arranged hierarchy and virtually without the content knowledge of the curriculum which is deemed necessary to achieve the stated educational goals.

The Curriculum

The physical plant and the organization provide the setting within which the school program or curriculum is carried out. As in most public secondary schools, the curriculum at Horatio Gates is divided into subject areas and these are further fragmented into courses. Every student then

is required to complete a specified number of courses within predetermined areas for each of his years in the institution.

Of course, diversity among students is recognized and the program provides for variety. Students select courses among three loosely defined study sequences. Those who will presumably go on to college choose the "general college" or "academic" sequence, those who wish to train as secretaries, bookkeepers, or clerks choose the "business" sequence, and those who upon graduation hope to enter the factories, crafts, or trades may choose "industrial arts." Thus, within the curriculum, students are expected to select courses which fit into some pattern and which are presumed reasonable given his future plans.

It is important to note that while students are sometimes grouped according to their sequence, because of the courses which all are required to take and of the elective system whereby a student may fill out his program by taking courses outside his sequence, there is a great deal of crossing over and mixing of students throughout the day. Students from all sequences are together in the English and social studies classes, and many students in the college sequence choose industrial arts or home economics for their electives. Therefore, students are not strictly designated as being academic or vocational, advanced or remedial, fast or slow.

All students earn five or six of the state-required eighteen units in their ninth year at the middle school. During their three years at Horatio Gates they must complete the remaining units of credit to earn a diploma. As the separate courses are combined into sequences, it is assumed that the student will internalize and assimilate these subjects into an integrated whole and will become capable of fulfilling the personal and social goals of education.

In order to determine whether a student has successfully completed the course requirements, the teachers depend on a system of numerical grades which represent student achievement in each class. The grade is a composite mark, two-thirds of which is based upon classwork and

one-third upon tests. The classwork includes homework, consisting of written assignments and preparation for oral participation and actual class participation; the tests include weekly or monthly quizzes and final exams. The lowest passing grade is sixty-five percent and report cards are graded and distributed to students six times a year.

While this standard program is generally accepted, there is some effort at Horatio Gates to alter it. The most recent innovation is the humanities program. A product of the English and social studies departments, it was designed to encourage seniors to pursue independent study with a minimum of teacher direction. The program is offered for twelve periods a week and students may substitute it for English, social studies, and one elective. Open to all seniors, the program has four teachers, one each for English, social studies, music, and speech. Three days a week, the entire class of 112 meet in the large group instruction room and then, depending on the planned activity, either stay together or break into smaller interest groups with a teacher being assigned to each group.

As the school program is fragmented into a series of courses and separate activities, so the school day is fragmented into a set number of periods. There are seven of these, each lasting forty minutes. In addition there is a brief homeroom period in the morning and another following lunch, during which teachers take attendance and make announcements. Between each period there is a five minute interval for the students to get to their next area, so every forty minutes the entire population of the school picks up and moves somewhere else to begin a different activity. No one finds this odd. Since the school is divided into rectangular rooms and the curriculum into clearly delineated fragments, it is only logical that the day should be similarly divided to create an integrated whole. In sum, the building, the organizational structure, and the day are all carefully structured to facilitate the process of the teacher passing on his particular speciality to batches of students.

The extensive activity-athletic program is also regarded as an integral part of the school's curriculum. Included

among these activities are: Student Council, Honor Society, Yearbook, Drama Club, Chess Club, Future Teachers, Business Club, Ski Club, Library Club, Bowling Club, and a large number of musical groups: large band, small band, marching band, drum and bugle corp, boys' chorus, senior chorus, girls' chorus, glee club, and so on. These organizations are active to varying degrees. Some seem to exist only in name, while others, the yearbook for instance, demand a great deal of time and commitment from those involved. And, of course, there is the very important athletic program. The school competes extramurally in football, soccer, basketball, wrestling, and baseball on the varsity, junior varsity, and freshman level. It also fields competing teams in gymnastics and lacrosse; has an extensive program for girls in the areas of field hockey, volleyball, gymnastics, and basketball; and in addition has a large on-going intramural sports program. In competition with a number of other suburban schools in the county, Horatio Gates usually does well in wrestling and lacrosse, poorly in basketball, track, and football. Recently, however, the new coach has been able to develop a better football team and the prospects for the county championship are improving.

The Organization and Its Subsystems

A complex organization like Horatio Gates High has within it a number of separate subsystems, two of which, production and maintenance, will be discussed here. The distinctions between the two will be helpful in later chapters when the different behavioral patterns carried on by students are explained.

We may think of an organizational subsystem as simply an integrated pattern of organization behaviors. For instance, under the heading of "production subsystem" we might include everything that is directly designed to assist in the transmission of knowledge, skills, and behavioral patterns; the specialized teaching tasks of the instructors, the set timed periods, the division of the curriculum into specialized areas, the further division of areas into courses,

the testing and evaluating that constantly take place, and, of course, the actual learning. Combined and integrated these patterns of activity constitute the school's productive subsystem.

