

At John Dewey H.S., a Student Can Go at His Own Pace

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY

Almost every school day, little groups of educators from around the country troop through the uncrowded halls of John Dewey High School in Coney Island to peer into the busy classrooms and see the city's major experiment in public education.

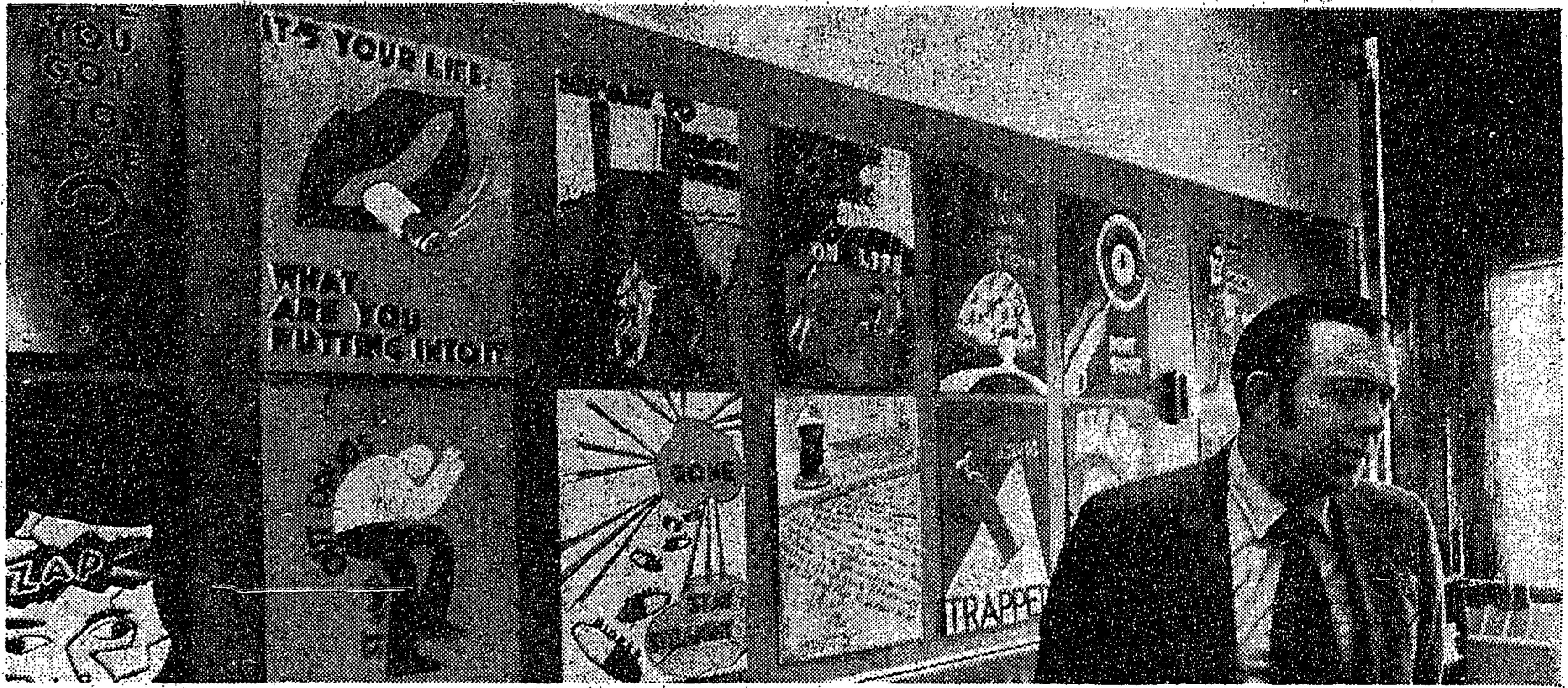
The experimental school, which has thrived since its beginning in September, 1969, brings together many of the reforms innovators have been talking about for the last decade. It is looked upon by school officials as a model for the future, and by others as an island of hope in a sea of trouble.

