

TOURO ALUMNUS WHO TURNED AROUND ONE OF NYC'S MOST VIOLENT SCHOOLS LAUNCHES REVOLUTIONARY PUBLIC SCHOOL MODEL

BY GAIL SCHILLER

AS SHIMON WARONKER approached Junior High School 22 in the South Bronx on his very first day as principal in the fall of 2004, he witnessed police arresting a student for assaulting a teacher.

In his first year at JHS 22, Mr. Waronker had a student arrested for beating up another student so badly that the victim lost partial brain function and vision in one eye. Mr. Waronker refused to arrange for the arrested teen's release even after the student's father, who had just been freed from prison, came to the school and warned Mr. Waronker that he "would be a dead man" if he didn't get the boy released.

Later that same year, Mr. Waronker returned to JHS 22 from a principals' conference to find the police trying to restore order after a group of students belonging to the Bloods gang attacked the school's offices where a student from the Crips gang had sought refuge.

But after just two years as principal of what was then one of New York City's failing and most violent schools, Mr. Waronker, a strictly observant Jew from the *Chabad Lubavitch* movement and an alumnus of Touro College's Graduate School of Education, astonished New York City Department of Education officials when he managed to transform JHS 22 into a flourishing middle school that scored an A on its annual school report card. By 2008, Mr. Waronker had attracted national media attention and won a vast array of awards due to his extraordinary success.

It was no small feat considering that gangs dominated JHS 22, The Jordan L. Mott Junior High School, the school had gone through six different principals in the two years prior to Mr. Waronker's arrival, and JHS 22 was on the list

of the 12 most violent schools in New York City as well as the New York State list of failing schools. It was also Mr. Waronker's first job as a public school principal, and many skeptics thought the Department of Education had lost its figurative mind when it decided to send an ultra-Orthodox *Chasidic* Jew to run a predominantly minority school in the South Bronx.

Now, Mr. Waronker, an alumnus of the MS in School Leadership Program at Touro College's Graduate School of Education, has taken on yet another extremely challenging mission with the same resolve and determination but this time the goal is much loftier than turning around a single troubled school.

After completing his first year at Harvard University's Urban Superintendents Doctoral Program in 2008-2009 and then





interning for a year with former New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein in 2009-2010 as part of the Harvard doctoral program, Mr. Waronker has launched a completely new cutting-edge public school model right in his own neighborhood of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, that he hopes will prove so successful that it will eventually replace the current New York City public school format.

With former Chancellor Klein's full support, Mr. Waronker, 42, opened The New American Academy at Lincoln Terrace Park, P.S. 770, this past fall with 127 students in kindergarten and first grade. An additional grade will be added each year up to grade 5.

The goal is to expand the new model,

developed by Mr. Waronker and five of his cohorts in the Harvard doctoral program (where Mr. Waronker is a Presidential Fellow), to numerous other New York City public schools within the next five years, possibly as soon as 2012. Mr. Waronker and his team also hope to eventually expand the model—a partnership of the New York City Department of Education, Harvard University and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT)—nationally and even internationally. Many school districts in other states and countries have already expressed interest in adopting the educational format, which won the 2009 Phi Delta Kappa award for innovation in education.

“My hope is that we will have a better way of helping to develop our citizens than the current educational system and I believe that can happen through The New American Academy,” Mr. Waronker told *Touro Links* in an interview. “The goal is to empower children and unleash their potential and to help transform education so that kids have access to opportunities in life. We designed a very different system to produce a very different result. We want citizens who can innovate and lead to make this a better world.”

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Shimon Waronker teaching a class at JHS 22 in the South Bronx

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Former Chancellor Klein, who was so impressed by Mr. Waronker’s success at turning JHS 22 around that he had made him his personal protégé, said, “The New American Academy is an innovative, potentially powerful way to provide education to children. It is both brilliant and scalable and holds out the hope of changing K-12 education in major ways. This is a big idea, something we desperately need if we are going to change the educational outcomes for our children.”

