

Sustained Success

The Wheatley School SWS

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Three characteristics have made the Wheatley school-within-a-school a continuing success over the years: strong academics, a focus on human relations, and a vibrant student-led government.

If asked to name the best schools I've been lucky enough to see in my 47 years in education, Wheatley's school-within-a-school would surely be high on the list. It takes very seriously education's ultimate aims and avoids the more typical mirroring in the proximate ones. The result is that its students grow visibly in judgment and wisdom, as well as in responsibility, sensitivity, tolerance, and empathy. This happens because school time goes to activities that will make youngsters better citizens and co-workers and friends and spouses and parents — as well as more successful in the public sector to which most high schools restrict their efforts. Through a focus or theme that entwines democracy and human relationships, students are helped to grow personally and socially. Through a strong emphasis on rigorous effort at what they find meaningful, they grow as learners and scholars.

The Setting

The school-within-a-school at Wheatley School on New York's Long Island is quite unusual. It challenges much of what we think we know about teenagers and schools — and even about educational innovations and what makes them work. As tenth to twelfth graders, these young people are the devisers and implementors of educational policy. Once in the program, they tend to take education pretty seriously and to work harder at it than they have done previously. And their enthusiasm about "SWS," and dedication to it, is rare.

I have taught a seminar on Alternative Education at Hofstra University for almost 20 years. A group of students and teachers from Wheatley's SWS have been regular visitors and participants. Usually they are the first of three such groups, representing three

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different alternative schools, who visit the class during the semester. Only after their visit do I feel the seminar — which seeks to give graduate students an idea of the range of possibility in education — is ready to begin. The SWS students are bright and articulate and enthusiastic, and although accompanied by a teacher or two, it is the students who do the presenting and carry the discussion. The level at which they are able to do so is always something of a shock to the class observing them. Clearly they are participants in their education, not mere recipients of it. What is more, they are informed, thoughtful, and very active participants in directing it.

The Wheatley School is a school of 525 students, grades eight through twelve. It is located in an affluent, education-oriented New York City suburb, and 95% of its graduates go on to college. The school is the only high school within a small district composed of sections of several different Long Island towns. All but one of the towns included consists primarily of high income families. Religiously as well as economically, the district is atypical, with approximately 80% of the population being divided equally between Catholic and Jewish families.

In fact, it was the religious differences which initially gave rise to SWS. The Wheatley School had been opened in 1956, and its students included youngsters from two elementary schools — one consisting primarily of Jewish students and the other largely of children from Christian families — who were finding it hard to get along together. The response of the high school was to establish T-Groups, as recommended by the national interest in group dynamics that had burgeoned a decade earlier. Several of the school's teachers had attended the National Training Laboratory for Group Development, the center of the group dynamics movement, and were well grounded in its principles. It was the T-Groups formed in response to this cross-cultural conflict which led eventually to an experimental class focusing on human relations. And it was this class that in 1972 became Wheatley's school-within-a-school.

SWS has identified itself from the start as an "alternative" school — and it has recurrently been subject to the criticisms that beset alternative schools: that it is a haven for hippies, frisbee-land, a permis-

sive enclave where the touchy-feely prevails. But despite such charges from critics, it has also fairly consistently been a popular choice among Wheatley's students, almost always with a waiting list and frequently attracting a number of the parent school's leaders and most successful students.

SWS enrolls 75 students, but only for a part of each school day, its last three periods. During the morning, students are in regular Wheatley classes, moving into SWS only at 12:30, with the beginning of the seventh period. SWS teachers, like their students, spend two-thirds of the school day on assignments outside the program. Ordinarily, programs structured so as to provide such limited affiliation are minimally successful: There is minimal programmatic differentiation, a minimally discernible identity for the program, and a correspondingly minimal sense of affiliation with it. The lived experience of students and teachers simply differs little from what they have elsewhere become accustomed to. SWS departs radically from this scenario: The program is unique and for most, it is compelling; the sense of ownership and affiliation it builds is extraordinary; and the role expectations of both students and teachers make SWS a novel experience for both groups.