Secondary to the production subsystem is the "maintenance subsystem" which is primarily designed to support and reinforce various productive activities. This subsystem is generally administered by the vice-principal and includes the bodies of rules and regulations concerning attendance, tardiness, driving, smoking, the pass system, cafeteria, bus, and study hall conduct, use of lockers and telephones, and the care of school property. These are listed in the student handbook where there are eighteen pages devoted to do's and don't's, the majority of which admonish students to be in attendance, be on time, be orderly, obey the administrators, teachers, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, keep themselves and their school neat, and not to violate the rules of the pass system.

The single most important element of this maintenance activity is the pass system which is based on the premise that a student should be supervised at all times during the day. When he is in the classroom or cafeteria he is obviously under proper supervision, but if he leaves the room at any other than the five minute class changing times, he is supposed to have a pass stating where he is going, at what time he left, and signed by the teacher. Distributing, checking, and collecting passes takes an enormous amount of time and effort by both teachers and administrators.

While the production and maintenance subsystems are conceptually easy to identify, the former concerned with the transmission of knowledge and skills and the latter with the preservation and smooth running of the organization, in an actual situation they may be difficult to separate. For instance, the vice-principal lecturing on promptness is exercising a maintenance function in support of the school's production process. He is also teaching socially desirable behavioral patterns and is, therefore, engaged in productive activities.

Administrators and Teachers

In addition to the physical plant and organization, there are other important elements in the school. First among these is the manner in which the administrators and teachers perform their daily tasks. The principal's job is extremely complex, far more so than his previous position as football coach. Mr. Vincent is not only in charge of Horatio Gates, but is directly responsible for the ninth grade of the middle school in Cowpens. He spends at least one day a week in that school and once remarked that his problems there were equal to his problems at Horatio Gates. Because he is responsible for these schools means some of his time is spent with the superintendent and central office staff, so he is frequently absent from the school. Mr. Vincent is a practical administrator who seemed to genuinely like adolescents. Once I told him that the school seemed to be relatively trouble-free. "You don't seem to have any discipline problems."

"Oh, yeah, we have problems like skipping classes and smoking. They're discipline problems."

"But, you don't see any kids giving teachers a hard time like in many schools."

"Oh, that. Well, one thing we won't tolerate in this place is lip. We've worked hard on that for three or four years and now it's pretty good. All in all they're pretty good kids. But like smoking, one day soon we'll crack down on that. We know that there is a lot of smoking in the john. I and the vice-principal have both talked to thirty or forty of those who smoke and they know that soon we'll be suspending them. We suspend them for a while, just seven or eight, and the word filters down."

"How long do you suspend them for?"

"Oh, just till their parents come in. You'd be surprised how soon their parents come when their boy has been thrown out of school. As soon as they do, we talk and the kid comes back. Also, a lot of these parents don't know their kids smoke and are really glad we notified them."

Except for particular occasions such as suspension, Mr. Vincent actually had limited contact with students. When

they were in the office, it was the vice-principal or the guidance counselors they came to see. When they were in classes, they were with teachers. From the contact he had with them, however, he seemed to have little trouble accepting their behavior and, in turn, the few remarks made by students indicated they were favorably disposed toward him. However, he frequently expressed concern that many merely come to school and "hang around with each other," admitted that school never touched many of them, "Especially the nonacademic kids," and worried about how much they actually learned in school.

Also, he strongly believed that the school had to adjust the structure to allow for the increased demand for student freedom. At this time (his third year in the office) he was working hard to change from the strict authoritarian role he had previously taken to one which was more relaxed and open. An important innovation which he encouraged was the senior lounge, a classroom set aside for seniors who wished to go there at noon or from study hall. The room was furnished with couches, soft chairs, card tables, a coke machine, and, after the middle of the year, a ping-pong table and television set were added. He believed in giving students more personal responsibility and hoped that the lounge and a more relaxed atmosphere would encourage them to be more positive about school.

Administrative actions aimed at increasing the students' interest in school may or may not have been successful with students, but they definitely compounded Mr. Vincent's problems with teachers. While careful to select a few teachers for praise, he frequently complained about the general lack of interest they showed in students. "They all want to be subject matter specialists, they're not concerned about whether the kids are getting the lecture, it's just the lecture that counts." And he cited, "inability to relate to the kids," as the reason for firing a teacher the previous year. "She knew her field, but that's not enough."

Other times he would speak of the teachers' unwillingness to involve themselves with students or to give them the personal consideration and attention he thought was necessary. Citing instances of teachers who would walk by

trouble in the halls only to complain about the lack of discipline in the school, he said, "Then they complain to me, but they don't want to do anything. They're always complaining about all the freedom the kids have. They want freedom, but just you give some to the kids and watch those teachers bitch. They're not ready for giving the kids any freedom at all." He was also bitter toward a number of teachers, among them the teacher association representatives, who constantly sent students to the office for petty infractions that, according to him, should have been handled in the classroom. He particularly resented what he considered the teachers' inability or unwillingness to deal effectively with nonacademic students. "That's what I worry about—the nonacademic kids . . . How do we get to them? The teachers don't even want to try."

