

REAL ESTATE

NYers are shelling out millions to live near this private school

By Adam Bonislawski

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David Poiman moved to One Riverside Park so that his daughter Isabel, age three-and-a-half, could be closer to Dwight's preschool.

Photo: Stefano Giovannini

Everyone knows the three Rs of grammar schooling: reading, writing and 'rithmetic. Now, add one more to the list — real estate.

That a good local school can boost a home's appeal is well-known. But how many institutions have goosed an area's housing market to the point where brokers are inspired to give the phenomenon a name?



As in, the “Avenues Effect,” a coinage Douglas Elliman’s Darren Sukenik says he came up with to describe the impact West Chelsea private school Avenues has had on surrounding neighborhoods since opening its doors in 2012.

“The school really has created this pocket of high-end real estate for high-end families who wanted access to a private school without schlepping up to Horace

Mann or Dalton or any of the uptown schools,” Sukenik says, adding that the school will be his and his soon-to-be husband’s first choice for their future children.

Granted, real estate in Avenues feeder neighborhoods like Chelsea, the West Village and Tribeca was going gangbusters even before the school showed up. Nonetheless, says developer Cary Tamarkin, it has had a clear impact both on apartment sales and on the type of product builders bring to market in the first place.

For instance, Tamarkin says, when he built 456 W. 19th St. in 2008, the school was little more than a distant possibility. Accordingly, that building’s unit mix consisted primarily of smaller apartments, with only three three-bedrooms among its 22 total apartments. Available units priced range from \$2.3 million to \$3.8 million.

On the other hand, by the time Tamarkin started planning his next building in the area, 508 W. 24th St., which opened in 2014, the neighborhood was anticipating Avenues’ arrival.

“It wasn’t open yet, but we knew it was coming, and it had a huge amount to do with the unit mix and the types of apartments that we made,” he says, noting that the majority of the building’s 10 units were three-bedrooms, with some convertible to four-bedrooms.



Developer Cary Tamarkin stands on the High Line in front of one of his projects, 508 W. 24th St.

Photo: Brian Zak

There was no guarantee that Avenues would prove the sort of hit it has since become. The school has grown from an initial enrollment of 735 to a current enrollment of 1,375. It plans to expand its capacity to 2,100 students in 2017 by taking over four floors at 540 W. 26th St., says Bruce Bobbins of Dan Klores Communications, which represents Avenues. But, Tamarkin says, “as a developer you have to make assumptions on things that are unknown... and that turned out to be a correct assumption.”

There was less guesswork in planning his newest Chelsea development, a 32-unit condo building nearby at 550 W. 29th St., which is similarly tilted towards larger apartments.



A rendering of the new Collegiate School.

Photo: Courtesy of Kohn Pedersen Fox

Avenues is perhaps the most prominent example of a new school boosting an area’s real estate fortunes, but it’s not alone. A few miles uptown, Extell’s 219-unit condo building One Riverside Park (with pads from \$2.4 million to \$25.8 million) is likewise benefiting from recent activity on the academic front, says Beth Fisher, senior managing director at Corcoran Sunshine, which is handling sales for the development.

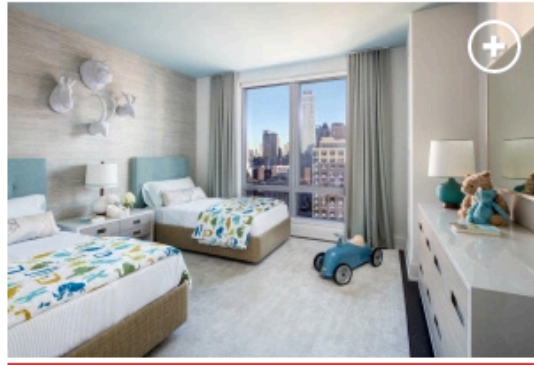
Three years ago, the Collegiate School said it would be moving from its home on West 78th Street to a new facility at Extell’s mixed-use Riverside Center development between West End Avenue and Riverside Boulevard near West 62nd Street.

“From the moment that was announced, we began having parents of Collegiate students come look at [One Riverside Park],” Fisher says.

The building is also near schools including Juilliard, the Abraham Joshua Heschel School and the Dwight School’s preschool program. And, Fisher notes, in addition to Collegiate, a new public school is slated to open at Riverside Center in 2018.