The motives underlying the experiments in Brooklyn are twofold: to allow students to learn at their own rate and to give students responsibility for planning their curriculums and carrying through their studies.

Greater Flexibility

To put these aims into effect, the school has designed a schedule with 22 periods in a day instead of the traditional seven, and six terms in the year instead of two.

The fragmentation of time into more easily maneuverable parts allows each student to follow his own pace more closely, rather than to proceed in the usual educational lock step. It also allows poor students to repeat work without having to be left back for an entire semester.



Sol Levine, 39, is the youngest high-school principal in the city system. "The satisfactions in working at Dewey are enormous," he said. Photographs for The New York Times by ROBERT WALKER.

About 25 per cent of the student's schedule is set aside for independent study. Students can use the time for homework, reading or for taking courses on their own with the help of study kits. They get credit for such courses as if they had attended class.

John Dewey students may graduate in six years, or in two.

"I believe what this town needs is a whole slew of educational alternatives," says Sol Levine, the principal of the school. "There have to be more choices for students. But I wouldn't say that all

kids should go to John Dewey high schools."

While parents in general like the experiment, there is concern about how seniors seeking college admission will fare, since the school does not give numerical grades. However, Mr. Levine says that colleges generally have said that the grading system will not be a deterrent, and that John Dewey students will be accepted on a level with others.

The grades given at John Dewey are M for mastery, MC for mastery with condition, MI for mastery in an independent study course and R for retention. Those who get an MC, or who get an R and must repeat the course, are given detailed analyses of their performance as a guide to future study by their teachers. Regents examinations given by the state supplement the letter marks.