Mr. Klein had paid a visit to The New American Academy last October before he resigned as Chancellor on Dec. 31, 2010. “Although The New American Academy had only been open for two months, it was easy for me to see that the school culture Shimon is cultivating has enormous potential,” he told *Touro Links*. “We need innovation—new ideas, new practices, new products—to take our game to a different level for students. In the 21st century, it’s going to take big ideas and big thinkers like Shimon to solve the education crisis that is diminishing the greatness of our country.”

A GROUNDBREAKING EDUCATIONAL MODEL IN THE NYC PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

The New American Academy, whose student body is roughly 90 percent African-American and 10 percent Hispanic, is introducing numerous cutting-edge innovations into the New York City public school system, many of which have been utilized elsewhere but never all together in one individual educational model.

“Many have experimented with one piece of the educational reform pie, but Shimon is pulling from so many new and creative models of education that the pie he is baking is truly innovative and unique,” said Eileen McGowan, director of the field experience program and a lecturer on education at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, who has participated in teacher training for The New American Academy.

“I think Shimon has the on-the-ground expertise to put all of it in motion,” she added. “Will there be a learning curve? Of course. Will the model evolve? For sure. But given Shimon’s commitment, his experience and the quality of the people he’s engaging, I have very high hopes for The New American Academy’s success. It truly can be revolutionary.”

Indeed, based on the initial responses from both the students and teachers, The New American Academy seems very likely to succeed. “I have a very good feeling about this school,” said first grade apprentice teacher Kathleen Kearns, who worked for Goldman Sachs for 28 years before leaving her position as a vice president in the operations division to become a teacher. “I think this school has a sense of purpose. I like the collaborative aspect of the instruction, especially as a new teacher. The master teacher serves as a mentor for me. In a typical school, I would be in the classroom alone. I also like that we loop with the children so that way we’ll really get to know them and understand their needs as opposed to having to spend every September getting to know a new group of children.”

Kindergarten teacher Pepe Gutierrez,

a “partner teacher” who was hired by and worked with Mr. Waronker at JHS 22 in the South Bronx, said teachers at The New American Academy have been intricately involved in transforming Mr. Waronker’s vision for the school into a reality, and as a result, are feeling empowered. “I think that’s the key to the school’s success,” said Mr. Gutierrez, who worked as a broker on Wall Street for five years before becoming a teacher. “Empowering teachers means we have a stake and a say in how things go and that’s why we’re able to do what’s best for the kids. Our entire team has been involved from the beginning and has worked together to make this happen.”

Five-year-old first grade student Em Tilly Gordon said she feels like she’s learning a great deal with so many teachers in the classroom. “It’s also nice to have so many kids because then I can make new friends every day.”

On a recent visit to the school, the two classes at The New American Academy were divided into numerous groups as they worked on separate lessons with different teachers in oversized, spacious classrooms originally built for the “open school” teaching model. But the size of the classrooms and the large number of students and teachers were not the only factors that made it evident that this was no ordinary New York City public school.

Mr. Waronker served the children their lunches and he and the entire teaching staff ate lunch with the children even though it is not part of the teachers’ contractual obligation to do so. “Our teachers are very dedicated,” Mr. Waronker said. “We eat lunch family style with the children because it helps our relationships with them and that is what this school is all about—developing relationships with the children.”

Toward the end of their lunch period, the kindergarten and first grade students shouted out the school’s official motto in unison. “I am unique and special. I have a purpose in life. Together we can make this a better world.” The New American Academy students recite that motto twice

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EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS BEING IMPLEMENTED AT THE NEW AMERICAN ACADEMY INCLUDE:

