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Greater Monmouth County Feature

Yeshiva head will focus on individuals

by [Jill Huber](#)

NJJN Bureau Chief/Monmouth

Rabbi Elie Tuchman, the new head of school of the Yeshiva at the Jersey Shore, says there is no such thing as a "bad" question.

"There are poorly worded questions and there are questions that may lack structure and focus," Tuchman said, "but all questions should lead to discussion, and discussion expands the horizons of young minds."

It is a philosophy he plans to bring to the classrooms and beyond when the new school's first first-grade class gets under way this fall at the [Ruth Hyman Jewish Community Center](#) in Deal.

Tuchman has served as a teacher and administrator in a variety of locales, including Oakland, Calif., where he helped another start-up school expand from the elementary grades to include a middle school.



Along the way, he has developed an educational philosophy that focuses on the individuality of every child. "My vision is child-centered and focuses on the needs of the individual child," said Tuchman. "The result is the creation of a nurturing and challenging environment that will help children grow academically, socially, and emotionally."

Moreover, he added, the learning will not always be confined to within the traditional four walls.

"There is so much outside the classroom that is part of the learning environment," the educator said. "By embracing the outside world, kids can experience life and understand its many opportunities for learning and growth."

For example, Tuchman said, he intends to schedule field trips for the young yeshiva students that may consist of brief walks through the neighborhood to examine the wonders of nature, as well as overnight excursions to places of historical significance.

The new school, which organizers hope will eventually encompass grades one through eight, is intended to appeal to the area's Ashkenazi population. Enrollment for the first year is expected to be between 10 and 15 students.

Tuchman said there will be a strong emphasis on a core curriculum that will include math, reading, the spoken and written word, languages (English and Hebrew), social studies, science, and Judaic studies.

"We will provide an educational format that includes secular and Judaic studies," said Tuchman. "Judaic and secular excellence go together — they are flip sides of the same coin. We are Jewish-Americans, and we are American Jews."

And the text-based learning that is at the core of Judaic studies, along with the traditions inherent in the processes of Jewish study and thought, will be embraced, he said.

Throughout the entire learning process, the students will be encouraged to take risks, Tuchman said.

“Children should be stimulated enough so that they feel comfortable asking questions; as a result, they learn to think ‘outside the box,’” Tuchman explained. “They will be in an environment in which they feel safe, so that if they want to stand in front of the class and talk about a sensitive or controversial subject, they know they won’t be shot down. They’ll always feel the presence of a safety net.”

Tuchman grew up in Rockland County, NY, and after high school, spent two years in Israel. There he was involved in community outreach work that included working with Ethiopian children who had recently immigrated. When he returned to the United States, he enrolled in Yeshiva University in New York City and received a degree in computer science.

He continued working with children, however, as a counselor for the National Conference of Synagogue Youth.

In the early 1990s, he enrolled at the university’s Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education, where he obtained a master’s degree in Jewish education and administration. He was ordained in 1992 at YU’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary.

He was also awarded a master’s degree in computer science from New York University.

From 1990 to 1996, Tuchman taught Judaic studies to students in grades six-eight at the Modern Orthodox Westchester Day School in Mamaroneck, NY. He then moved to the West Coast to become head of school at Oakland (Calif.) Hebrew Day School.

“That was an exciting challenge,” Tuchman said. “When I arrived at the Oakland school, it consisted of grades K through three. In 1996, we added a fourth grade, and then grades five through eight were added in each subsequent year. Because of the expansion, we raised money and designed and built a new school building.”

In 2003, he returned to New York and became head of school at the Adolph H. Schreiber Hebrew Academy of Rockland, a Modern Orthodox day school. He is currently enrolled in a doctoral program at Azrieli, where he also supervises student teachers.

Tuchman, his wife, Suzi, and their four children, ages five to 14, will move from Rockland County to Passaic this summer. Although a new home and a new position in a new yeshiva will present challenges, Tuchman is finding a strong element of excitement in the mix.

“The kind of environment we want to build at the new yeshiva has to be created, not imposed,” he said. “It will be a Modern Orthodox Ashkenazi day school, and that’s an exciting concept for kids, parents, teachers, and administrators. We’ll have the freedom and flexibility to try new things. That’s a fantastic prospect.”

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