Hoping that things would improve if he included teachers in the school's decision making process, he set up a teachers' advisory council to deal with everything that went on in the school. But his attempt to involve them, apparently at their own request, was also frustrating. "Now that they're involved, they're finding out that it's a lot of work. They don't want the trouble of making decisions, they want someone to do it for 'em. I have been having trouble getting them to work on their committees. Like the library committee."

"What do the committees do?" I asked.

"Oh, it's part of the democratic process," he smiled. "Teachers get a big voice in running the school."

But his enthusiasm for the change was low. When he finished talking about the teachers' unwillingness to take responsibility, he seemed to relish the possibility of taking the burden back on himself. "Pretty soon, I'm going to do it for them."

These changes did not come easily for Mr. Vincent. He admitted that he was having trouble giving teachers more responsibility and freedom. "This is hard for me. I've been an administrator for eight years. Now I've got to change and get more democratic. Maybe I'm too far behind."

And his comments frequently reflected his concern over the school's public relations. He purposively encouraged

activities that would "bring the kids together," and hoped that the people would more strongly support what the school was trying to do. This was certainly an important administrative issue in a district that served three distinct villages.

The vice-principal, Mr. Rossi, was very proud of his success as a former classroom music teacher in that district. He was reputed to have started the whole series of successful musical groups in the high school that had earned the school a county-wide reputation. He now has two roles: first, dealing directly with students, and secondly, supervising teachers. He shared the principal's views of teachers.

They got a new toy now, collective negotiations, that's their new toy. When that thing first came out I was teaching music and they came to me and told me I would have to stop all the extra activities I had going. You know why? Because I wasn't getting paid for it. I told them, "Bullshit." Now they want and get five periods, planning time, meetings, everything, but they don't pay any attention to the kids.

Citing an instance in the Cowpens school where teachers asked their administrators to stay out of their teachers' room, Mr. Rossi said, "Oh, you wait till they do that to me. You know what I do since that happened? I go in there every period. Just let one of them say to me that I should stay out. I'll lock the place; I'll give 'em the broom closet for their teachers' room." Rossi's animosity toward the teachers' organization was reputed to be a source of trouble among the staff. The district personnel manager reported that on one occasion, "Rossi was arguing with the head of that organization and he mentioned the teachers' contract. 'Contract? Contract? What contract?' said Rossi, holding the document up. 'You mean this piece of shit?' And he threw it in the basket."

Rossi frequently accused a number of teachers of being overly interested in their subject and of regarding students as "pleasant dummies." "We got one guy, you know what he told me when I asked him to do something one

day? He said, 'I'm here to be a *scholar in residence*, not to supervise the cafeteria.' Honest to God. That's what he said, 'A scholar in residence!'

He accused them of being too intellectual, too aloof, poor disciplinarians, and unwilling to take responsibility for students outside the class. Rossi knew that teachers wanted him to be tougher on the students. "Four-fifths of the teachers hate me because I'm too tough on them and too lenient on the kids. But the kids are in school to learn, not to be thrown out. You don't have a problem until you try to solve it. Any dummy can throw kids out, but I try to solve their problem." While Vincent shared Rossi's view of many teachers, the animosity between Rossi and the teachers did not make running the school easy. Of Rossi, Mr. Vincent remarked, "That bird's real good with the kids, but I wish he'd stop aggravating the teachers."

Rossi saw himself as the students' advocate. He was proud of his efforts toward bringing about the senior lounge and did not allow the additional conflict between him and the teachers, who said the students spent too much time there, to force its closing. When at student meetings he exhorted students to keep the lounge clean, his reason was not that the lounge was really dirty. Privately he admitted, "It's not really that bad, but the teachers are always after me. They blame the lounge for the kids being in the halls."

When a dance was being planned, Mr. Rossi would be sure that a good band was hired at a reasonable cost. When the bonfire rally was being planned, he borrowed a payload from a local contractor. When a group of students wanted to go somewhere, he made the arrangements. When it was time to buy class rings, he obtained reasonable rates. He regarded himself as a fair person primarily interested in the students and saw no conflict between these actions and his disciplinarian role. He seemed to be well-liked by students. When, as frequently happened, he went into a class or the lounge to get some one who, although in the building, had been absent from the previous class, the malfactor always went with "the man." Indeed, there was little reason not to. A talking to, an

implied threat of suspension, and an appeal to one's sense of justice were the outcome. Occasionally a student would be placed on detention for two or three days, but only once in six months did an actual suspension come about. Never was there any physical violence.

