

Give students a voice, says new yeshiva hire

Hillel High School's activities director touts 'investment'



Rabbi Dovid Becker is the new director of student activities at Hillel Yeshiva High School in Ocean.

Photo by Jill Huber

by [Jill Huber](#)
NJN Bureau Chief/Monmouth

October 7, 2008

Rabbi Dovid Becker, the new director of student activities at Hillel Yeshiva High School in Ocean, believes in programs that give students a voice in their own education.

“There is the concept that students move through developmental stages, such as the moral levels of cognition,” said Becker. “If you can tap into that educational philosophy, you can initiate student empowerment. You can create committees for the betterment of the school, such as a fairness committee, and the students become invested in their school.”

Becker, who was born and raised in an Orthodox home in Los Angeles, was chair of Judaics at the Shalhavet School in that city from 2000 to 2006, where he developed curricula that included innovative student activities.

“Within the school, the students helped create a democratic society,” Becker said. “I was impressed by the power that was wielded by them. The students were drawn into the process. There was a weekly town hall meeting during which they discussed topical issues. They were given a voice, and it helped to invest them in the school.”

When Becker was dean of students at Yeshiva University in Los Angeles from 2006 to 2008, he introduced some of the educational concepts he learned at the Shalhavet School.

“The idea was to enhance activities that would aid student development,” he said.

“You have to help students find their role within the school. If you find ways to invest the students and give them an opportunity to shine, they become happier, more productive, and more secure in all areas of their lives.”

Since joining the Hillel Yeshiva High School staff (Becker’s predecessor, Rabbi David Zeit, recently made aliya), Becker has observed that the dedication level of the teachers is “exceedingly high.”

“It was very heartening to see this,” he said. “At some schools, teachers don’t always want to spend any extra-curricular time with their students. But that’s not the case here. There are a lot of extra-curricular activities here that involve teachers and students. We can become good mentors who can relate to the student body.”

‘Magic of education’

During his high school years in Los Angeles, Becker said, he felt a lack of positive mentorship among the faculty members.

“I felt that I was not a person with feelings,” Becker said. “Instead, I was a student who was to be shaped and molded, but not listened to. That’s one reason I feel so strongly about the value of student investment.”

At Hillel Yeshiva, Becker feels it’s important that the students have a “qualitative” environment.

“If the students invest themselves in school committees and school activities, they learn to work together and they can become leaders,” he said. “They should work to achieve something and become involved in the planning and creation of an activity. And we must help to put a positive spin on their efforts and beliefs.”

And if a student finds himself in a quandary, the teachers must respond in an open-minded way.

“I once had a student who began to question his belief system,” Becker said. “I told him that whatever he does, he must never lose confidence in himself. I said he should try and recognize what’s stopping him or interfering with his beliefs, but his self-confidence must always remain strong.”

Becker has a powerful message for the Hillel Yeshiva high school students.

“I want to instill in the students the idea that nothing is impossible,” he said. “Education should be far-reaching and we must foster the idea that one should never regret doing good deeds.”

The yeshiva high school has multiple clubs and committees, such as a creative workshop and a fund-raising committee for student programs. In September, the students launched “Al Sefat Ha’ Yam,” a weekly student newsletter that, among other features, includes words from the Torah and is distributed to every synagogue in the vicinity.

“This project gave them a chance to shine,” Becker said. “You have to identify talent and give it an outlet. That’s the magic of education.”

Becker was ordained at Yeshiva Gedolah of Midwood, Brooklyn, in 2003. He and his wife, Devorah, and their four-year-old son, Avi, live in Oakhurst.

“There are 180 students in this high school, and I want them to be proud of themselves,” he said. “I want them to become engaged in something positive. As teachers and mentors, we can inspire them to become confident and productive. If the students want to express their appreciation about something, I tell them to go out and perform a mitzva — that’s the only appreciation I want.”