A prominent part of the success lies, I suspect, in the emphasis on building community among those within the program. This leads to activities that establish close bonds between students and students, as well as between students and teachers. It leads to the acquisition of interactional skills that students recognize as personal growth within themselves. It also results in a considerable amount of self-consciousness about the community that is being built and the ties formed. This focus on human connection tends to offset the relatively limited time spent together in the school-within-a-school — making SWS a clearly discernible entity, when units constrained by this sort of time frame usually are not.

Another reason for SWS's success is its unusual academic program, which is limited to electives in Social Studies and English. The way in which time is used within the program makes it possible for students to take as many as 24 such electives a year: The year is divided into four or five modules, each about six weeks long. There are three periods per day, and most classes meet twice weekly. This means a stu-

dent can take up to six courses per module. Courses are usually rather targeted — to cover a single topic or issue or person or time period. Recent courses, for instance have included such titles as "Literary Dogs" (featuring 11 short stories about dogs), "Constitutional Quarrels," "Should Saddam Hussein Get the Bomb?," "Stand-Up Comedy," "Kurt Vonnegut," "The History of Rock," and "Anita Hill vs. Clarence Thomas."

But if the titles are catchy, the expectations are anything but frivolous. For instance, those who enrolled in the "Stand-Up Comedy" course were required to study "the aspects of language and the power of words which create humor," and to "explore various styles of comedy, from Plato to the present," along with "society's changing attitudes toward comedy." Course requirements included the writing and performing of three five-minute comedy routines as well as the preparation of several reaction papers. Requirements here and in other classes are often substantial, and a tally a couple of years ago disclosed that during the year's final module, the 75 students enrolled in SWS wrote and rewrote a grand total of more than 700 papers!

SWS students take a much more active role within classes than is typical in high schools, and there are marked contrasts in the proportion of class time devoted to teacher talk. Often students assume an even further responsibility by teaching a course. Those who wish to do so are encouraged and given help in a special course on "Teaching in SWS." They complete the class with a full design for their course, including a curriculum plan for each lesson they will teach, and a repertoire of teaching techniques. Courses are also taught by parents, and Wheatley School principals also sometimes teach in SWS — a former principal (who is now district superintendent) having offered a class on multiple interpretations of the Cinderella myth, and the current principal having offered a class on the book *No Heroes, No Villains*.

A different sort of factor that undoubtedly figures in SWS success is continuity. Although the program is almost a quarter of a century old, its current director has been involved with it since its earliest days. There is little turnover among the teaching staff, and there have only been four different leadership teams

in the program's history. The result is that staff orientation has remained unusually constant. There are also other, more personal continuities — such as the fact that the brother of one of the program's current teachers was in the first SWS graduating class! On the other hand, there has been little recent continuity in the principalship of Wheatley, with five principals in the last five years. The turnover was evidently not traumatic for SWS, however, whose security seems fairly well assured. There is sufficient community awareness and support for the program that an administration unfriendly to it might find itself in real trouble.

Yet another strength has been the program's flexibility and adaptability. Students exert considerable control within SWS, and each year brings a fresh examination and assessment of everything from classes to the program's constitution — virtually assuring the self-renewal now held so central to school success. Change is constant — change of content, change of structure, change of activities — yet through it all, SWS's purpose and orientation have remained surprisingly untouched: Human relations and community building within the program are still focal, and democratic self-governance has consistently remained a second dominant theme. The emphasis on knowledge has perhaps evolved most over the years, with a steady strengthening of the program's intellectual component. This is often managed, however, without eroding the commitment to human relations and democracy. For instance, the annual Fall retreat in 1996 was not scheduled for the usual camping experience with trust walks and ropes that Sharone describes later in this article. Instead, it took the form of a trip to Washington, D.C. The culminating activity was designed as spending time in the Holocaust Museum — and sharing with one another the emotion which that experience evokes.

Several years ago, I asked the then-director of SWS if there was a student who would be interested in writing a description of SWS for publication. Three people responded, so each chose a major dimension of the program to discuss: Nicole Krauss chose to write about the academic dimension of SWS and what it is to be a student there; Sharone Ostrow offered an account of the way the human relations

theme is sustained within the program throughout the school year; and Jodi Kreitzman examined the SWS structure, and the way the program is governed. In the several years that have intervened since these three graduated, changes have taken place and the details may differ. With respect to the essentials, however, SWS remains today very much as they portray it here.

