

YOUR TOWN RECORD

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School chiefs spread harmony

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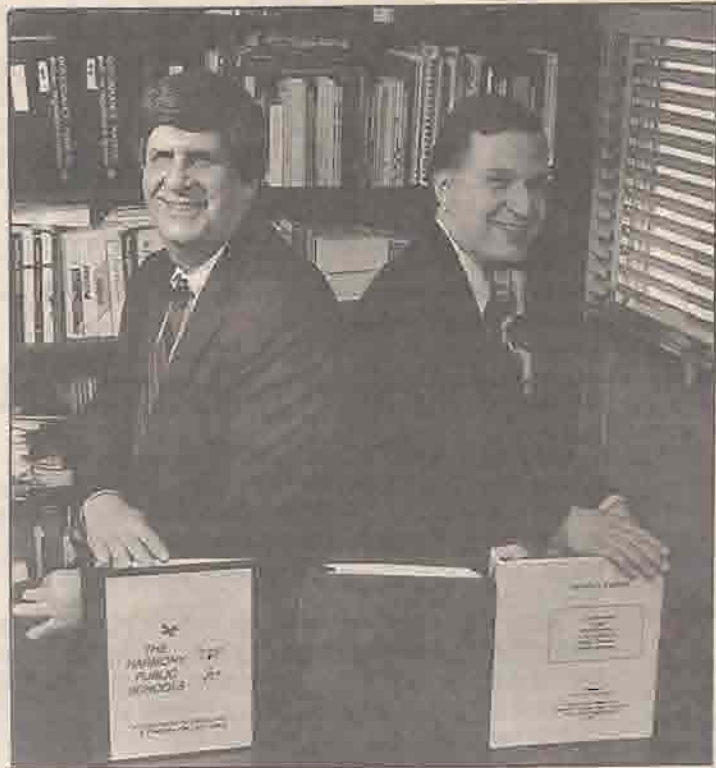
During his first week as Norwood Public School principal, Andrew Rose was flabbergasted by a second-grader who threw pennies at a classmate for being Jewish.

Questions about how an educator should deal with prejudice, the diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds of students, and involvement of such students' parents have dogged Rose, now district superintendent, since he began as an administrator in Norwood 11 years ago. His kindergarten through eighth-grade district is about 22 percent Asian-American.

One answer, he hopes, will be found in Harmony, a simulated school district he and Closter Superintendent Jeffrey Feifer have devised to help would-be school administrators practice dealing with the diverse viewpoints of their students, teachers, and community residents.

For their joint dissertation for doctorates in educational administration at Columbia University's Teachers College, the two men spent 2½ years developing 12 scenarios in Harmony, including examples of such incidents as town police making insulting remarks about Asians and a teacher refusing to give a makeup test to a student who missed class for a Jewish holiday.

Participants read the scenarios and indicate what actions they would take if they were



BOB BRUSH/THE RECORD

Jeffrey Feifer, left, and Andrew Rose devised a model district so that they could deal with prejudice in the schools.

school administrators. They read further to learn about how their decisions reflect broad administrative approaches. The two superintendents encourage administrators to involve teachers, students, parents, and others in their decision-making.

The cases are accompanied by a 350-page overview of the history and characteristics of Harmony and were tried out on 30 Bergen County superintendents for fine-tuning.

"As far as the strength goes, [the model] gets people directly involved, making the conceptual into a meaningful problem that administrators actually face," said Professor Frank L. Smith Jr. of Teachers College, who was Rose's and Feifer's dissertation adviser.

"The weakness . . . is that in a real administrative situation, problems are so intertwined. In

any training program, it's hard to make all those linkages evident," he said.

Smith, who is head of the educational administration program at the college, said joint dissertation work was uncommon among his students, but that it worked well in this case because the men had clearly defined responsibilities in the project. They received the highest ranking for their oral presentation of the doctoral work this winter, Feifer said.

The simulated Harmony school district likely will be used in the college's graduate courses to train educational administrators, Smith added. The men also plan in the spring to begin to seek publication of their work.

Rose, 46, and Feifer, 47, both of New City, N.Y., will receive their doctoral degrees in May.