



An educational publication  
brought to you by PTACH

# vistas

INSIDE

Project Chai

How Do You Measure Success?

It's All About Relationships

Grit, Gratitude & Growth

One Student at a Time

FALL, 2019

Utilizing a team  
approach.  
Educating the  
whole child.



director's message

**Dr. Judah Weller, Ed.D.**

# Every Child Unique

**Each Program A  
World Of Its Own**

**The story of PTACH is the story of hope, ambition, hard work, and resilience.**

It's the story of challenges overcome, and goals met. It's the story of children learning

how to read, and young adults preparing for marriage and careers. Most of all, it's the story of outstanding achievement and success.

After 40 years, PTACH continues to be a trailblazer in the world of education.

Today, PTACH is proud to have a vibrant presence in several educational institutions - model programs - each one uniquely designed for the students that it serves. Every program is different, each curriculum is one of a kind. Every staff member in each of our programs is filled with a passion and an enthusiasm that is unrivaled in the field of education.

If you visit one of our programs, you would witness firsthand how every child in our program is treated in a wholly exclusive manner. From the one-on-one sessions with reading specialists to the social skills training with social workers, to the regents prep with math teachers, to the heart-to-heart talks with program coordinators - we spare no effort in ensuring that each student attain an elevated level of personal excellence and success.

Our programs work so well because although we are committed to academic excellence, we are determined to educate not just the student, but the whole child. By honing in on and developing individual skills, talents and strengths, we nurture the social, spiritual, and emotional growth of our students. The effect is profound; growth from learning then inspires, elevates, enriches and ultimately empowers our students in every area of life.

When we work with the whole child and dig beyond the surface to discover underlying issues, we are sure to discover more viable, effective solutions. Success is then marked not just by the scores on top of test papers, but also by smiles, self confidence, and maturity that leads to a stable and successful adulthood.

Our graduates often come back to visit, showing us their growing families and their burgeoning careers. Years after leaving school, they stay in touch and maintain contact with their teachers from PTACH. Because we're not just a program; we're like a family.

✉ [ptachdrw@aol.com](mailto:ptachdrw@aol.com) ☎ (718) 854.8600 x102

programs

## How do we help our students succeed?

That is the question that is on the minds of the first cohort of 14 Rabbeim who are currently hard-at-work training with CHAI (Chinuch Advancement Initiative), a new program that will help teachers to better deal with children who have learning challenges and social-emotional difficulties.

**M**any students struggle through years of schooling only to leave school without the resources and skills needed to become successful and confident adults who are knowledgeable about and proud of their Yiddishkeit. To combat this problem, Rabbi Moshe Greenspan, a senior eighth grade Rebbe and mentor at Yeshiva Ketanah of Long Island, founded Project CHAI. The program lasting several months is hosted by Yeshiva Ketanah. The program is divided into two parts: academic and behavioral.

The educational component is presented by Dr. Judah Weller, who is a trained facilitator and Educational Director of PTACH. He explains that the program teaches

Rebbeim, “How to become keen observers of the learning process, to understand deeply how students learn - how to be specific about student’s strengths and weaknesses.” Specificity is critical and the goal is to create management plans based on the needs of each child. Dr. Weller adds, this is not a program for learning specialists. It is geared for, “regular classroom teachers, no matter how many students are in the class.” It promotes flexibility in thinking about student learning.

The program covers a neurodevelopmental framework recognizing that all children develop and learn differently. It is based on the latest scientific research in education. The framework looks at 8 different

pathways of learning such as memory, language, attention and organizational skills. Rebbeim are regularly faced with students who present these very challenges. Dr. Weller stresses that this is not a diagnostic program but empowers teachers “to know enough about the learning process to recognize where kids are struggling.” As one participant in the program expressed it: “As teachers we are so focused on our curriculum goals, when really we need to prepare by starting on the other end- who are our students?”