Academics
(Nicole Krauss)

"Do you have a lot of work to do for SWS tonight?" Cara asks me as we hurry down the green hallway to our Madame Bovary class.

"Work!" I scream back. "I have an essay and two reactions, plus I haven't even finished Bovary. I'm beginning to hate Emma. She never learns from her mistakes, and that's frustrating," I tell her, waving my wrinkled copy of Flaubert's masterpiece in the air.

"Yeah, but I dislike Charles even more," she says of Emma's husband, "he is so flat and gray. I empathize with Emma sometimes!" We slip into room 207, and into our desks, and spread our reading journals before us. Cara laughs at my marble notebook, with scribbles that only I can decipher. The class grows quiet, and an intense discussion begins. I wave my hand impatiently in the air, and then, when it's finally my turn I say to the students around me in circle, "I was just talking with Cara, and I think ..."

Madame Bovary is one of my favorite classes this module — but then again, I can't think of one class out of the six that's not. From my 1920s class, to Writer's Notebook, the Middle East, Word Weaving, and Three Novels of Redemption, I am learning exactly what I choose, exactly what I desire to learn, and for that reason, I love every minute of my SWS classes. Others selected from a list which also included such classes as World Leaders, The Soviet Empire Unravels, Argentina, and Women in Greek Drama. SWS only consists of English and Social Sciences, and therefore, it only meets for three out of the nine periods each day. In the morning, as I sit through pre-calculus and AP Biology, I wait in anticipation for 7th period to roll around when SWS begins. There are two sets of classes, the Monday/Thursday set and the Tuesday/Friday set. So, I

can take three different classes in each of those sets. This can get slightly confusing and once in awhile one may overhear a confused SWS student wonder, "Wait, do I have Great Debates today or Freedom of Speech?" After a dazed moment or two, he'll recall staying up past midnight the night before finishing his Freedom of Speech assignment and turn towards class. Most of us, however, after the first week of the session, called a module, get right into the groove. There are four of these sessions, or modules, per year. That means that four times a year, each student in the program has to make the difficult decision of which classes to take.

Today, as the 3rd module is approaching, we all gathered together in the worn, comfortable SWS room, some of us sprawled on the donated couches, others reclining on the gray carpeted floor. New modules, and the chance to begin fresh courses, always generates a lot of excitement. Everyone anxiously awaits a copy of the Module Book, a packet that contains a description of all of the classes that will be offered that module. I stumbled sleepily into the room, a tall stack of the packets in my arms, I had stayed up all night carefully designing the innovative cover for the Module Book. I drew every single person in the community holding hands. After everyone had found themselves on the cover, and goggled over the funny images of their friends, we settled down to listen to each teacher present his or her class or classes.

Many different people offer classes each module. Besides the proposals of our four "core" teachers, two for each subject, students offer classes as well. Student-taught classes are an incredible experience where we each have the opportunity to share knowledge that we have already gained with others. We can teach two classes, twelve classes, or none at all. Every module a number of students always offer classes. Parents often teach as well, usually offering their classes at their homes in the evening. Even the principal of our school taught a class this module on Cinderella — yes, the fairytale! Course Description lasted about two periods, with the teachers describing their classes one after another. Each of us sat with pen in hand, circling classes that appealed to us, and by the time description is over, we had before us a module packet covered with stars, question marks,

and circles that we leave until the evening to pore over with our parents and over the telephone with friends.

Every class offered must first be approved in the Course Approval Meeting. Any person interested in teaching a class (core teachers, parents, and students included), must attend this meeting. The prospective teacher presents his or her class to the committee, the work that has been done in preparation, what the class will be about, possible assignments, etc. The committee members, made up of anyone who wants to attend, ask the teachers questions. If the class and preparation prove to be satisfactory, the committee will approve the class. If however, the committee feels that a class may not be successful, or that the person lacks sufficient knowledge of the subject, or is not prepared thoroughly, then it is not approved and the person will not offer the class.

