

1971
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miracle on 136th street



At the corner of Eighth Avenue and 136th Street in New York City, a converted supermarket houses a remarkable secondary school. Harlem Preparatory, an independent, nonsectarian school, conducts high school courses with a difference: most of its students are former public school dropouts.

How do you reach and inspire youngsters who have turned off and given up on furthering their education? How do you bring them in off the streets of Harlem and convince them that regular attendance at high school courses will eventually provide them with the tools for success? Edward F. Carpenter, headmaster of "The Prep," as it is known by the students, admits that it isn't easy. "We reach these young people with the concept of school as a place where they will find respect, belief in their abilities, and an attitude of sincerely caring about their problems," Carpenter states. "Our purpose is to build within each student an awareness of his worth and capabilities and to persuade him that there is a group of adults as well as members of his own peer group who will pull with him."

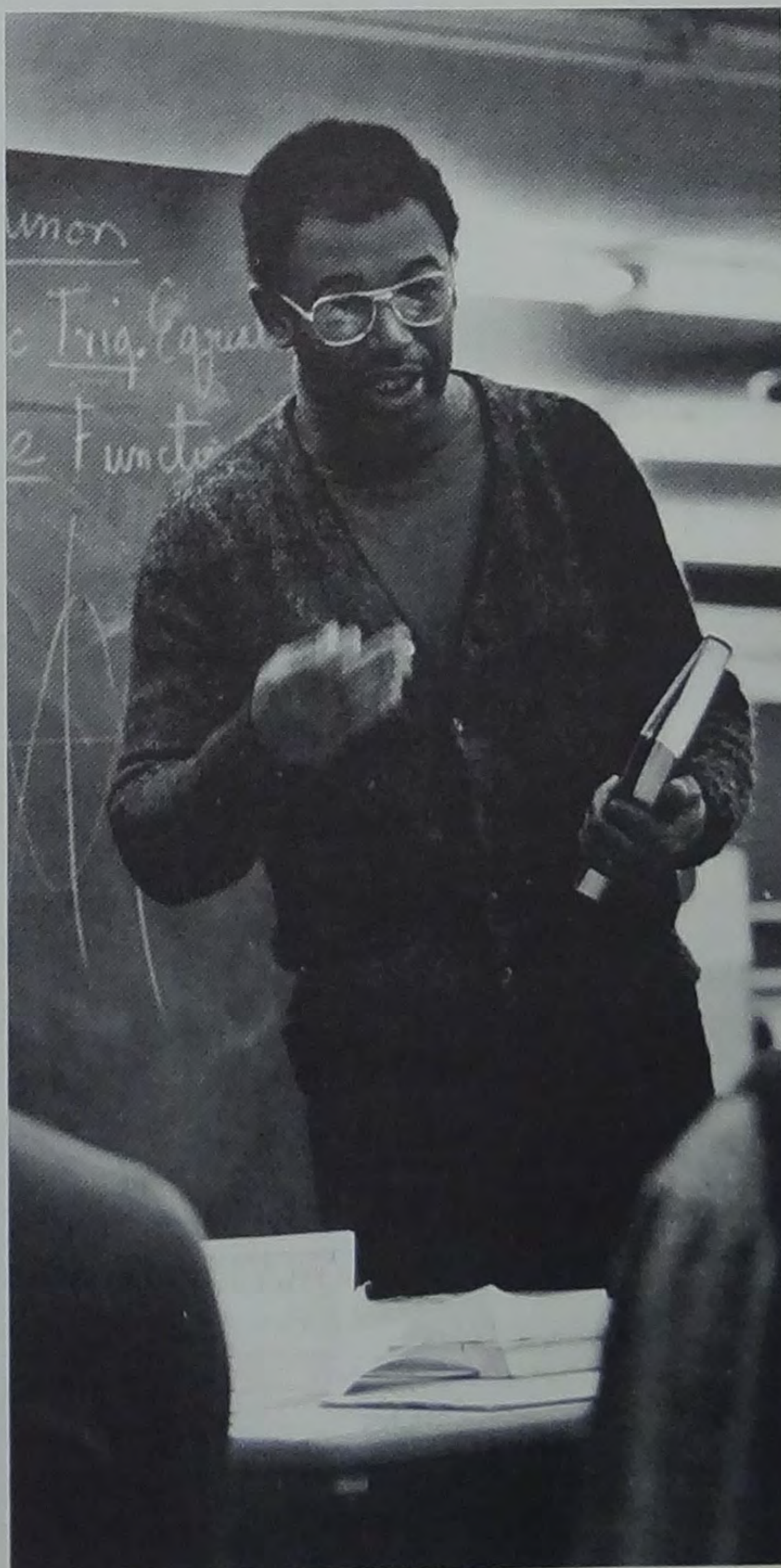
Each student at Harlem Prep is encouraged to pursue his studies at his own rate, although there are standards of performance which he must satisfy in order to move closer to the goal of graduation and attendance at a college or university. Graduation from Harlem Prep, incidentally, is conditional upon acceptance at an accredited college. According to the school's records, 214 graduates have entered institutions of higher learning across the United States; of these, only ten have since left college.