- Trilingual education in English, French and Spanish, with classes being taught on a rotating trilingual schedule to advance students’ cognitive abilities and allow for future economic success (Trilingual education is utilized in many European schools)
- A classroom structure of roughly 60 students being taught by four teachers (a 15:1 student-teacher ratio) including one master teacher, ensuring that a highly-qualified teacher will be present in every classroom, that novice teachers are always under the supervision of an experienced teacher, that teachers can learn from one another, and that a team of four instructors collaborates to plan for each child in the classroom every day (There is an elementary school in Australia that implements collaborative teaching with 120 students and five teachers)
- A teaching team that will remain with the same group of 60 students from kindergarten through grade 5, eliminating the annual September “learning curve” during which teachers and students struggle to adjust to one another (This approach, also called “looping,” is utilized by the Waldorf private schools)
- Differentiated instruction that allows most special education students to participate in each classroom, with two of the four teachers in each classroom special education teachers and the students divided into nine different learning group levels
- A tiered career ladder for teachers that provides for promotions based on merit rather than seniority in order to attract top talent (The New American Academy pays first or second-year “apprentice” teachers an average of \$50,000 and master teachers up to \$120,000. Typical New York City public school teachers with the maximum combination of experience—22 years—and education—a doctorate degree—earn as much as \$100,049, according to the Department of Education’s website)
- A focus on developing leadership skills to give students the tools they need to both succeed in the world and change it
- An approach to teaching in which the students are the center of the classroom, not the teacher
- An emphasis on technology with students learning computer programming and internet skills beginning in first grade (In later grades, students will learn how such systems as plumbing, electricity, refrigeration and combustion engines work as part of thematic learning units that include communication, transportation, engineering, energy, agriculture and medicine)
- Student-initiated learning, which allows students to help decide the subject matter of each course. Students learn elected topics chosen by consensus such as how paper or glass is made or how a nearby building is constructed in an interdisciplinary fashion so that state standards and mandatory subjects such as reading, writing and mathematics are incorporated within those lessons. (This teaching method is based on the more complex Reggio Emilia Approach, which was developed in Italy and is the hallmark of elite private schools like Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire)
- A discussion-based style of teaching, known as the Harkness table, in which students sit at a large, oval table along with their teachers who encourage them to contribute ideas of their own to the lessons. The teacher serves as the moderator and students learn from one another as they suggest their own ideas and solutions to complex problems or questions posed in such fields as history, mathematics, science and current events. (Elements of this teaching method will be used with younger grades but genuine Harkness table learning, which was developed at Phillips Exeter Academy, will take place in the upper grades)



A unique principal, Mr. Waronker helps serve students lunch. Right, first grade students work on lesson in oversized classroom with assistance from apprentice teacher Kathleen Kearns



a day, during both breakfast and lunch.

Another factor making the school unique is that 20 percent of the students have either physical or cognitive special needs. “This is an inclusion model,” said Mr. Waronker. “Even in a special education classroom, nobody differentiates the learning this much. I believe very strongly that we need to be sensitive to all children and that the children need to be sensitive to others and understand that everybody’s valuable. We’re all one community and we all help one another out. I believe that’s very important.”

EFFORTS TO REMAKE THE NYC AND U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEMS

According to Mr. Waronker, the current public school educational system with one-teacher classrooms and a strict hierarchy of power is antiquated, based on the educational model designed in the Kingdom of Prussia in the 1750s by a government that hoped to control its citizens and make them subservient to the king. Renamed the industrial model after its adoption in the United States, this educational system designed to control students through isolation and prepare them to work on factory assembly lines—with factory-like bell-ringing to alert students to changes in class periods—was updated but not changed in the 1920s.

“The fact that our classrooms haven’t changed in almost one hundred years is shameful,” states The New American Academy brochure. “Even more shameful are education statistics that prove that not only is this industrial model antiquated, it is failing our nation’s children.”

Mr. Waronker said future expansion of The New American Academy model will help determine whether it can be successfully replicated in other New York City public schools in the hopes of eventually changing not just the public school system in New York City but across the country.