Dr. Weller emphasized that this program is not presented in lecture format, rather, it takes a constructivist approach – building knowledge from the participants, which ultimately leads to the most effective change in the classroom. Each week the Rebbeim implement new ideas and strategies and then report on their accomplishments. Dr. Weller gives great credit to the Rebbeim, who are “very involved and very enthusiastic.” A new world is open to them and they are working diligently to achieve a higher level of teaching.” One Rebbe related, “I want you to know that I share many of the techniques and discussions with my principal and fellow Rebbeim. I absolutely love coming each week and want to thank you for everything!” Another Rebbe stated, “I gained a wealth of knowledge into understanding the root of the issues that many of my students struggle with.”

Helping one student in a class will help many! A Rebbe who is always thinking about his students in an organized and knowledgeable way will certainly have a positive effect on student behavior and long-term attitudes.”

**“As one participant in the program expressed it: “As teachers we are so focused on our curriculum goals, when really we need to prepare by starting on the other end- who are our students?”**



# How Do You Measure Success?

**Ahuva is having reading issues. And Saraleh finds it difficult to make friends. Batya is acting out in class. So it would seem that Batya's issues are disciplinary, Ahuva may be dealing with a learning disability, and Saraleh needs social skills training.**

But things are not always as they seem, says Mrs. Miriam (Kulik) Serkez, M.S. Coordinator of PTACH at Bais Yaakov D'Rav Meir (BYDM) in Brooklyn. And children are much more complex and multi-faceted than we might think. That's why it takes a team of seasoned professionals, skilled therapists, and well-informed experts working together to recognize and evaluate the source of a child's issues. That's where PTACH comes in.

PTACH, an integral part of BYDM for decades, is widely recognized for its outstanding success... but how is success measured? But how do you measure success? According to Mrs. Serkez, there's no actual 'cure'

for a learning challenge. But there are a wide range of methods and techniques, that can be taught so that students can reach their greatest potential in every aspect of their lives, including academic, social, spiritual, and emotional. In other words, they will emerge healthy, happy, mature, responsible, and self-confident. Isn't that what everybody wants?

Over the years, countless methods have been utilized in the world of special education and many are effective and helpful to some degree. But, Mrs. Serkez is careful to explain that, "methods don't teach; teachers teach." And those teachers should be both passionate

and professional in serving their students' needs. They also should think out of the box. For example, Mrs. Serkez discusses a common condition called dyslexia, which affects 5 to 15% of American students. "Most people think it's a visually based condition," she explains. "But often it's auditory which means that the child is having trouble discriminating sounds or processing them correctly. In other words, many variables go into these issues."

That's why it's imperative to evaluate the whole child, not just academic but also social, emotional, and spiritual background of each individual child as well as their family situation. At PTACH of BYDM, they take this to the next level. A team of highly skilled specialists, together with assistant coordinator, Samantha Tucker, M.A., evaluates the students on every aspect of their development. Then they gather together until they

# Looking at the "Whole" Child

emerge with a comprehensive plan that identifies the source of the problem and offers viable solutions.

Much emphasis is placed on auditory skills, using a program called 'earobics' which addresses language processing skills. "So many kids are weak in that area," Mrs. Serkez points out. "And yet so much of learning is auditory-based, especially in the later years when we rely heavily on lectures." The program also utilizes cutting-edge reading programs based on Orton-Gillingham called "Read Right." There are different levels of auditory challenges and many solutions that can be customized and personalized to address the needs of individual students.