While acting as their advocate, Rossi also took pains to shield students from conflict with teachers or other administrators. A constant bother in the school was lavatory smoking, and the student council was working for a separate student smoking area. Mr. Rossi suggested they drop their demand, since the Board of Education would never approve it, and he would unofficially tell the staff to avoid checking two lavatories (one for the boys and one for the girls) where students could then smoke. While the council leaders refused and took the matter to the board, they agreed that Rossi's proposal was fair and was made in their interest.

While publicly Rossi frequently berated students for not being enthused about school, he privately admitted that they were "work minded." "High School's only two years long, after that it's a car, a girl, a job, that takes up their life."

In general, both administrators shared the concern over a lack of rapport between the teachers and the students, and accused the teachers' organization of adding to the division. Both men expressed strong opinions that most teachers were more interested in their "subject" rather than the students, that they were too "intellectual," and both expressed preference for those few teachers whom they described as "oriented to the kids." Neither man had any negative comments to make about the students.

The Teachers

Teachers are hired on the basis of their subject matter speciality and presumed ability to teach. Their primary duty is to pass on to students the knowledge, skills, and behavioral patterns considered important. The breakdown into departments, the progression from English I to English IV, or general science to physics, the day with its

seven time periods, and the program with its sequences, all support and reinforce the idea of subject matter speciality. Even the physical setting, which keeps the science teachers in one wing and the industrial arts teachers in another, and places one seat at the front for the teacher and twenty-five facing it for the students, all contribute to subject matter speciality and a vertically arranged organization.

The teachers' behavior in class is largely in keeping with their role as experts. They set up their class as dyadic interactions, they on one side and the students on the other. They then lecture, question, call on students to answer, pass out assignments, ask the students to read a passage or paragraph, and then criticize and discuss their responses. Point by point, line by line, page by page, they pass on those pieces of knowledge that they consider important to that particular speciality. In the structure there is little room for either speculation or reflection. If a student fails to answer within a few seconds, another student will be called on. If he gives an incorrect answer, the right one will be quickly pointed out by the teacher or someone designated by the teacher. Occasionally a "discussion" will take place, but these are more often cases of the teacher manipulating students' remarks and responses to illustrate his planned conclusion. For instance, an English teacher discussing a story by Hawthorne:

"Now class, what does the name Young Goodman Brown tell us? That he was young, right? Correct? Well, say something. Also that he was apparently good, right? Of course, didn't you read the story? How many read the story? Honestly!"

Or a social studies teacher doing an exercise from the psychology book. "Now then, how did you feel during the first exercise when you couldn't ask questions? Mr. N., did you feel . . . well, how did you feel?"

"Confused."

"Sure, confused, he felt confused. Did you also feel frustrated?"

The teacher seemed to want the boy to say frustrated and when he did not, the teacher said it for him.

Or another teacher trying to teach a point about motivation.

"You work, right? Sure you do. I know. I had a job when I was in school. Now, why do you work? So you can have money, right? Sure, if that blouse cost \$1.95, at least you can say that although you didn't pay much, at least you bought it with your own money, right? Sure. It gives you a sense of . . . I mean, buying your own clothes gives you a sense of . . . What's it give you a sense of? A sense of inde . . ."

A volunteer says, "pendence."

"Right! It gives you a sense of indePENDENCE, and that is one source of motivation. RIGHT?"

There were many classes in which discussions were carried out with some skill, but even there this technique of manipulating each student's response to fit into a prearranged pattern was used. The problem is that often responses that do not fit into the teacher's framework are ignored. In psychology class during a discussion of rewards and punishments, the teacher asked, "What do you do when you're babysitting and the kid won't drink his milk? Do you reward him or punish him?"

"Neither, I try to reason with him," replied a girl. The remark was passed over.

Students are, of course, aware of this and on occasion express their awareness. On a discussion of law enforcement a teacher asked, "Why don't you speed down Winnsboro Road?"

"Because I'll get caught," said the student.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it's the answer you want." That reply, too, was ignored.

Students' personal remarks, even when they fit into the general prearranged pattern, also are ignored. The teacher was trying to begin a discussion of a story by Willa Cather when Robert spoke up loudly: "Hey, I read the story."

"Please, Robert."

"But this is the first story I read in two years."

"Well, welcome to the club," replied the teacher and went on.

Exceptions do occur, especially in classes where the students are divided into work units and carry out some prearranged experiment or project in cooperation with one another. There the teacher carries on his instruction by walking around, interacting with the encouraging one group at a time. But these are classes such as physics or chemistry labs where the lab manuals and texts lay out the step by step process to be followed, and there too the methods are structured and the answers set. It is not enough just to say simply that there were good and bad classes, good and bad teachers. The fact was that the teaching in all classes, science, math, English, language, was remarkably similar. The teacher would take care of his basic maintenance activity: take attendance, close the door, accept late slips, take out his book, and call the page number; then he would structure the activity by acting out the part of questioner, encourager, teller, and explicator, doing, of course, most of what there was to do while the students watched, waited, and responded to his cues. This was the way classes were conducted day in and day out.