“We want to learn not just whether the school is effective but whether or not it is scalable. Can it replace the current Prussian/Industrial design; is it economically feasible? Is it producing better results for children? I think we need to learn a lot from this process. We think we have the answer but we want to see the results and then the results will be indisputable. If the school is successful,

the hope is that we can change the educational system in New York and beyond.”

Beyond his own astonishing track record of success, Mr. Waronker has good reason to believe The New American Academy will succeed based on two research studies in the field of education. The Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) study conducted by the Tennessee Department of Education found that if the teacher-student ratio is reduced to about 15:1 in kindergarten through grade 2, there is a .3 to .45 deviation in improvement, meaning a child learns 30 to 45 percent more in one school year, according to Mr. Waronker.

Another study conducted by Professor Charles Clotfelter at Duke University demonstrated that if you have a quality teacher in the classroom, there is a .5 to .9 standard deviation in improvement, or 1.5 to 1.9 years of improvement within a school year. “This is huge,” said Mr. Waronker. “We know intuitively that if you have a really good teacher

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TOURO'S GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION LAYS FOUNDATION FOR SHIMON WARONKER'S STUNNING SUCCESS

While people like former NYC Schools Chancellor Joel Klein credit Shimon Waronker for the innovative ideas and daring leadership style that led to his enormous success at revitalizing JHS 22 and attempting one of boldest experiments ever in reforming the NYC public school system, Mr. Waronker credits Touro College for leading the way.

He says Touro's Graduate School of Education provided him with the exceptional practitioner-based education, collaborative teaching models and innovative, values-driven leadership skills that not only provided the foundation for his success in turning around JHS 22 but encouraged the kind of out-of-the-box thinking that led him to co-create and implement The New American Academy teaching model.

"Touro helped lay down the groundwork for me to understand the concept of collaboration. Without it, I don't think I could have survived the experience at JHS 22 and been successful," Mr. Waronker said. "With its very hands-on, practitioner-based approach, Touro prepared me to take on the challenges of leading a school. I benefited tremendously from Touro because I learned from people who were masters of leading schools, which made for extremely powerful learning.

"I had a great education at Touro that put me on the path to Harvard," he added. "I feel very privileged to have been a student of so many fine minds at Touro who really care about education and students. I only have very warm feelings for Touro College, the professors, the students and the faculty."

Mr. Waronker said that the most powerful lesson he learned at Touro, which helped shape the way he led JHS 22 and developed the model for The New American Academy, is that a principal's values drive a school's budget. Rather than focusing solely on traditional academic subjects as many other principals do, especially in underserved urban areas like the South Bronx and Crown Heights, Mr. Waronker has allocated funding to intensive teacher training, violin and other music lessons, field trips to upscale Manhattan restaurants to learn etiquette, inspirational guest speakers, and other experiences he feels expand the students' horizons and expose them to opportunities beyond the concrete buildings of their inner city neighborhoods.

"One of my professors who really had a big impact on me said, 'Take a look at what your values are when you create a budget; How would you create a school? Where would you put your money? Really think through what your values are and what your community's values are to be able to run a school based on your vision.' The passion and values that practition-

ers bring to education is something that I took with me to my schools and understood deeply because of Touro.

"I don't think the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) encompass education," he added. "To me, education is really opening the minds to possibilities so that the children can innovate and create new ideas. Had I not had the Touro experience, I would not have had the depth of understanding to grasp that there is something beyond the three R's and I would not have had the tools to think outside the box. I would have taken whatever the school's budget was, and thought, 'Well, that's just the way it is.' My professors were great leaders who helped me chart my own future and my own vision as a school leader."

Mr. Waronker credits Dr. Nilda Soto-Ruiz, chair of the MS in School Leadership Program at Touro, for helping him make the critical decision to attend the very first year of the New York Leadership Academy's Aspiring Principals Program, which helped him further develop his leadership skills and placed him in the JHS 22 job that catapulted his career.