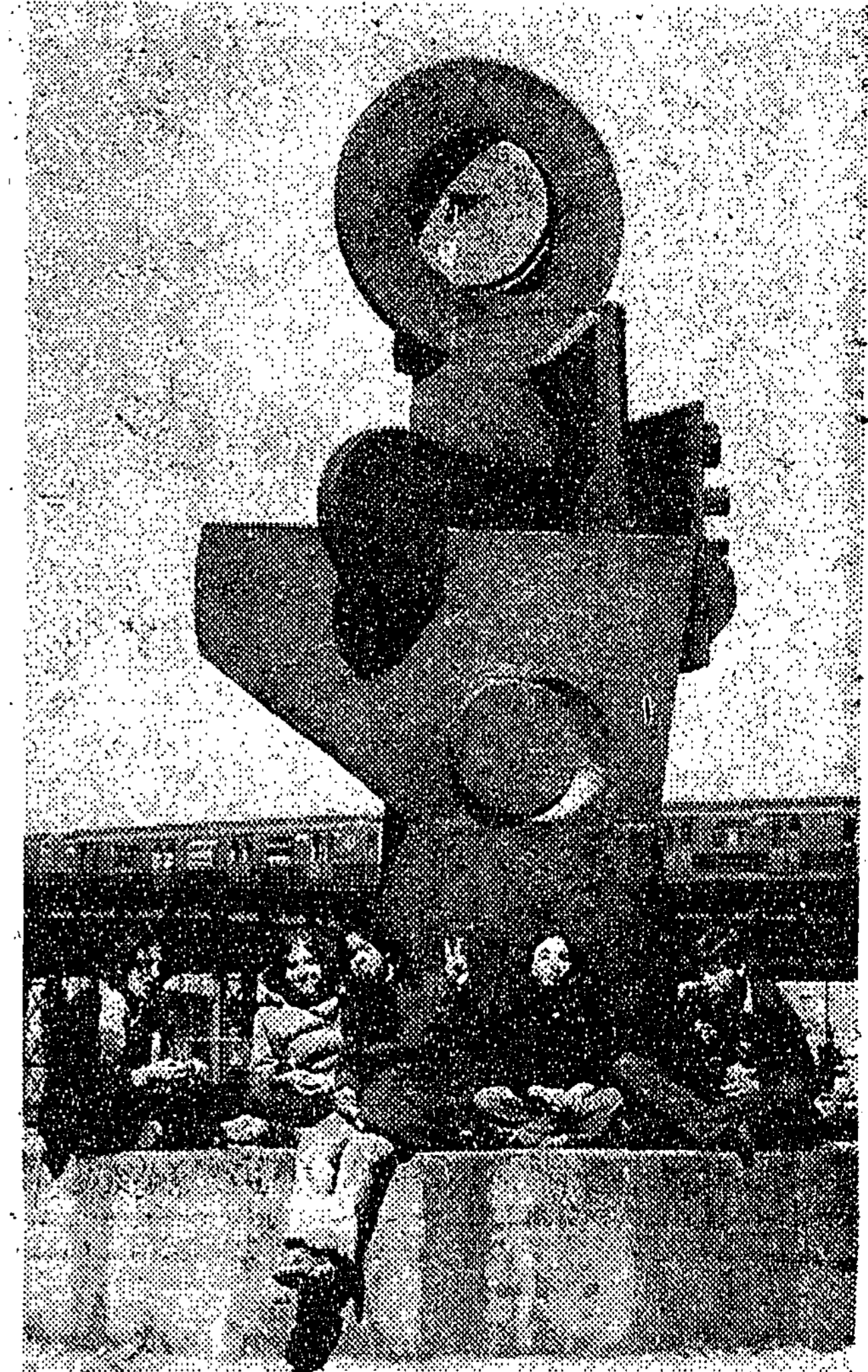
Choice of Teachers

By special arrangement with the United Federation of Teachers, the principal of John Dewey is allowed to pick half of his teachers without regard to seniority. The other half are chosen on the basis of seniority.

The teachers, all of whom are volunteers, receive extra pay for working at the school because the day runs from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M., at least an hour longer than the day in other schools.

The staff is generally younger than that in other schools. Mr. Levine, who is 39 years old, is the youngest high school principal in the city system. He says that morale in his staff is very high.

"The satisfactions in working at Dewey are enormous," Mr. Levine says. "We're involved in innovative change in education and I guess



Dewey students on the base of a sculpture outside the school. The day's 22 short periods permit some free time.

we're also the bellwether for what's going to happen elsewhere."

The \$12-million school and its 12-acre campus at Stillwell Avenue and Avenue X provide an ideal setting for the experiment. The shops and spacious classrooms have the newest equipment, from motor-driven pot-

ters' wheels to computers for learning programming.

John Dewey is one of the handful of schools in the city that is not overcrowded. The capacity of the building is 3,000, but in its first year, by arrangement, only 1,000 students were admitted. This year there are 2,000 students. Capacity will not be reached until next September.

There are expected to be 2,000 applications for the 1,000 new places. Students from the district, District 21, are admitted automatically. The rest are chosen from freshmen and sophomores in Brooklyn who apply.

The school day of 22 "modules" lasting 20 minutes each gives students and teachers great flexibility in scheduling. Most courses run two or three modules, but laboratory periods requiring extra time can be held once or twice a week without disrupting the rest of the schedule.

There are five seven-week cycles in the normal school year and a sixth in the summer session. Every cycle, students get a new schedule that is adaptable to their new interests or need for remedial work.

