

# Sanders comes from fame factory

Many well-known people attended lawmaker's high school

BFP 8/14/05

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WASHINGTON — New York Sen. Charles Schumer has a personal reason for wanting to help elect Vermont Rep. Bernie Sanders to the Senate next year.

Sanders would be more than just another vote for Senate liberals. He is, just as important to Schumer, a fellow graduate of James Madison High School in Brooklyn.

If Sanders were elected to the Senate next November, he would become one of three sitting senators who graduated from the New York City school. Sanders, an independent, was in the Class of 1959. Schumer, a Democrat, was in the Class of 1967. Sen. Norm Coleman of Minnesota, a Republican, was in the Class of 1966.

Although many members of the Senate graduated from the same college (17 from Harvard University alone), it is rare for them to have attended the same high school.

"It would be utterly amazing," said Schumer.

For Madison High, it would be another point of pride at a 75-year-old institution that already has a lot to brag about.

The school has had such notable graduates as Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, novelist Irwin Shaw ("Rich Man, Poor Man") and Nobel Prize winners in medicine and economics. It also has turned out entertainers and athletes, including singer/songwriter Carole King, comedian Andrew Dice Clay, actor Martin Landau, and old-time Brooklyn Dodgers Cal Abrams and Harry Eisenstadt.

A more recent graduate, Julia James, was chosen as a 2004 Rhodes Scholar in chemistry and is hoping to help develop a vaccine to prevent AIDS.

"Madison is a lot like Brooklyn," said Principal Joseph A. Gogliormella. "It's provincial, yet at the same time worldly. It has a great small-town feeling, but it's very diverse, with a real mix of cultures and a global perspective. Once you've experienced Brooklyn and Madison, you're ready for anything."

## Common bond

- **SCHOOL NAME:** James Madison High School
- **SCHOOL NUMBER:** 425
- **BOROUGH:** Brooklyn
- **GRADE LEVELS:** 9-12
- **STUDENT ENROLLMENT:** 4,071
- **ON THE WEB:** [www.nycenet.edu/OurSchools/Region6/K425/default.htm](http://www.nycenet.edu/OurSchools/Region6/K425/default.htm)

## Key to a better life

When Sanders, Schumer and Coleman were at Madison, the school was attended largely by the children of working-class Jewish, Irish and Italian parents who saw education as the key to a better life for their children.

Sanders, whose father emigrated from Poland at age 17 and never graduated from high school, said his parents — especially his mother — taught him to take school seriously as his ticket to the middle class.

"I would say the main reason why schools like Madison produced a lot of folks who went out into the world and accomplished things was that they had parents who desperately wanted their kids to do better economically and socially than they had done," said Sanders, 63. "If someone in the neighborhood graduated from college, that was a very big deal."

The congressman said he has especially fond memories of a social studies teacher who encouraged students to share and debate a wide range of ideas.

"He provoked discussion and showed us that ideas could be great fun," Sanders said.

There were early indications of the congressman's energetic, talkative style.

"I enjoyed classroom discussions very much, and I was always raising my hand," Sanders recalled. "I remember the teachers saying, 'Calm down, Bernard. Let someone else have a chance to speak.'"

Sanders, captain of the track team and a good student, said he had no reason to believe then that he'd someday be debating ideas on the floor of the U.S. House of

## From humble beginnings

James Madison High School in Brooklyn, N.Y., has graduated some notable students, including Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt. Sanders is seen below (top row, second from left) with the track team.



## Notable grads

(From left) Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn.; Ruth Bader Ginsburg, U.S. Supreme Court justice; Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y.; Martin Landau, actor; Carole King, singer/songwriter; Andrew Dice Clay, comedian; Cal Abrams, former professional baseball player with the old Brooklyn Dodgers and other teams.

## Other prominent grads

**Arnold Kopelson**, movie producer, Academy Award winner for best picture for "Platoon."

**Rudy LaRusso**, former five-time NBA All-Star.

**Harry Eisenstadt**, former baseball player with the Brooklyn Dodgers and other teams.

**Fuzzy Levane**, former coach of the New York Knicks.

**Joel Benjamin**, U.S. chess champion in 1987, 1997 and 2000.

**Stanley Cohen**, 1986 Nobel Prize winner for medicine.

**Gary Becker**, professor and 1992 Nobel Prize winner for economics.

**Barry Commoner**, a cellular biologist who helped launch the modern environmental movement; he ran for president in 1980 as a third-party candidate.

Source: James Madison High School Alumni Association

Representatives.

He ran for president of the school, but lost to a friend.

"To me the idea that I would be elected to the U.S. Congress was literally beyond comprehension," said Sanders, who thought he might become a social worker. "My parents (who both died when Sanders was young) would have been amazed."

Schumer, 54, said there was a sense of optimism at the school during the 1960s when he was there.

"Our parents had survived the Depression and World War II, and there was an atti-

tude that the future was brighter and that the world could be your oyster if you worked hard," Schumer said.

The senator said his thoughts were far from politics back then.

"I played basketball morning, noon and night, and spent a lot of time trying to pick up girls without much success," Schumer said.

Coleman, 55, was the only one to win elected office in high school, serving as class treasurer.

"I learned early on that power comes with control of the money," Coleman said,

laughing.

Sanders, Schumer and Coleman said the lessons they learned on the basketball court or baseball field were as important to them as what they learned in the classroom.

"We'd play softball or basketball in the school yard every Sunday morning," Coleman said. "There'd be 20 or 30 kids wanting to play. If your team won, you got to keep playing and choose the players that would play with you. If you lost, you could be sitting on the sidelines a long time. So you fought hard to win."