"I spoke with Dr. Soto-Ruiz and asked for her advice in terms of what I should do," Mr. Waronker recalled. "I was offered an assistant principal's position at P.S. 161 in Crown Heights, where I had been working as a Spanish teacher, but then I was accepted to the Leadership Academy. I remember calling Dr. Soto-Ruiz and asking her for advice because the assistant principal's position was a sure thing and the other was a new program. She asked me, 'Well, what's your goal?' and I said, 'To be a principal.' Then she asked, 'Which one gets you there faster?' I said, 'The Leadership Academy' and that made it very clear for me which path I should take. She was instrumental in that pivotal decision."

Mr. Waronker said the collaborative teaching style in many of his classes at Touro, in which teams of graduate students worked on projects together, planted the seeds for both the collaborative leadership style he utilized to help revitalize JHS 22 and the collaborative teaching model he is implementing at The New American Academy.

"In the world of education, collaborative teaching is a radical leap. The whole collaborative piece was very foreign to me and it really started laying down the groundwork for me to understand what collaboration is and how effective it can be. I think collaborative skills are very necessary for school leadership because if a person doesn't know how to collaborate, they won't know how to lead an organization. The Leadership Academy brought that point home, but it began at Touro."



Nilda Soto-Ruiz, Ph.D., chair of the Touro MS in School Leadership Program attended by Mr. Waronker



Mr. Waronker observes kindergarten lesson being taught by apprentice teacher Andrea Nolet

in front of you, you are going to excel tremendously. This sort of confirmed that but in a big way. This is why we have a master teacher in every classroom. We have one teacher who is really superb.

“We think our students will progress about two years in one year because we’re combining the reduced student-teacher ratio and the high-quality teacher in the classroom,” Mr. Warnoker said. “And I think that’s almost at a minimum because as you can imagine, if the teachers are growing and developing, discussing how to help their students on a daily basis, collaborating for an hour-and-a-half daily, and looping with the students so they stay with them from kindergarten through fifth grade, they have an incredible sense of accountability. They can’t blame anybody else for how the children are developing. They’re the ones responsible and in charge. What’s going to happen with these students is going to be amazing.”

FROM A HARVARD DOCTORAL PROJECT TO A CUTTING-EDGE NYC PUBLIC SCHOOL

The proposal for The New American Academy emerged from a class Mr. Waronker took at Harvard with Professor Richard Elmore, co-director of the Doctor of Education Leadership Program. Mr. Waronker and the five other students in his doctoral program developed the proposal for The New American Academy, but while all the other students returned to assistant superintendent or superintendent positions, Mr. Waronker made implementing the new school model his personal mission and he achieved it in just over a year after he first presented the concept to former Chancellor Klein.

“Starting a new school takes a lot of time, dedication and sweat equity,” Mr. Klein said. “Shimon was determined to open his school in September 2010 and he did what he needed to do to meet that deadline. He’s in it for the children and never loses sight of that. That’s what drove him to accomplish so much in a limited span of time.” The backing of the former chancellor, the UFT teachers’ union and Har-

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– Former NYC Schools Chancellor Joel Klein

vard helped Mr. Waronker actualize his Harvard doctoral class’ proposal for a new educational system at breakneck speed.

“Shimon just seemed to cut through an entire spectrum of mediation, negotiation and arbitration to get to an agreement,” said Dr. McGowan, whose expertise is in the field of teacher mentoring. “Pulling together these various factions in New York City, tapping into everyone’s desire to do the best they can for the kids in the city, and building on that in an unprecedented way really portends very wonderful things for moving ahead.”

Added Mr. Klein: “Shimon had a vision for The New American Academy and he worked relentlessly to bring together partners and resources that would support its realization. The devil is always in the details and Shimon invested a lot of time and energy in working with the UFT to ensure that The New American Academy would provide the best possible support for student learning.”

Mr. Klein noted that since The New American Academy model is predicated on a “radically different approach” to teacher collaboration and planning, it will take time for teacher teams to function at the level Mr. Waronker envisions. “But

sophisticated planning, collaboration, and development are happening,” he said.