After students had signed up for their classes, the module got underway, along with lots of work. Reaction papers, poems, literary essays, reading, the list goes on. Though I stay up into the morning hours slaving away behind my computer, I don't mind the work so much. I'm learning about what interests me: The Middle East Crisis, creative writing, King Lear, the 1920s — I love learning about all these things and I put time and effort into each assignment. This module I also chose to take an Independent Study, where one selects a topic, any topic, and learns about it on one's own. I chose to do personal writing, where I would write about my own experiences in a creative way. I chose an adviser who read my pieces of mail, and would anxiously await his comments written in green pen and covering the typed pages of my stories. The wonderful thing about the Independent Study program is that anything in the world can become our curriculum. Students have done studies on everything from J.D. Salinger, to the Holocaust, to Renaissance art.

As each module draws to a close, students must think about what kind of grades they deserve for each of the classes taken. Each student fills out an Assessment Sheet evaluating his or her performance in the class, and assigning a grade. The teacher of the class then reads the assessment, considers how he or she feels the student performed and then assigns a final grade in the class. The equation that students

often use to determine their grades is $Quality + Quantity + Effort = Grade$.

At the half-year mark, and at the end of the year, we receive a final grade in English and Social Sciences. Each student has to compile all of his or her work in a collection called a transcript. The night before transcripts are due, I sit on my floor, my work spread around me in piles for each class. Each essay, each reaction paper, each story that I wrote lies before me. I put the work, separated by dividers, into a folder, along with the assessment and the final grades received in each of the classes. I then sit before my computer and write a sort of letter that discusses how I think I performed over the two modules. I discuss each class I took, what I got out of each one, and finally I give myself a final grade in both English and Social Sciences.

The next morning, the SWS room is full of students putting the finishing touches on their transcripts, filing last minute papers in order, and placing the entire folder, his or her pride and joy, sweat and blood, into a box. Questions like "What did you ask for? What did you write in your evaluation? How long was it?" can be heard throughout the room. Some students look guiltily down at their thin transcripts, after seeing another student's thick folder overflowing with papers.

Two evaluating committees, one for each subject, assess each student's transcript, deciding whether the student truly deserves what he or she asked for. The committees are made up of the two core teachers of that subject and two elected student evaluators. After school and even during some periods in the day, the evaluators slave over the folders, reading evaluations and looking over the quality and amount of work that each student did.

When they have finally finished, a list goes up in the SWS room of those students in whose cases there are conflicts between student-assigned and evaluation committee grades. Such students must meet with the evaluators to discuss their grade. Clusters of students gather around the list, praying their names are not on it. If the evaluators and the student cannot come to a settlement, the student can bring the evaluators to court to sue for a higher (or in few cases lower) grade.

The Academic portion of SWS is a rewarding and wonderful experience. It offers each student a world of knowledge, the privilege of learning what is interesting to oneself, the opportunity to teach a class, as well as the opportunity to get involved in the design and operation of the Academic module. Whatever class one takes, or whatever one chooses to do in Academics, each one of us gets out tenfold what we put in.

As Nicole's account testifies, SWS manages to engage students in multiple ways in designing their own educations. As she suggests, the sense of ownership is strong and the students are proud of how difficult and demanding their work is.

But "Academics" are only one part of the SWS program. Sharone describes a second component receiving equal emphasis.

The Human Relations component of SWS is the heart and soul of the program. The emphasis here is on honest communication and genuine caring. The learning that ensues is considered every bit as important as the learning that goes on in academics. In the beginning of the year, the students in the program struggle to become a community, learning to trust, to open up, to share themselves, and students come to realize that this is not a "me" world, but one that includes all of us. Several kinds of arrangements and activities facilitate bonding and caring. These include family groups, community building days, sharing, field trips, and weekend retreats. Through these experiences the members of SWS become the community of SWS.

The following account is typical of what happens in the Human Relations part of the program throughout the year.