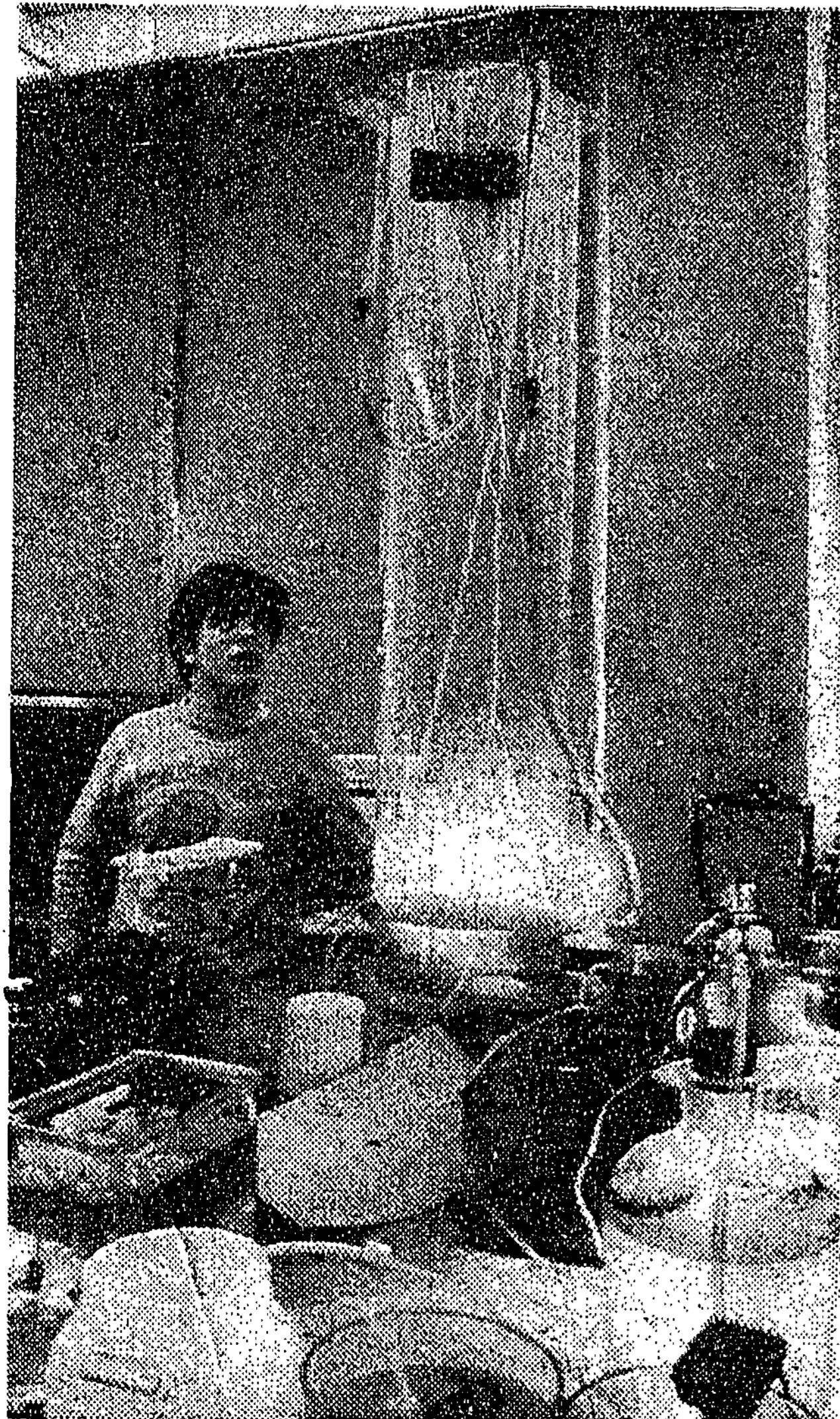
How Clubs Fit In

Activities that in other schools would be extracurricular are integrated into the school day. Club activities in line with students' special interests or independent studies are programed like classes.

The attendance rate at John Dewey is about 81 per cent, several percentage points higher than the city-wide average for high schools. Mr. Levine says that while about 200 of the school's 2,000 students do not appear to be succeeding in the experiment, about 1,100 are taking extra courses through the independent study program.

The school has not escaped all the problems of other city high schools. Mr. Levine acknowledges that there have been problems with drugs. A writer in the school paper complained of students being beaten in washrooms for their lunch money. The teachers recently had to crack down on a wave of pervasive class-cutting.

However, almost everywhere, the experiment is regarded as a success. More than 1,000 educators visited the school last year, some from as far away as Thailand and Sweden, and the Board of Education is actively discussing plans for several other schools on the John Dewey model.



Edward Wilensky, a student at John Dewey High School, at Coney Island, making a marine pollution test in laboratory. Flexible schedule adjusts to laboratory time needs.