Sometimes it's the little things that make a big difference. A student with an attention disorder sits on a balloon cushion which keeps her grounded and ultimately a more efficient learner. Another student

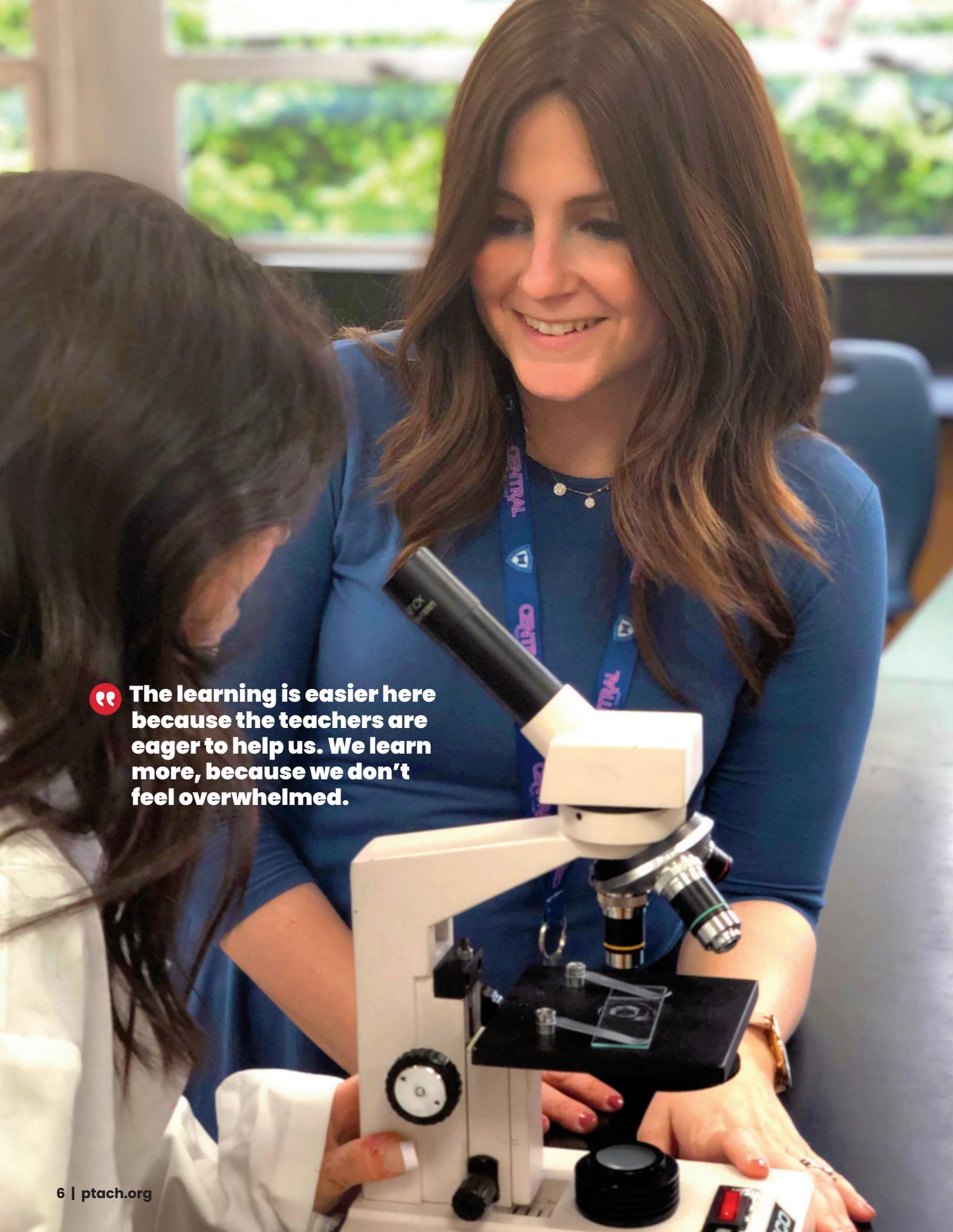
who is hyperactive or has trouble focusing carries a heavy package to a certain destination. "Carrying a heavy item has been proven to help with focus and concentration which translates into more productive and positive academic results." The program's Occupational Therapist, Sharon Tepfer, M.S. OTR/L. M.S., neuropsychology, utilizes Touch for Health techniques and the ILS, Integrated Learning Systems (which works on rewiring the brain, a process known as neuroplasticity) as well as the Safe and Sound protocol, to help children open up to the learning process.