Human Relations (Sharone Ostrow)

It's a warm, yet breezy summer evening and our stomachs churn with excitement as we anticipate the year to come, another year; the cycle continues as seniors step into the collegiate world and sophomores fill our SWS circle. We prepare for the first SWS weekend as we pack our bags and join other community members on the bus to Camp Oquago.

We look forward to a weekend of creating new relationships and strengthening old ones.

The bus hums with laughter and music and buzzing conversations, and we climb our way through the Northeastern countryside; we're almost there. Sixty SWS students and teachers listen to the PA as another member announces bunk and dining assignments; friends are separated in the interests of bringing mere acquaintances together. Tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders share the Oquago experience and the magic of the countryside seems to melt the age barrier away.

Beds are made and bags unpacked and students are brought together on an open field where an older member of our Human Relations Committee prepares us for an activity. What now? An obstacle course, five teams, timed races, strangers working together, strangers becoming friends. This is what Human Relations is all about. We file into the dining room with smiles on our faces and new friends by our sides, indeed we are off to a wonderful beginning. We're seated with strangers, yet we laugh and joke as if we are the best of friends; we poke fun at the sticky mashed potatoes and we talk with a nervous excitement that invades our voices.

And now the sun sets casting a yellow shadow across the camp and we, the SWS community, gather in a circle and begin with two minutes of silence; a silence noisy with thoughts that race through our minds. It's the first Meeting for Sharing, a forum for joke and story telling, a forum for tears, and a forum for mere observation. We each can speak, but we cannot respond to other speakers. A member stands in the core of our circle shedding light in the darkness of this club as she tells of a humorous experience. Her smile is radiant and it dances across all of our faces; she shares and we listen. And now she sits, we are silent, and another classmate rises to describe a sorrow. We ride an emotional roller coaster as we laugh and cry with our peers. This is what Human Relations is all about.

Singing around a campfire, canoe races in the lake, and competing in a talent show. The weekend ends and we return along the Northeastern skyline to the beginning of an exciting and promising year in SWS. We have begun to spin a web of trust and friendship and we step off of the bus and into the classrooms

anticipating the growth and continuous development of new relationships.

And with the summer heat still dripping down our foreheads we experience the first "in-school" Community Building week; a week devoted to strengthening and improving the social networks of the program. We attack this project in a more systematic way as we divide the community into several groups of about eight members each. The groups, each of which include one teacher, become a member's "family" for the year as it provides support and the foundation upon which trust is built. A Family Group, as we call it, creates an outlet for bottled emotions and frustrations; it creates a cushion of confidentiality upon which we can depend. And a trained facilitator, another member of the group, helps construct a secure environment as he/she breaks the barriers of intimidation and conflict and builds a circle of smiles and honesty. A Family Group is a year-long commitment as it plants the seeds for new friendships that often prove longlasting. These friendships are cherished as we grow closer together, constantly concerned about improving our program.

As the summer heat becomes an autumn chill, we find ourselves working towards the development of the larger SWS community beyond individual and Family Group ties and we participate in what we call Community Building activities. Let us draw the setting: We are gathered in a circle, a wide and round circle and the sound of voices fade as an activity is presented to us. We are to take off one of our shoes and place it in the middle of the circle. Sneakers — Nikes, Addidas — shoes, loafers, dress shoes, and boots are thrown in the middle of our circle. And the activity begins as one person, blindfolded walks toward the pile of shoes and reaches for one, any one. And as he holds a sneaker in his hand, he opens his eyes, looks at the shoe, stares at his peers that surround him and searches for the person, the foot that matches the sneaker. He feels like the duke in a Cinderella fairy tale, matching the slipper to the perfect fit. Ah ha! He has found the right size foot, the matching person and now he must say something, anything that he knows or wants to know about this peer. He shares a funny story with the community and we laugh and the activity continues in the same manner as the next person enters the circle, picks a

loafer, finds a matching foot, etc. The activity better acquaints us with our friends and creates a comfortable atmosphere in which we can giggle and sometimes even cry.

Community Building activities provide relaxation in between difficult and sometimes frustrating modules. A week separates each module from the next, and most of this time is devoted to Human Relations activities designed by the student Human Relations Committee. They are geared toward taking our minds off of academic pressure and refocusing our energy on enjoying the company of others.