Harlem Prep started out in a local armory in October, 1967, with forty-nine students. More than 400 were enrolled during the 1970-71 school year, 165 of whom are expected to graduate in June.

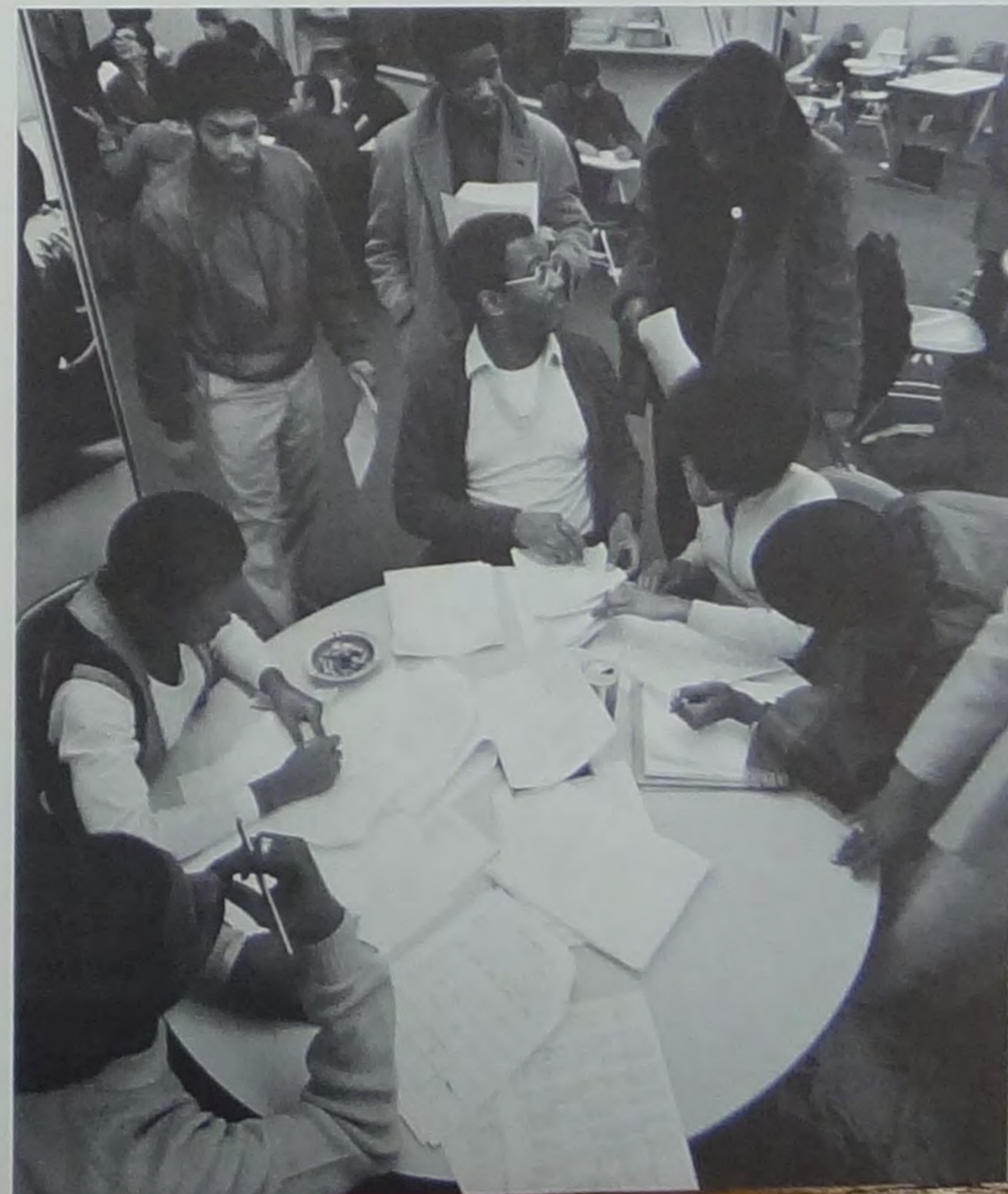
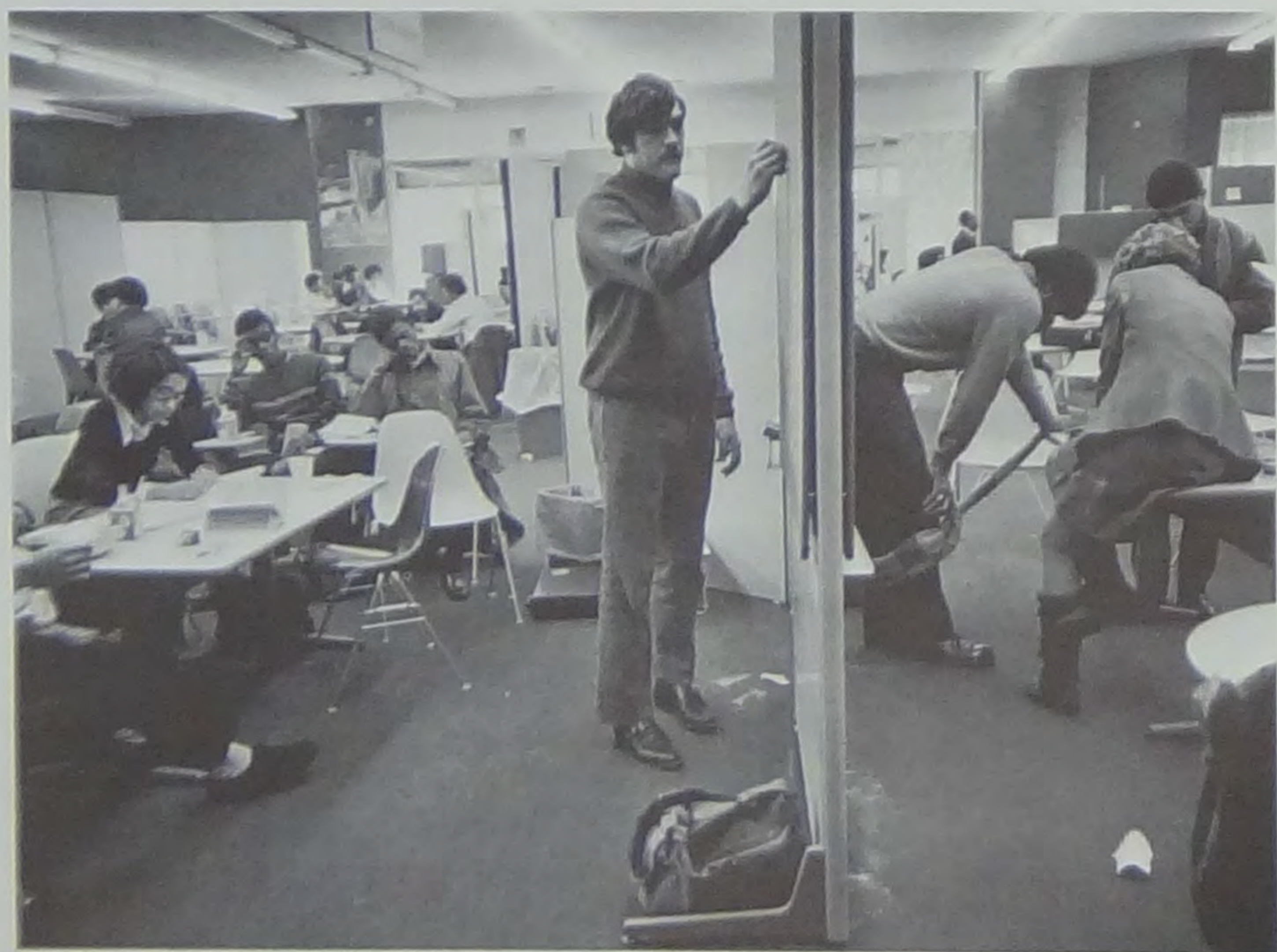
The rapport that exists between students and faculty at Harlem Prep is its single most distinguishing feature. Despite the lack of walls—many classes are separated from others only by freestanding partitions—a visitor is struck by the concentration of each class on its own course material. In any secondary school, this