These options were part of the building's appeal for David Poiman, a doctor who moved with his wife and daughter to One Riverside Park in November. His daughter, who is three-and-a-half, recently started preschool at Dwight, and, Poiman says, he hopes that in the future she'll be able to attend the new public school.

In the meantime, the move has meant a blessedly abbreviated preschool commute. "We lived close by [before], but from my experience as a parent, even the short distance we moved makes a significant difference," Poiman says.



A kids' room in a model unit at One Riverside Park, which has seen buyers interested in the range of schools nearby.

Photo: Evan Joseph Images

Barbara Witt, account director for Cottages & Gardens Publications, is likewise familiar with the joys of an improved school-day commute. Her daughter will graduate from Avenues this spring, but prior to the school's opening she had traveled each day from the family's home at 43rd and 10th Avenue to the Upper East Side's Hewitt School at Madison Avenue and 75th Street.

"I used to drive her up there every day," Witt recalls. "So I was thrilled when [Avenues opened]."

Though the Witts already lived near enough to Avenues that relocating wasn't necessary, Witt says that many of her daughter's classmates have moved from other parts of the city to buildings closer to the school.

Being close to school doesn't just mean a shorter trip back and forth during the week, says Stribling's Robert McCain. It makes life easier on off days, too.

"A lot of the other kids will [also] live in the neighborhood, so it's easy for playdates and that kind of thing," he says. "It localizes everything and sort of brings New York down to a more manageable scale."



Avenues in West Chelsea.

Photo: Christian Johnston

And for all the buzz surrounding Avenues, more established educational loci like the Upper East Side still retain their appeal, McCain says, citing the example of Philip House, Cheshire Group's condo conversion at 141 East 88th St., where he is handling sales of apartments priced from \$3.9 million to \$16 million.

"When the sponsor bought it and converted it to condominiums, we combined apartments wherever we could to make larger apartments to make it able to accommodate families," McCain says.

"And what we've found so far is that a very large number of those apartments

have been bought by people with a young child who were planning to apply to schools on the Upper East Side."

A number of UES institutions including The Chapin School, The Brearley School, The Dalton School and Trevor Day School are either pursuing or have moved into new or expanded facilities. The area's real estate offerings are growing apace. In addition to Philip House, developments like Anbau Enterprises' Citizen360 condo building (\$1.3 million to \$6.2 million) at 89th Street and First Avenue and Extell's The Kent (\$2.9 million to \$20 million-plus) at 95th and Third Avenue are on the rise.

Back in 2003, Tamarkin spearheaded a successful Upper East Side development.

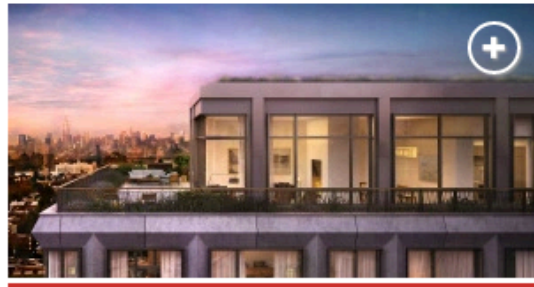
"We built a building at 47 E. 91st St. of full-floor, 4,200-square foot apartments, and those sold beautifully just because of the schools," he says. "That was a major, major draw."

Some things never change.

“There are more and more people moving into Manhattan, and it’s more and more expensive to go to the schools that exist and harder and harder to get in,” Tamarkin says. “So this is a major determiner of where people end up living.”

And it’s not just Manhattan. New schools are also drawing the attention of residents in outer borough neighborhoods like Red Hook, Brooklyn, where private school Basis Independent Brooklyn opened in 2014. At 550 Vanderbilt, where condos start at \$540,000 and top out at \$6.9 million — part of the Pacific Park complex rising in Prospect Heights — a new public middle school planned for the area is proving a draw with buyers, says Corcoran Sunshine managing director Jodi Stasse.

“People with young families are always concerned about schools,” she says. “It’s an important decision for them when they are deciding where they are going to live.”



A rendering of 550 Vanderbilt. The Pacific Park complex it's part of will include a public school.

Photo: VUW Studio