The oranges and blacks of Halloween decorate our room with ghosts and goblins as we celebrate together on this dry autumn day. Frightening moans and screams invade the speakers of the radio as we eat hero sandwiches and take part in yet another Human Relations activity. We are divided into four groups and each receives a paper bag in which there is a straw, an empty box of Junior Mints, an empty soda can, masking tape, a paper plate, and other materials of the sort. We are instructed to create an appliance together and to give it a name and a purpose. The starting bell rings and we're off taping and connecting the different parts of our piece of work, we joke and yell. Our laughter creates the melodies of this Halloween afternoon. We are having a wonderful time together again.

The cycle continues as autumn becomes winter and the bells of Christmas and the celebration of Hanukkah resonates throughout the SWS room. We experience one of the most exciting and mysterious of activities as the Human Relations Committee announces the commencement of "Angel-Mortal Week," a time of giving and receiving, hiding and pretending, writing and reading, and most importantly, sharing. I am secretly assigned a "Mortal," another member of the community to whom I may anonymously send letters, write poems, or give candy; she does not know who I am and the mystery continues as I receive gifts and letters from my "Angel," the person who gives to me. Angel-Mortal Week creates a cycle of giving, taking, and thanking; and again it provides a means of cultivating friendships as at the end of the week we reveal our true identity to our Mortals. The activity, if you haven't noticed, is quite difficult to explain, it is the experi-

ence, the fluttering sense of joy and belonging that becomes the ultimate pleasure of Angel-Mortal Week. Together as a community, we celebrate the holidays, together as a community we step into the New Year.

The pollen of springtime permeates the air, and coughs, colds, and sneezes sing throughout the hallways. The green leaves and dewy grass open a new door for the Human Relations dimension of SWS as we step out of the white-walled building and into a forest of fresh air. We prepare to "share the wealth" and broaden our community, we bring the wonders of SWS to prospective ninth graders as we invite them to join us on a picnic. The sun shines and we run to the bus with frisbees in our hands and sunglasses on our faces; we're going to Eisenhower Park for a day of activities. Names are called, attendance is taken, and again we are off.

A barbecue blazes and we sit in a circle and share our most embarrassing moments. "Well, I didn't mean to step on Mrs. Stern's skirt and who would have thought that it would have fallen right down to her knees." The stories evoke roaring laughs from the group and the mystique of a sunny day seems to make it all even brighter. A frisbee catch begins on the field to the left, a soccer game on right, and sunbathing in the middle. We are all relaxed and free as we learn to welcome others into our program and prepare to bid some farewell.

As the seasons revolve, so does our community; yet, we "close" (for I hate to use the word "end" or "finish," they're so finite) with a banquet celebrating the success of the past year. For the banquet everyone must cook a meal, a dessert, or even bring a beverage and we sit and eat and write letters to ourselves. The letters are journals, some review the highlights of the year while others preview the year to come. They are written and sealed and given to the Chairperson of the Human Relations Committee to be kept until the following year's banquet at which point they are returned to the proper author. We are nostalgic and reminisce about Camp Oquago, its funny stories and incredibly intense moments. And with the food settling in our bellies, we congregate once again, one last time, in a circle for our last Meeting and Sharing. Seniors bid farewell and often cry as they must break away from the place that they love most. And other

members talk and share and laugh and cry and our circle opens and the cycle continues.

SWS becomes a part of every member and every member becomes a part of SWS. We share and experience and we sow the seeds of a wholesome and fruitful tree to which we are attached forever. Human Relations in SWS brings color into a sometimes gray world, it creates love and friendship — two factors that often fill our voids and inspire happiness. This is what Human Relations is all about: nurturing, creating, and developing.

Thus the Human Relations component of SWS has a great deal to do with the extraordinary loyalty students show. And it is far from a matter of leaving unscheduled leisure to share — hangin' out time. Rather it is a deliberate, carefully planned set of structures and activities. It is managed almost completely by students. This is also the case with the program's final component, its governance arrangements. Jodi describes their organization, making SWS both a participatory and a representative democracy.

