

● REALLY BIG SHOW

Boston Public

School's out — of control



The new kid on the block this season is Joey McIntyre (far right), along with (from left) Jeri Ryan, Jon Abrahams and Sharon Leal.

IT'S a typical school day for the season premiere of "Boston Public" on Monday — angry debates among the teachers, hot-button issues like teen pregnancy and prostitution, and a climactic finale that looks like a gangland battle from "West Side Story."

"They recover," laughs executive producer Jonathan Pontell. "They're very resilient at Winslow High School."

In another annual tradition for the David E. Kelley drama, the new season brings a host of new faces. For a show that's been a ratings hit from the start, "Boston Public" has had an unusually active cast list — most recently last year's add of bombshell Jeri Ryan and Michael Rapaport, among others.

This year's model includes a student turned teacher (Jon Abrahams of "Meet the Parents"), a fresh-faced newbie ready to make a difference (Michelle Monag-

han) and most notably Joey (now "Joseph") McIntyre of New Kids on the Block as Colin Flynn.

"Colin is a teacher who is very tight with the students," says Pontell, who was raised in Queens. "That irks the administration. He tries to be the cool guy and everybody calls him by his first name, and he hangs out with the kids after school on occasion."

"Joseph came in and read for a part. He's not a seasoned actor but he has a very good stage presence. We just liked his vibe. It also brings a little buzz to the show, obviously, and that can't hurt."

But a bigger buzz is already building for a four-episode arc featuring "American Idol" star Tamyra Gray.

"I'm going to direct the first episode with Tamyra," says the 55-year-old Pontell, who is married — appropriately enough — to a schoolteacher. "We'll film

it around Christmas time. We're not even sure where we're going with it but she came in and did a fabulous read. We got very excited."

Pontell readily admits they asked Gray to read simply because of the hype surrounding the summer reality phenom. That was enough to get her in the door, but by no means enough to get her on the show. People knew her name, but could she act?

"You never know," says Pontell, who became a believer. "And I was not really on board with that show. But when she came up here, it was incredible — people were in awe. You see a lot of people at a movie studio, but she certainly had a cachet when she arrived."

— Michael Giltz

Boston Public
Monday, 8 p.m., FOX