Under Mr. Klein’s leadership, Mr. Waronker and his team had hoped to open six more New American Academy-model schools in the fall of 2011 and up to an additional 30 in fall 2012 but under the chancellorship of Mr. Klein’s successors—Cathleen Black and Dennis Walcott—expansion is now expected within the next five years, after The New American Academy demonstrates success in student achievement and learning. There are also plans to introduce The New American Academy prototype in a new *yeshiva* being funded by a Jewish philanthropist in Crown Heights.

Mr. Waronker never met with Ms. Black during her brief tenure nor has he had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Walcott since he took over as New York City schools chancellor on April 7th following Ms. Black’s resignation, but Mr. Waronker is confident that the New York City Department of Education will continue to support The New American Academy model and its plans for expansion. “At this point in time we’re proceeding full speed ahead and we’re very excited to have Dennis Walcott as our new chancellor. I think when he comes to visit and sees the work we’re doing with the children, he will also be very excited.”

Asked about the change in the Department of Education’s expansion plans, DOE spokesman Matt Mitthenthal said, “The New American Academy holds real promise, and we are optimistic that its model for teacher collaboration and classroom design will succeed. But before proposing a second school, we think that The New American Academy should complete its first full year to inform any changes moving forward.”

Mr. Waronker said he is not concerned that the departure of Mr. Klein, whose staunch support enabled him to open The New American Academy, will hinder his ambitious plans for the new public school model over the long-term. “The reason I’m not worried is the results will prove themselves.”

Asked if she thought Mr. Waronker could realize his extremely ambitious goal of reinventing the public school system in

New York City and beyond, Dr. McGowan said, “I would never make the mistake of underestimating Shimon. It’s certainly challenging and Shimon would be the first one to acknowledge that. But challenging situations have never deterred him from obtaining success in the past and I have no reason to think it will now. I simply would refrain from putting any kind of barriers on the potential for real accomplishment here.”

A high-profile and extremely experienced strategic planning team as well as input and teacher training from some of the country’s leading educational experts including Dr. McGowan and Barry Jentz of Harvard, and Professor Robert Baruch Bush of Hofstra University, have also helped launch The New American Academy. The New York City Leadership Academy, where Mr. Waronker studied in the first class of the Aspiring Principals Program after attending Touro College, has also provided training for the eight New American Academy teachers who need to adjust to a whole new style of collaborative teaching to a much larger student body.

The New American Academy strategic planning team includes Dr. Leo Casey, vice president of academic high schools at the UFT; Kenneth Merin, president and CEO of the Charles Hayden Foundation; Krista Dunbar, executive director of the Cahn Fellows Program at Columbia University’s Teacher’s College, and Varleton McDonald, network leader for the New York City Department of Education.

While the jury is still out on whether The New American Academy will succeed, Mr. Waronker believes he has seen signs that G-d is watching over the project. Out of 1,200 buildings in the New York City public school system, the

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New American Academy students work on interdisciplinary language arts-math-art education project



As principal of JHS 22, Mr. Waronker accompanied his students aboard the French warship *Jeanne d'Arc* at a Manhattan pier to receive books for the school's French dual language program, a gift from the French government

Department of Education found the space needed to house the extra large classes of roughly 60 children and four teachers in Crown Heights, where Mr. Waronker lives with his wife and six children, and more important, the location of *Chabad Lubavitch* headquarters.

For Mr. Waronker, an even more evident sign of G-d's role is that the school that houses The New American Academy was renamed P.S. 770 (from P.S. 748) after the 770 Eastern Parkway address of *Chabad* headquarters. According to Mr. Waronker, former Chancellor Klein told him to change the number of the school after he mentioned that the 748 figure in the school's former P.S. 748 title plus 22—as in JHS 22 in the South Bronx—equaled 770, a number that members of *Chabad* consider very significant, even holy because of the 770 Eastern Parkway address that served (and continues to serve until today) as the center of prayer services, Talmudic study and *Chabad* gatherings under the last two *Lubavitcher rebbes*. “There’s no question somebody up there, way, way up in the echelons above, had something to do with this,” Mr. Waronker said.