PTACH is unique in that it addresses the students' spiritual needs as well. "People sometimes wonder what this has to do with learning," says Mrs. Serkez. "But it's an essential part of the program. Everything has to do with everything." "Kids need to feel like they're part of a

culture and to be exposed to normal Yeshiva education. Otherwise they will feel increasingly isolated from their families and communities.

Most important, says Mrs. Serkez, is "demystification." The girls are taught to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, to highlight their assets and take advantage of their special qualities. This will be an important predictor of future success. "Imagine if we could all understand the mystery of who we are. It's all about resiliency and self-awareness." It's also the ultimate expression of empowerment.

In this way, she adds, students can be their own best advocate. "They'll be okay with who they are. If a class is difficult, they will have the tools they need to learn at their own pace. If a social situation is too overwhelming they'll know how to deal with it. And best of all, they will be comfortable with who they are."



**The learning is easier here because the teachers are eager to help us. We learn more, because we don't feel overwhelmed.**

# IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

PTACH@YESHIVA UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

**T**he PTACH office at Yeshiva University High School for Girls is best described as cozy. It's located on the second floor of the school building, wedged between the gym and a school corridor. The room is lined with bookcases, a few desks with chairs, and an oversized copy machine. Teachers and students can be found learning together, often lingering to chat or perhaps even to share a joke or two.

But the laid-back atmosphere shouldn't fool anyone. The girls, grades 9 through 12, who are enrolled in this Queens based program and their dedicated teachers wouldn't have it any other way. Because in this comfortable little space, they learn, they dream, they grow and connect with each other, and look forward to a bright and successful future. The students work hard, as all high-schoolers do, putting in a full day until 5:10 PM. But it's not just about the books, the classes, and the Regents exams. It's about transforming young women into confident, passionate, and happy young adults.

Mrs. Jacqueline Welkowitz, the coordinator at this program, has seen hundreds of students come and go. She says she still maintains a relationship with many of them, whether attending a wedding of a graduate, inviting an alumna to visit, or simply catching up with a former student through an email or a phone call.

There is a strong emphasis on

making connections and building relationships here, a key component of this program. Shira, a student, explains that, "the learning is easier here because the teachers are so eager to help us. So we learn more, because we don't feel overwhelmed." Her friend Alysha adds, "They don't leave your side."

"It's all about relationships," says Mrs. Meira Winter, PTACH Mechanechet. "The girls realize how much we care. I tell them that I don't care about the marks they may have gotten in the past. I care about the process of growth. Our students understand that I truly want what's best for them."

Many of the PTACH students excel at extracurricular activities and are given a chance to shine outside of the classroom in the many mainstream programs. One student heads the photography club, others have been color war captains, and many have made the cut to become members of sports teams. Tikvah, a twelfth grader, says she joined the 'Adopt-A-Bubby' program and Sara, a freshman, is on the soccer team.

They thrive in both social and academic areas because of PTACH's emphasis on self-assurance. "Until now," says Tikvah, "I didn't believe in myself. But in this program, the teachers focus on me and work with me. I am now a lot more confident in myself."

"The teaching," says Mrs. Shani Winokur who teaches Navi, "is the easy part. We need to do this balancing act, getting to know the

girls without prying. It takes time, you need to have patience, and the end result is that we see a lot of nachas. The girls really blossom."

The faculty speaks with tremendous pride about former students who have become super successful. Whether it be Rachel who is a social worker in Queens, Tamara the small business owner, Estee who graduated college with a major in biology and has been accepted to a sonography program, Chava the elementary school teacher, or Naomi who works for a financial firm in the greater Washington DC area and was the valedictory speaker at her college graduation, the feeling of pure joy is evident amongst the staff.

Friendships naturally blossom when self-confidence increases.