Government (Jodi Kreitzman)

SWS is a democratic community governed by its student members. Stressing the idea of student leadership, the program runs in accordance with the SWS Constitution, a document created by students. As the Constitution declares, SWS is committed to:

promoting a nonauthoritarian and egalitarian education and community by promoting responsibility for one's own personal and academic growth, maximizing the opportunities for citizens to learn from one another, developing leadership, providing a unified and close-knit community environment, and maintaining a learning environment in which each student strives towards mastery of academic skills, English, Social Studies, and Humanities.

To uphold these goals, the Constitution organizes SWS into executive, representative, and judicial branches. Every year, the Constitution is altered, revised, and updated. Through a class taught about this document, so important to life in SWS, students involved are able to study each aspect of the docu-

ment, and to discover ways to improve the program. The Constitution fundamentally defines SWS. It shapes the essential roles and functions within the program.

The SWS Constitution assigns administrative powers to an elected student chairperson, or moderator, who is our executive. The moderator's main objective is to "coordinate the SWS program as a whole, and help it run smoothly." Encouraging the idea of student leadership, the moderator is always a student within the program. He or she does not function as a president or a dictator. Rather, the role is to facilitate discussions and ensure the success of the program by making sure all provisions of the Constitution are upheld. The moderator must also serve as an effective liaison between faculty and students. Generating social control is the moderator's job, for this is not her program or his program. SWS is our program, belonging to every teacher and student associated with it. The moderator's job focuses on making the community run effectively by encouraging the involvement of each and every student and teacher in the well-being of the program.

Teachers are not the primary leaders of SWS. They are considered the equals of the students. Teachers in SWS are called by their first names, symbolizing their equality with students. More importantly though, the functions described in the Constitution assign students the main leadership responsibilities with SWS.

In addition to the moderator, a recorder, and a treasurer also hold important positions within the community. The recorder's job is to assist the moderator in helping to make general meetings run smoothly by maintaining a speaker's list, "compiling records of all general meetings and advisory board meetings," and keeping attendance records. Last, the treasurer functions as the holder of all financial responsibilities within the program. It is the treasurer's obligation to collect dues from all SWS members, and "advise the community of its financial standing at the midyear and at the year's end." Although these specific functions are outlined under the executive branch, student leadership does not end here, for its most important responsibility is to ensure the participation of all community members.

The SWS constitution provides both for representative and direct, or participatory, democracy. It is representative in that each student is a member of one of four committees — Academics, Human Relations, Social Actions, or Publications — which act for the entire SWS population in overseeing the main aspects of the program. Committees meet every Wednesday for one period of the SWS day. Following the committee meetings, there is also a general meeting each week, which reflects the participatory democracy in SWS.

General meetings are led by the SWS moderator. Each meeting offers students the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions. The meetings provide an opportunity for students or teachers to bring proposals to the community. From the small request to paint the meeting room, to the complex proposals on whether or not to have a five-module academic year, whether grades in SWS should be pass/fail, or whether parts of the human relations aspect of the program, like family groups, should be abolished, students within SWS are given the opportunity to bring up proposals to improve the community in any way they see fit. After the proposal is described, a speaker's list is created, allowing all members of the community who have an opinion about the proposal the chance to express their views. Throughout the meeting different motions can be made, including motions for immediate votes, closing the speaker's list, adjourning the meeting, suspending the rules, tabling the proposal, or setting time limits for speakers. When there is significant objection to a motion, the moderator can deny it. Students also have the opportunity to intervene during the meeting with points of personal privilege, information, inquiry, or parliamentary procedure. At the end of the meeting, each student and teacher votes on the proposal either by roll-call a show of hands. SWS members can either vote yes or no on a proposal or practice two other voting options. They can abstain from the vote, meaning they are part of the quorum and will be tallied a "no" in a vote on a constitutional proposal, or they can vote "vegetable," meaning they are uncertain of their views on this proposal, and wish not to be considered in the quorum. Constitutional amendments need a two-thirds majority to pass. A regular proposal needs a simple majority.