Subject matter speciality also enabled teachers to withhold their personal involvement from the class. For instance, when in a class debate on religion the teacher was asked to state his views, his response was that he did not think either side had a good command of the facts and recommended that they spend more time in the library. Or another teacher, when asked about his political views, referred the questioner to a particular American history teacher who "knows more about it." Of course, not allowing the structured material to get sidetracked by questions or responses of a more personal nature prevented the teacher from committing himself to classroom interactions. For instance, while they would encourage discussions of the Vietnam conflict, one seldom heard a teacher say whether he approved or disapproved of any particular aspect of the war.

There were exceptions, and it is only fair to cite them. One teacher in particular consistently made reference to his war record, his political experience, and his own boy-

hood. While to the author he seemed to be doing little actual instructing, the students liked him because he brought himself into the class. But, in general, the behavior of teachers was that of subject-matter-specialists, and student-teacher interactions in and out of class were made on a didactic, seldom on a personal basis. Even the teacher cited as an exception would eventually lead his personal stories to the texts.

Since they are also responsible for the general student behavior, teachers spend a great deal of time checking excuses and passes, asking students where they are going or why, telling them to sit up and pay attention, open their books, hand in their homework, or stop talking. This type of activity seems to take up a tremendous amount of the teacher's classroom time, frequently as much as ten or fifteen minutes out of a single period. This is probably the way the teachers interpreted the admonitions of both administrators to be more concerned with discipline and behavior and, of course, the administrators wanted teachers to take responsibility for them.

While, as indicated, most of the teachers avoided student contact in class unless it was subject matter oriented, they did seem to like the students and the students seemed to like and respect them. A very few even made a point of spending their free time with students rather than in the teachers' lounge or the faculty workroom. These could be seen with the same few each day and from all appearances, those interactions seemed friendly and personal. Most, however, maintained the distance between themselves and students both in and out of class. While in the halls, teachers had a way of looking as though they were going somewhere; that is, they walked with purpose and gave little attention to the students who were literally swarming around. Following lunch there would always be a large crowd of seniors in front of the lounge. When teachers passed on the way to their faculty room, they stayed against the wall and never initiated any contact with the students. Presumably some of these were the same ones who pressed to have the lounge closed, but they never voiced objections there. The seriousness of their

expressions indicated that they had no time to stop and talk. This probably reinforced their subject-matter-expert role and helped to maintain the distance between them and the students, which they probably felt was essential given the role they had to take in the classroom.

The teachers seemed to feel that the backgrounds of the students were generally poor. A number reported that the kids came from "working class homes" where there was no appreciation of learning. Mr. W. reported, "Many of the kids come from homes where both the mother and the father work, and maybe they work at the discount house until 12:00; then they deserve a couple of hours off so they head for the local gin mill, and they come home at 2:00; and in the morning, the kids get up early and go and the parents seldom get to see them."

Also, many seemed to think little of the intellectual ability of the students. They were quick to tell of the students' low reading scores, reputed to be an average of two years behind grade level: "And we don't have a reading teacher. Can you believe that?" Many cited the students' poor academic performance, preference for "jungle music," and firmly believed that the local community college was the limit of most students' ambition. Even in class a teacher, within earshot of students, would remark, "These aren't my best students, you know. Now, if you come in fifth period, you'll see better work." Some teachers openly wished for the more peaceful past when students were presumably more orderly. One remarked disparagingly, "We don't teach behavior, we should . . . but we don't anymore."

Frequently they would compare their district, rather unfavorably, to an adjoining district where seventy-five percent of the students attend college as opposed to forty percent in Hillsborough-Cowpens. One teacher recalled with disgust the football rally at which, "The whole student body stood up and cheered the captain of the football team for *five minutes!* And I know that *Kid!* He can't even *Read!* But that's the way this place is."

But there is a danger of over-generalizing about the teachers' attitude toward students. A former vice-principal

presently the personnel manager of the district, pointed out what most teachers thought of kids,

That they're stupid. Haven't you seen that? No, let me take that back. Some of them treat the kids that way, but then I notice less of it as the years go on. Today you would hear a teacher in a faculty meeting say something like, "Let's face it, these kids we have aren't that good. Let's prepare them for something they're capable of." And then you would hear another teacher say that that attitude was wrong. "That the kids are capable of just about anything."

When asked which view prevailed, he replied, "That's hard to say. I guess it depends on the conviction that the teacher has when he or she comes in. If they've got the attitude that the kids are essentially good and capable of learning, then they will probably be the teachers who fight the attitude of kids being essentially stupid!" Rossi and Vincent, however, did not see the split. They agreed, "Teachers think the kids are stupid," or "Teachers regard the kids as pleasant dummies."