"I made more friends since I'm here," says Ahuva, a tenth grader, "both in this program and in the mainstream school. I feel better about myself and I'm more open than I used to be."

"I have better friendships," says Malky, another student. "I'm more confident because our classes are small and it's easier to connect with people." Ever since she's been in the program, she adds, she looks forward to coming to school.

Amy says that before she started the program, "I came home crying to my mom after school. I was so overwhelmed. But at PTACH, I learned skills and I got new confidence. Now I know that I'm not a failure."

A simple statement from a struggling student, but one that speaks volumes.

A close-up photograph of a basketball hoop and a basketball. The basketball is in the foreground, slightly out of focus, and is orange with black lines. The hoop and net are in the background, with the net being white and the hoop being orange. The lighting is warm and golden, creating a soft glow. In the top left corner, there is an orange rectangular box with the text "mental health" in white lowercase letters.

mental health

# Grit, Grat & Growth

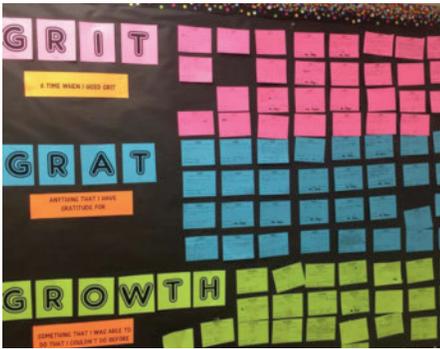
**How PTACH at Chaim Berlin  
Empowers Students  
to Succeed**

**T**here are stacks of colorful cards sitting on the corner of Rabbi Reuven Kamin's desk at PTACH of Chaim

Berlin, and they probably get more attention than anything else in the room. Rabbi Kamin is the Program Coordinator at PTACH, and his office is where students show up when they have questions, seek encouragement, or just need to unwind. More often than not, students are offered the opportunity to take a card, fill it out, and attach it to the bulletin board in the hallway. The board is bursting with these cards, and if you take a closer look, you will see that they are all representative of one of the program's favorite mottos: Grit. Grat. Growth.

"Grit," says Rabbi Kamin, "is crucial for success. Studies have shown that those who have a higher grit index, who can persevere in the face of adversity, will be more successful than people with a higher IQ." Successful people are resilient, determined, and don't give up easily. A fundamental goal at PTACH in Chaim Berlin is to "demystify" students, thereby building resilience in kids who may feel helpless when success doesn't come naturally and easily. "We afford the students opportunities to explore the grit of a character in a story, or even better, someone we respect - a Talmid Chacham or a Torah figure. "We're seeing durable changes, changes that will remain a part of their lives years down the road. What they do here is super important, but I want it to last so they'll know how to resolve conflicts, how to collaborate, and eventually how to communicate well as teenagers and adults."

"Grat, or gratitude," is also an important indicator of emotional health. "Studies have shown that people with gratitude live healthier, longer lives," Rabbi Kamin points out. "The more one elaborately acts on gratitude, the greater the effect it has on his learning and emotional wellbeing." That's why there's a thankfulness section on the bulletin board where students



are encouraged to write their personal thank you notes about something they are grateful for. Students are encouraged to acknowledge their accomplishments and areas of growth. If a student is more aware of the effects that their successes have on their feelings and emotions, learning then becomes an intrinsic value. “We use rewards as a tool to teach this concept,” says Mrs. Schwed, Assistant Coordinator, who encourages the boys to pay attention while they are enjoying the reward. “It’s a technique for developing mindfulness,” she explains. “We bring our students’ attention to what they are experiencing. Eventually we transition students’ awareness to general feelings and emotions as a way to help them manage them more productively.” The goal is not necessarily to develop a taste for rewards but rather to develop a mindful and focused approach to life. This is just one of countless teaching opportunities at PTACH in Chaim Berlin and is an indication that the program’s mission is to provide a ‘holistic’ approach to learning and growth. “We could be addressing

