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New boys high school opens

Yeshiva Ohr Yisroel broadens Boston day school choices

By Alexandra Lapkin

Advocate Staff

A new Jewish high school for boys opened its doors this fall.

Rabbi Uri Feldman, the founder and menahel (administrator) of Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael, felt there was something missing in Boston's Jewish community when it came to Jewish day school education. "Along with several families in the community," he wrote in an email to The Jewish Advocate, "I saw a need for an all-boys high school that combines a strong Limudei Kodesh [traditional Jewish studies] curriculum with an excellent college preparatory general studies program."

With two Orthodox high schools – Maimonides School in Brookline and Mesivta High School in Brighton – already competing for students from the Greater Boston's relatively small Orthodox community, the new school may face an uphill battle. The opening of Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael may also have struck a sensitive chord, as Maimonides School declined to comment and Mesivta did not return The Jewish Advocate's phone calls.

Nonetheless, Feldman remains optimistic. "We have a very strong probability of successfully recruiting students," he wrote, citing the school's mission of combining a high-level



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religious program, with first-rate college-preparatory general studies. "Rather than choosing one of the local options, families have left Boston or have sent their sons away from the area for high school. Our high school will reduce this attrition and should help attract new families to the area." Feldman offered no figures supporting this claim, which he said is based on anecdotal evidence.

Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael is currently in its beginning stage, with only six students enrolled for the 2014-15 school year. The Orthodox school is temporarily housed at the Sephardic Community of Greater Boston on Corey Road in Brighton, until its permanent building in Chestnut Hill is completed in January of next year.

Feldman is no stranger to Jewish education in the Greater Boston area, having taught a



Rabbi Uri Feldman is the founder and principal of the new school.

high school Torah Club at Maimonides School in Brookline and a Gemara class at the Mesivta of Greater Boston. "From my past experiences teaching boys of that age," he noted, "I also saw the potential for helping them grow through inquisitive learning and personal development." Feldman also began a Gemara class at Boston University and lectures for Meor Harvard, an educational program for college students.

Peter Holland, the dean of general studies at the school is a former superintendent of the Belmont Public Schools, who will bring his expertise to the secular education curriculum, while Feldman's focus is on Judaic studies. Holland, who "was intrigued by our vision," Feldman said, was a "key motivation," to open the school.

The six students at Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael, all of whom are in

the ninth grade, come from Newton, Brookline and Brighton. And as the school grows, the administrators hope to attract students from Sharon, Providence, and the greater New England area.

Each year, the school plans to add a grade and eventually grow the class size to an average of eight to 12 students per grade. The admissions process is based on a standard level of knowledge that students are expected to have, "but more importantly applicants must be committed to the mission of the school," he said.

Tuition for this year is \$14,400 and scholarships are available for families requiring assistance. Feldman did not disclose the names of private donors or the institutions he said have contributed financially to the school.

Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael, named in honor of a book written by Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, who was the founder of the Musar (ethics) movement, has been designed with a similar philosophy as the Mesivta High School of Greater Philadelphia that also opened this month. Feldman said that he has been in touch with the head of that school throughout the past year, as they each planned their similar programs. Feldman added that he also looked to other institutions

Continued on next page

New Boston yeshiva offers a mix

Continued from previous page

for inspiration. “There are schools that are excellent in one or the other of the two areas [secular and Judaic studies], and we have learned best practices from them, too,” he said.

Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael has hired Richard Brancato, who has previously taught English and

humanities in grades six through eight at Kehillah Schechter Academy in Norwood, which closed this spring. Rabbi Dovid Bielory, the school’s ninth-grade Rebbi, has been teaching eighth grade in New England Hebrew Academy in Brookline and 11th grade in Bais Yaakov High School in Brighton for the past four years.

The goal of the new school is not only to provide equally solid foundations in Judaic and secular studies, but to combine the two curricula. “For instance, where in the Gemara or Halacha do we see the need to understand mathematical concepts?” Feldman asked. “How does knowledge of physics give us a deeper

appreciation of how Hashem created our world?”

In their first week, while students learned about the halachos of the sukkah, they have also begun learning JavaScript programming and this week developed their first Chrome app.

To learn more, visit www.ohryisrael.com.

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