The issue of the teachers' attitude toward students was further confused by tension within the teachers' ranks concerning teacher-administrator relations. On one hand, there were those teachers referred to as the "mafia," who side with the administrators, on the other hand, were those whose interests center on their organization, termed by Rossi the "airdales," presumably because they "sniff out" issues for contract disputes. The association teachers were unhappy about the cuts in the previous year's budget which had eliminated a number of positions. They also felt that the administrators were largely unsympathetic to their demands and stated that it was a difficult school in which to teach. The head of the humanities program, an association representative, reported:

But when we try to do something it doesn't go anywhere. Like the humanities program, they don't support it. The other day we went to the superintendent and he told us to spend money. But today we find out that the books we ordered for the musical have to be sent back.

Why? Because the purchase order wasn't signed by his office. So he's telling us one thing and telling the administrators something else.

There is \$2500 to be spent on curriculum this year. I put in two proposals, one in September and I never heard anything about it. And about a month ago someone says, "Why aren't the department chairmen doing anything in line of proposals?" So, I reapply and Vincent sends it back because he doesn't like it.

He added that the administrators "hated the humanities program because it upsets their schedule." It was said that this contributed to low morale among teachers, one of whom reported, "This school is in sad shape." All four teachers in the humanities program reported that the administration was hostile to their efforts. They were right. Both the principal and the vice-principal said that they thought it was "unstructured" and "ill-planned" and said that it "would change" in the future. Privately Vincent said he was looking outside the school for a teacher who could come in and set up a "real humanities program."

Other teachers frequently complained because they felt that the office was not backing their efforts and cited as proof instances in which they were not supported in their efforts to discipline students. Rossi's attitude toward this type of complaint was clear. "This one teacher, he brings in a kid to the office and says, 'He's late for class.' But when I looked into it I found that the kid had been late for the previous fourteen days in a row! Now I ask you, why didn't that teacher take care of the kid the first time?"

While this split between some teachers and administrators certainly existed and could have acted as a strong force somewhere in the organization, it should not be overplayed in this book about students. After all, the information about it was not gathered systematically or intentionally by participation, observation, or interviewing. It was picked up in unstructured conversations with staff members which, while undertaken to discuss the students, often wound up in discussions of other staff members. The primary insight may be that a number of staff members

were more willing to discuss the internal politics of the institution than they were to talk about students.

These controversies rarely showed up in the classrooms or corridors in front of students. In fact, only once or twice in humanities class was any reference made to the fact that the administrators were hostile toward the program, and if the students had any awareness of what the teacher was even talking about, they made no mention of it there or anywhere else. Those things just never seemed to be part of the students' consciousness.

Indeed, there is little reason that they should have been. As previously explained, the teachers consistently present themselves to the students as subject matter specialists; the English teacher spoke only of English, the coach of competition, the physics teacher of experiments, the French teacher of France and verbs, the vice-principal of the virtues of promptness and order. Teachers' personal problems, conflicts, and emotional issues of any sort were thus sublimated and never displayed for the students' scrutiny. In fact, the outward appearance and demeanor of the teachers could best be described as bland.

An issue which could have been responsible for both the rather conservative climate in the school and the divisions among teachers may have been the general perceptions held by the teachers of the community. Many teachers, although they were long-time residents of the district, openly said that the inhabitants did not really support the idea of education, that the students' working-class parents were at best high school graduates who did not really think their children should go much beyond that, and further that parents would not be willing to support anything remotely "innovative" in their school. No measure was taken of the community to see if these perceptions were based on fact, but they were certainly shared by staff members at all levels. Even the new superintendent who was Jewish expressed surprise that he had even been hired in Hillsborough-Cowpens, a school district he considered "tough" and "blue-collared." He, however, was most dismayed that the staff was not attempting to raise the stu-

dents' level of aspiration. He wanted the teachers to spend more time on intellectual issues, to get the students to read more, to score higher on competitive tests, and to move students toward applying to better colleges.

But efforts toward these ends were not common and were somewhat discouraged. One incident occurred the previous year in which a teacher, Mrs. J., who sponsored the publication of a student literary magazine, was asked to resign. While the magazine was not cited as the main reason, it certainly did not help her. According to the vice-principal she was too interested in the bright kids and inconsiderate of the average kids:

A little girl came to me. This kid is a Seventh Day Adventist. I had this kid in band and she came in one day. And she was smart, real smart, but she was uptight because of the religious thing. She had this paper from J.'s class. It was an essay; it was marked 70. Now, I'm no literary scholar, but I can read. The sentences were right, the paragraphs were right, the thing made sense, and the words were spelled okay, and she had a 70. So, I went to Mrs. J. and asked her about the grade. "It lacks depth," she says. Now, I'm no literary scholar, but the thing was okay and the paragraphs were okay, the sentences made sense, and the words were spelled all right. What the hell did she want?"

Upon observing Mrs. J., he found her talking over the heads of the kids, the "less sharp kids" as he referred to them, and he "Found her forcing her sophisticated views on the kids." As he explained in his evaluation which cited these things as poor teaching, this was exactly in line with the evaluation given her by the former principal, and as a result, she was asked to resign. A teacher whose position was eliminated the previous year, but who regained employment by moving into Mrs. J.'s slot reported, "She was here for only a year. She was weird, a real raving liberal, started a paper and encouraged the kids to say all sorts of good little things, encouraged complete freedom. She didn't use her head." She was the one of whom Vincent said, "She knew her material but couldn't relate to the kids."