**“When we know what they’re good at, we can connect to them through that medium.”**

the academic needs of the students,” says Rabbi Kamin, “and we do. But there’s so much more to each individual boy than academics. Kids are very complex. There are social, emotional health, and family issues that are affecting them. If we do not deal with the other issues, then we are not educating them for life.” That’s why the staff at PTACH Chaim Berlin offers a team approach to learning, which includes detailed cross-disciplinary staff meetings and where each staff member can offer a piece of the puzzle. There’s a huge emphasis on positivity at the Chaim Berlin program, and a deliberate effort to recognize the qualities and strengths of each child. “When we know what they’re good at, we can connect to them through that medium.” This has dramatic implications in the classroom as well. Linking the

curriculum with a student’s affinities brings cultural relevance and raises the student’s attentiveness. All these underlying messages do not deter from the very real learning that is going on at PTACH in Chaim Berlin. In Rabbi Roth’s class, six boys are studying the melacha of bishul, and the lesson segues into a discussion about opening the refrigerator door on Shabbos. The boys also learn Gemorah, with the assistance of visual aids, photos, magnets, and illustrations to help them understand the more complex concepts. Mrs. Gastfreund is the curriculum coordinator at PTACH in Chaim Berlin. She is often asked which specific reading program is used here and she explains that it’s not one size fits all, “We’ll tweak, combine and custom design a curriculum for every kid.” She acknowledges that this may be a lengthy and involved process, but it’s also the most beneficial way to reach every single child. “We sometimes sit up at night to prepare these customized lessons,” she says. And then she adds, “These are probably the hardest working teachers on the planet.”

# One Student at a Time

Building Life Skills in  
the PTACH Program  
at YUHS for Boys

Yeshiva University High School for Boys is well known for its high-standard Lemudei Kodesh Program and rigorous academic program in both the Jewish and General Studies. Housed together within the same majestic building in upper Manhattan, a PTACH program thrives.

"I have two academic goals," says Rabbi Baruch Feder, Coordinator of the PTACH program for high school boys. "One is to help the boys earn a high school diploma. The other is to teach them the skills and strategies in both Lemudei Kodesh and Lemudei Chol that they will need for future success."

These two goals are not mutually exclusive. Every day, students learn Chumash, Gemorah, Mishna and Halacha in addition to their regular classes in English, History, Math, Science and Gymnastics. They may also be learning how to cook shnitzel and how to write a resume.

In two classrooms Rabbi Feman and Rabbi Loiterman are teaching Gemorah. Questions such as, "Can Coca Cola be used for Havdalah or in a very different halachic domain, regarding whether or not one can look at the information on someone else's computer?" A short discussion ensues. "We make the boys become successful at understanding Gemorah by distilling the sugyah into smaller, more manageable parts. They discover that they can gain skills they thought were unattainable before they came here. Together with the Halachos of daily life and Yom Tovim, we teach the boys business Halacha and Halachos of Bain Adam Lechavero. These are all life skills for a well-rounded frum boy." An emphasis is put on the transition into college life and professional life so that they can act as frum Jews working in the modern world."

Rabbi Feder's ultimate goal is to prepare these students for the future. Some will continue on to learn in Yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel, others will attend a two-year or four-year college, and still others will enter the work force directly. In all cases, crucial life skills will help them achieve success.

"I give a cooking class four days a week," Rabbi Blackstein says.. "We alternate days between developing the menu and cooking. The focus is on teamwork. We all work together while planning, following directions and cleaning up afterwards. This is how we build life skills."

 An emphasis is put on the transition into college life and professional life so that they can act as frum Jews working in the modern world."

Down the hall, Mrs. Jacobovits, a reading specialist, is coaching a student on how to properly write an essay. Her goal, she says, is to turn out polished and proper prose which she feels is crucial for a successful future. "If these boys will be looking for a job, they will need a basic vocabulary to express themselves properly." She guides her students with endless patience. "You build slowly," she explains, "from the ground up. First you lay the foundation with vocabulary. Then you build the upper floors."