Harlem Prep grad Kent Johnson (back page) works on a film project at home for his studies at New York University and (above) assists in the shooting of "Step by Step" as a member of the crew. Students (top) report for classes at The Prep, housed in a former supermarket. Instructor John Minors (right) explains trigonometric functions



Classrooms lack walls at Harlem Prep. Despite this open atmosphere, John Czerniejewski's math class listens intently (bottom left), and instructor Martha Manley is able to give individual attention to a student. Kent Johnson (below) crosses Washington Square to classes at NYU. (Bottom) John Minor counsels incoming students on registration day



would be at least an indication that learning was going on; for a high school in Central Harlem, it is a truly remarkable sign that a small and dedicated group of educators has come up with a method of breaking through the disaffection of American youth and of getting them turned on again. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: Step by Step: the Story of Harlem Prep, a 16-millimeter color film sponsored by Standard Oil Company (New Jersey), is available for showings on a free-loan basis to interested groups. The film, a documentary which runs approximately twenty-six minutes, was shot on location at the school, in the streets and homes of Harlem, and with a former Harlem Prep student at Vassar College. Please write to Modern Talking Picture Service, Inc., 2323 New Hyde Park Road, New Hyde Park, N. Y. 11040, and include both a preferred date and an alternate date on which you would like to show the film.