In general, it may be said of the staff members at Horatio Gates, just as was said earlier of the students, that they developed reasonable ways of thinking and behaving in their situation. They, too, were bound by definite physical, organizational, and conceptual constraints which combined to structure their behavior in the classroom. For instance, the classroom with its physical setting and furniture arrangement practically demanded that the teacher take the front desk. And since groups of students come in regularly and with the expectation that they will be told certain things, there is little that the teacher can do but use that front desk as a base and tell the students whatever it is that he thinks they should know. It is assumed that the teacher considers the material important and will not allow either his own or the students' personal experiences or other extraneous material to disrupt the lesson as he planned it. Therefore, if in the process of classroom interaction, the student responses do not fit into the teacher's prearranged plan, then there is little that he can do but pass it over, turn it around so that it fits his scheme, or supply the proper response himself. There are few differences in the way teachers plan their classes and present the material. The only difference was in the degree of finesse with which the teacher appeared to elicit a certain level of interest, obtain the proper response, and discourage non-task-oriented behavior on the part of the students. Of course, some teachers did make jokes and respond to jokes made by students, but these asides were not part of the lesson and were seldom allowed to go on for more than a few seconds. Even in the humanities class where there was a stated goal to "get the kids to expand themselves in different directions," and even "let them structure their own experiences," by means of nondirected individual study, the reactions of both the principal and vice-principal showed that they thought this was a waste of time.

An additional constraint on the teachers was the details of the maintenance subsystem. The business of accounting for, disciplining, and keeping records on students in class took an enormous amount of the teachers' time and effort.

Outside class they were expected to assist in keeping the halls orderly, watching the cafeteria, checking the lavatories for smokers, checking for passes, and in general supervising students wherever they happened to be. This, not their teaching, appeared to be the main point of contention between them and the administrators who apparently felt that the responsibility for the conduct of the students was being left to them, while the majority of teachers were concerning themselves only with subject matter. It appeared that most teachers regarded supervision of students as an odious burden which interfered with their teaching.

It should be remembered that the administrators were also closely bound in their responsibilities. They were obligated to see that the schedule and the curriculum ran smoothly and that it did not become disrupted by "deviant" behavior. That is, behavior which did not fit into the overall plan. When Vincent and Rossi spoke of teachers who were "not interested in the kids," they were referring to those teachers who allowed and even encouraged students to exhibit any behavior which could have disrupted the smooth running of the organization.

Summary and Discussion of Chapter 2

Student behavior does not take place in a vacuum but in a definite, organizational setting which has a number of complex forces. If one is to have any understanding of that behavior, he must make an attempt to have a corresponding understanding of that setting and some of those forces. That is why it was so important in this first chapter to give some attention to the community, the school, and the behavior of teachers and administrators.

This brief description has raised questions which might be relevant for one who either teaches or is preparing to teach in public schools. For instance, such an individual might ask: "Why do all the teachers, regardless of their subject-matter speciality, use the same instructional pattern?" Or perhaps, "Why did the administrators blame the teachers for ignoring the poorer students, when at the

same time those administrators headed an organization which did not encourage student-teacher interaction on an other-than-instructional level?" Or, one might wonder if it were even possible for teachers to take the initiative and seek out more informal student contact. Would such behavior be rewarded by the administrators? Or might these teachers be fired, as was Mrs. J., because they appeared to have been overly selective in their choice of students?

To begin with, the whole issue of Mrs. J. might have been a study in itself. Why was she fired? I should mention at this point, a latter conversation I had with Rossi. He was talking about Mrs. J.'s literary magazine:

Ah, it wasn't very good, it could have been better. I threw them all out, I was happy to be rid of them . . . You know what, she [Mrs. J.] wanted to put that magazine out so I told her I'd help; I gave her a month; I gave her the rights to the print shop where we publish the paper, but come time to sell them, I says to her, "Do you have anyone to sell them?" and she says, "No." So I sold them in the cafeteria. Then I put the money in a special fund for the use by the magazine. The next issue comes out, same thing. I ask her if she had someone to sell them; "No." so I sell them in the cafeteria again, and not once did anyone on the staff, or Mrs. J., thank me for what I did, not the first time I sold them, not the second time, not once.

So, was she fired because she encouraged the kids to "say all kinds of good little things," as the teacher said, because she "talked over the heads of the less sharp kids," as the principal said, or because she failed to thank the vice-principal when he did her a favor. It appeared that she had been fired for a combination of these reasons, all of which have to do with an over concern with student ideas and intellectualizing, and a lesser concern with organizational maintenance and good administrator relations. Teachers in other schools have been fired for encouraging sharper students to intellectualize while ignoring the basic maintenance matters that administrators consider important. The grounds for firing may be justified simply as "inability to relate to students."