Directly across the hall, is an Earth Science class and Social Studies class. Both Rabbi Goldberg and Mrs. Doiny don't lecture to their students. Instead, they encourage students to think. Another popular class at PTACH is Business Math, taught by Mr. Kujawski. Here's where academics and life skills seamlessly merge. Mr. K teaches the boys how to write checks and how to recognize the difference between debit and credit cards. They also learn the basics of mortgages,

They also learn the basics of mortgages, borrowing and investing. "This class really prepares them for the future," he says.

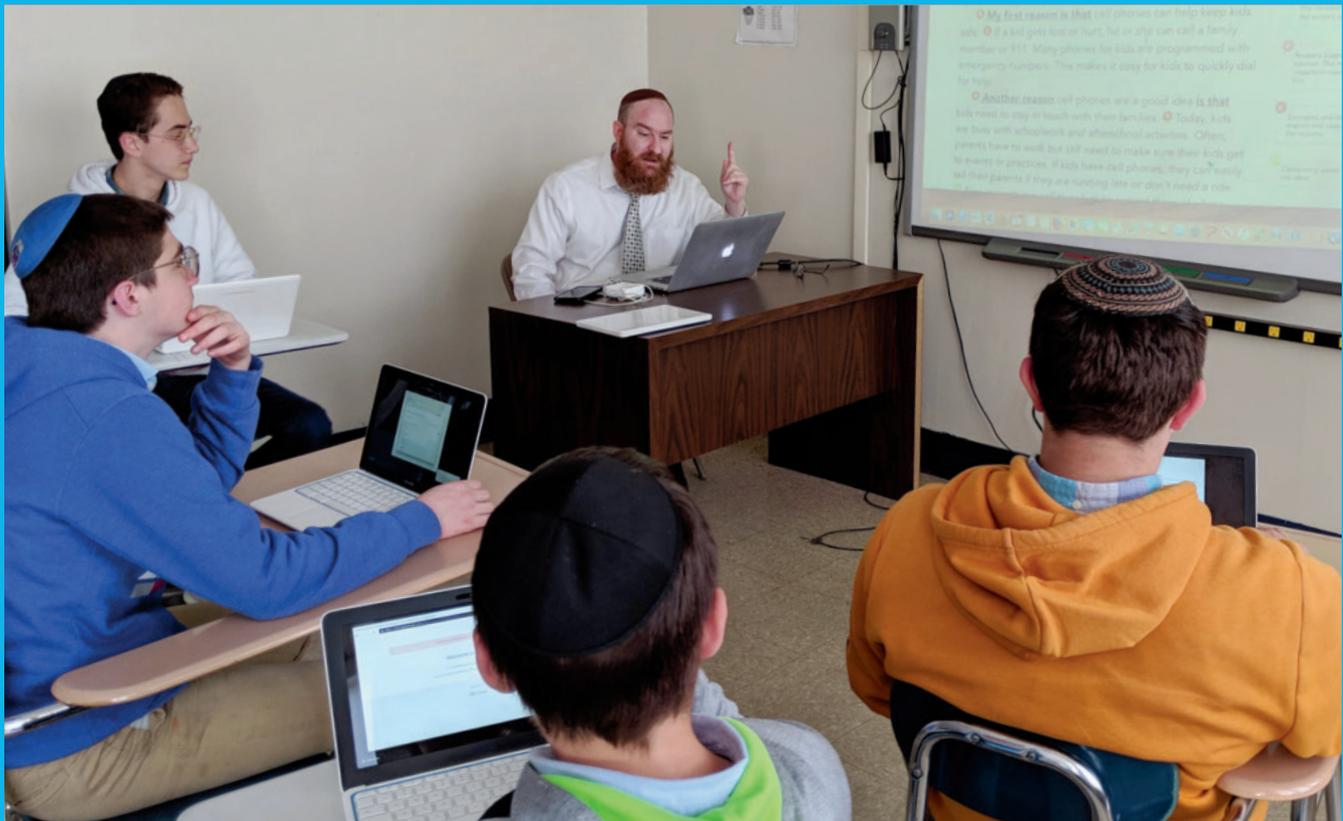
borrowing and investing. "This class really prepares them for the future," he says.