Through motions, speaker's list, role-call votes, and amendments that may be offered to the proposal, the opinion of each SWS member has a direct effect upon the program. No one's opinion is considered insignificant within SWS. Everyone is respected for the opinion they choose to express, whether all community members are in agreement with that opinion or not.

Once a month, the moderator presides over the meeting of an Advisory Board consisting of all committee chairpersons, the recorder, treasurer, chief justice of the SWS Supreme Court, a representative from each family group, and a representative of the SWS professional teaching staff. In addition, the Advisory Board is open to any other members of the community who wish to attend. All present have equal voting privileges. Advisory Board meetings are run as informal discussions on "subjects relating to the governing" and maintenance of the high standards of the human relations and academic aspects of the program. Within these meetings all committees give an updated report of their goals and projects throughout the year, and community members are asked for their suggestions for solving problems within the community. For example, the Advisory Board can discuss ways to improve student involvement or honesty, and can initiate plans for the orientation of freshmen into the program. Essentially, the Advisory Board is one more avenue to ensure complete student involvement in the effort to maintain the quality of the program. Students who attend are dedicated to maintaining the well-being of the program and are willing to volunteer their time and eager to participate in a program that means so much to them.

In accordance with the SWS principles of taking control of our own actions, and of student leadership and participation, SWS government also has a judiciary branch, our Supreme Court. The court consists entirely of students — two elected from each grade and one member at large from the junior or senior class. SWS has an honor code and all students within the program are expected to uphold the principles of honesty, morality, and student responsibility, by taking fellow members to court for eating in the SWS room, cheating, illegal absences, or breaking any other moral expectations of the community. Grade

conflicts students may have with the Academic Evaluation Committee may be settled by the court, as well. As a jury of seven students, including one chief justice, the Supreme Court listens to both sides of a situation before making an impartial decision. All affairs within the Supreme Court are confidential, although students are given access to information about the precedents the court has set in deciding similar cases in the past. Names, however, are withheld from these records. Essentially, the court emphasizes the student's responsibility not only to him or herself, but to the other members of the program as well.

After debating the pros and cons, I came into the community at the start of my sophomore year, like many others, unsure of what it would mean to me. After experiencing the wonderful aspects of the program, however, I am now a committed member of SWS. Quite simply, I love it. I love the opportunities for academic and social growth it offers. I love that I can stand up during a general meeting and have a direct effect on the well-being of our program. I love that through human relations and community building activities, I have become friends with sophomores, juniors, and seniors. I love that every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday I can challenge my brain through discussions on topics I never dreamed of. And, I love the opportunities for student leadership and responsibility SWS offers in every aspect of the program. So I decided at the start of tenth grade to make SWS become something very special to me, and to take advantage of the opportunities to become involved in a program that survives on each and every member's involvement. And now I reflect upon my years in the program and realize just how much SWS has changed me. I matured from a shy, quiet, intellectual student, to an outspoken, involved, friendly member of the program, with a passion for SWS.

SWS is not a program led by one individual student, or a program controlled by its faculty. Through the different governmental aspects of the program, as outlined in the SWS Constitution, members are given the opportunity to become involved in every aspect of the program. General meetings, Advisory Board, and Supreme Court all provide an opportunity for every member of the program to express

their opinions and directly affect the program. SWS students learn that the program is as good as the students involved make it. As a result, it is important that each and every member of the community give a part of ourselves to the program through time, effort, cooperation, participation, and knowledge.

As Jodi suggests, the self-governance arrangement at SWS provides one more avenue for student involvement and responsibility, hence growth and development. A far cry from the typical "Student Council," this structure puts youngsters in collective charge of the whole enterprise. At the same time, it expands the options open to individuals, thus em-

powering students singly as well as collectively. The unusual authority they exercise, plus the human relations they live, makes this a highly self-conscious community with extraordinary student commitment — both to the community and to learning.

And students' extraordinary ties to the program and to their classmates — in Jodi's terms, their "passion for SWS" — in turn amplifies the influence the school exerts. The result is that for more than two decades, Wheatley's SWS has proved a highly successful effort to make learning meaningful for its students, and of sufficient breadth to address the kinds of human beings and citizens they are becoming, as well as the scholarship they daily display.