The student publication by itself may not have been the reason she was fired, but it certainly didn't help her. Any teacher who wishes to encourage "independent thinking" on the part of his students should be aware that such thinking will be difficult to manipulate and control once it begins. And a "student run" publication, if it is to really be student run, is bound to become critical of the present organizational structure at some point. At that point, the teacher who initiated such a project can find himself in trouble. Does that mean that idealistic, beginning teachers should be careful lest they appear to give too much attention to student intellectualizing and not enough to the maintenance of the organization? Perhaps not, but one who wishes to stimulate student thought and activity has to be aware of these things.

Attempting to make sense of the behavior of teachers and administrators at Horatio Gates, it appears that there are certain realities to which they and teachers in other similar schools pay attention. First, the school organization places at least as many constraints on teachers as it does upon students. Deviant behavior among students may be smiled upon, tolerated, or punished, but it is usually, except in extreme cases, forgiven and forgotten. Not so for teachers. The untenured teacher can be quite easily fired and one who presents himself as a potential threat to maintaining the organization had better be prepared to either hunt for a new position or conform to accepted norms. Public schools demand that organizational boundaries be respected. They have little use for "scholars in residence" or "critical thinkers."

A second reality is that it is extremely difficult for a teacher to deviate from some rather narrow boundaries. Hypothetically, consider a teacher in Horatio Gates who might have wished to somehow "radically change" his instructional pattern. What would he do? First, remember that he still has to work within the school schedule, and therefore he has his students, just as does everyone else, in classes of 20-30 for five forty-minute periods. Then remember he has to take care of the maintenance details as does everyone else. Then, of course, his room is set; that is,

with thirty chairs for students and one for him. If he wanted to begin by sitting on the floor in a circle, chairs would have to be moved, and then be moved back at the end of the period because the next teacher to use the room might not like it that way. That additional maintenance activity of chair moving would probably consume ten more of the forty minutes. One simply cannot expect the janitor to take care of such things. In fact, that janitor, if bothered by abnormal seating arrangements, might choose to let the principal know that "so and so is doing something funny in his room." I don't need to go on to make the point. If a teacher wants to be different, there are a large number of barriers to obstruct him. And even those that begin their teaching careers by wanting to become different may become discouraged, accept the organizational constraints as unavoidable, even necessary, and let those demands define their behavior. They, too, will wind up doing seventy-five percent of the talking, avoid students' personal lives, and walk down the hall in a businesslike fashion. Simultaneously, this will mean they may have to ignore the poorer students because to do otherwise would be to bypass the constraints. I don't mean to say these things to be critical of teachers and their behavior. My intent, rather, is to try to get beneath the rhetoric about "changing behavior," and be realistic about the complexity of the school organization and admit the difficulties of implementing change given the organizational structure.

There is a third reality. Mr. Vincent and Mr. Rossi were responsible for the school in the eyes of the community. Despite what they said about lack of community support and commitment, I think they were actually getting a great deal of both. What the community wanted was an orderly, well-run, clean school, one that was free of controversy, student unrest, or anything that could be called "trouble." As long as the administrators maintained that kind of school, they were secure, and the lack of parent participation in the P.T.A. was actually a vote of confidence. Had the parents perceived some kind of trouble, there would have been hundreds at the board meeting, and the two administrators might have been fired.

Admittedly, these issues are being raised more for the purpose of asking questions than of seeking answers. The main purpose of this book is still to describe students and their school behavior. The original questions remain: What does a student do in Horatio Gates? How does he make sense of his life there? How does he develop a reasonable and consistent pattern of thinking and acting so that he can fulfill his personal needs and at the same time deal effectively with institutional demands? To answer these questions we have to move beyond the description of environment, teachers, and administrators, and start to describe the students.

General Student Behavior

A visitor to the corridors and classrooms of Horatio Gates would probably be impressed by the general appearance of the students. All but a very few are clean, neat, and moderately well-dressed. The boys wear the slim-lined or belled wash pants and button-down shirts or sweaters. The girls wear fresh blouses or sweaters, skirts of the fashionable length, stockings or knee socks, and some variation of flat heeled shoes. While a few boys keep their hair shoulder length, only a few of the entire senior class affect the hippie garb. In previous years there had been a staff-enforced dress code, but in keeping with Mr. Vincent's attempts to give the students more freedom, that had been dropped and according to both students and teachers, it did not make any difference. The students still dressed the same way.

Like their dress, their overall behavior was orderly. Having been told to expect a "tough" school, I was genuinely surprised by the apparent lack of conflict between the expectations of the staff and the desires of the students. When the bell sounded and the students were expected to go somewhere, they went. When an administrator asked for some compliance or quiet, or a teacher for attention and order, he received it. The students did not seem to find the atmosphere at all oppressive or even distasteful, and they went about their daily activities with apparent willingness. They seemed to accept, almost without question, their place at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. At a time when the spectre of student revolt was frightening many school people, the students at Horatio Gates, even when unsupervised, would automat-