Mr. Schepansky, the in-house social worker at PTACH, makes sure that the students' emotional needs are met. "Every boy has the opportunity to meet with me on an individual basis," he says. He also runs group sessions to help the boys acquire and practice proper social skills. "The boys learn to overcome shyness, anxiety, and fear of rejection. For years they have struggled in school, convinced that they cannot make it. They've been through years of being put down, both socially and academically. I teach them that they can learn. "I'll explain to them that some of the world's

most successful businessmen also struggled in school, and look at where they are now. I work with the students to develop their own personal talents and strengths."

A recent graduate of the program was diagnosed with ADHD and, says Rabbi Feder, "he couldn't sit still." Today he's working as an electrician "and he's doing really well. He uses all that energy to wire skyscrapers. It's the perfect career path for him."

Each student's individual challenges and strengths are addressed. Boys are placed into mainstream Shiurim or classes where appropriate. Students are encouraged to participate in mainstream extracurricular activities. Rabbi Feder explains, "I juggle their schedules, coordinate with the teachers and provide extra assistance to make it all work smoothly. It's an indication of the great lengths that PTACH staff members will go to see their students achieve success. "We're here to help them," says Rabbi Feder. "We're all on one team."





Parents for Torah for All Children  
 1689 East 5th Street  
 Brooklyn, NY 11230



## Dear Dr. Weller & P'TACH Staff,

JAN 28, 2019

There are no words to express our sincere gratitude for all you did for our daughter who was a student in P'TACH approximately 15 years ago. She entered your program as a fifth grader with terribly poor reading skills and a lack of confidence to match.

I specifically recall one evening during that time period when my husband and I came home to find her reading on the couch way past her bedtime. My husband's first reaction was to immediately send her to bed. However, I immediately brought his attention to focus on the new, wonderful phenomenon that was taking place before our eyes. I said, "Tatty, look, she's actually reading for pleasure! Let her continue..."

As parents of a child who was once unsuccessful and unhappy, we are overflowing with gratitude to the Ribono Shel Olam for having given us this special gift of turning that precious daughter into an outstanding, happy mother of 3 children, ka"h, whose husband is learning and teaching. She is a pride to us and Klal Yisrael.

May you be zoche to successfully continue building Yiddishe kinderlach with bricks of bitachon, love and fortitude for many years to come.

SINCERELY YOURS,

*Rabbi & Mrs. E.*

**Could  
your child  
benefit from  
small classes &  
individualized  
learning?**

**Come visit our program &  
make an informed decision!**

**Bais Yaakov D'Rav Meir**  
85 Parkville Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11230  
Mrs. Miriam Serkez, M.A.

**Yeshivas Rabbi Chaim Berlin**  
Elementary School  
1310 Avenue I  
High School  
1593 Coney Island Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11230  
Rabbi Reuven Kamin, M.A.

**Yeshiva University  
High School for Boys**  
2540 Amsterdam Avenue  
New York, NY 10033  
Rabbi Baruch Feder M.S.

**Yeshiva University  
High School for Girls**  
86-86 Palo Alto Street  
Holliswood, NY 11423  
Mrs. Jacqueline  
Welkowitz MS.M.Ed

[ptach.org](http://ptach.org) (718)854.8600

PTACH Main Office: 1689 East 5th Street | Brooklyn NY 11230

**Does your  
employer  
offer a**



**matching gifts  
program?**

Donate now. Help secure a Jewish child's future. Simply obtain a form from your company's matching gift coordinator and send it to

PTACH: 1689 East 5th Street | Brooklyn NY 11230