Asked his reasons for instructing Mr. Waronker to change the school's name to P.S. 770, Mr. Klein said, “It mattered to him and I wanted to be supportive.”

HOW SHIMON WARONKER RESCUED JHS 22 IN THE SOUTH BRONX

Mr. Waronker will undoubtedly utilize the same unique combination of skills and talent emanating from his very eclectic background that he credits for much of his astounding success at JHS 22 at The New American Academy—mainly his military experience and training in counter-insurgency tactics as an intelligence officer in the U.S. Army, his education at Touro College and the Leadership Academy (See story on page 39) and the warm, loving approach toward teaching that he believes stems mostly from his faith in G-d and the *Chabad* approach to Judaism.

“When I went to airborne school (which conducts the basic paratrooper training for the U.S. Army), I learned that people can do things they really don't think they can; that they can go beyond their limits and it gives them a sense of confidence that they can do just about anything as long as they put their minds

to it,” Mr. Waronker said.

“The military is probably the best organization I've ever seen in terms of training. I didn't see that going into the world of public school or even private school education, so helping to create that atmosphere in the schools in terms of structure and routine was very helpful. I also think the intelligence training I received was incredibly helpful in terms of dealing with the gang situation at JHS 22.”

Mr. Waronker noted that the textbook rules for dealing with counter-insurgencies instruct you to take three basic courses of action: inviting the insurgent leadership into the government for talks, launching a large-scale publicity campaign to discredit the insurgents and demonstrate that they are actually hurting the people they are claiming to protect, and eliminating the insurgent leaders who refuse to join the government.

“I saw how many of these strategies were applicable at JHS 22,” he said. “The first step we took was to create a student congress. We elected one student from each class. We had about 30 students and we met about once a week. These were the most popular children in the school. Most of them were gang members and gangs are in a way insurgents because they had control of the school.

“The second thing we did was to hold town hall meetings as part of a publicity campaign against the gangs. Kids join gangs for protection; to feel they're not going to be hurt. I explained the opposite is true. I told them that instead of being protected, they were going to be put in danger's way; instead of leading a successful life, they would lead a short, unsuccessful life. I also had a NYPD unit talk to the kids about gangs.”

Mr. Waronker said the third course of action was to document the violent behavior of a number of gang leaders and remove them from the school with the special authority vested by the chancellor to the principals of the city's 12 most violent schools, also known as Impact Schools. “This helped tremendously because it sent a very powerful message to everyone at the school that the principal has authority. Some of the most powerful gang leaders were taken out and transferred to other schools.”

In addition to ridding JHS 22 of much of its violence, Mr. Waronker's leadership resulted in the school receiving its first A ever on its annual school report card issued by the Department of Education after students showed a .5 standard deviation, or 1.5 years of improvement, on their New York State standardized test scores in the 2006-2007 academic year.

"Shimon was dealt an enormous challenge in turning around JHS 22," said Mr. Klein. "Its problems were entrenched, and at first, he had little support from teachers and parents. But he persevered and was able to effect real change, changing the hearts and minds of the entire JHS 22 community and making them believe in the transformative power of education. He is a compelling leader with a clear vision and the ability to connect deeply with people."

Born in Chile and raised in Honduras, Guatemala and Uruguay, Mr. Waronker is fluent in Spanish, which led many parents, teachers and students at JHS 22 to view him with less suspicion despite his outsider status and strictly Orthodox garb of a black velvet *yarmulke*, black hat, dark suit and beard.

But Mr. Waronker noted that the principal who preceded him also spoke Spanish and served in the military but only lasted two months. It is, in Mr. Waronker's opinion, the combination of counter-insurgency training and the loving, positive and purpose-driven approach of *Chabad* that led to his success at JHS 22.

Raised as a secular Jew, Mr. Waronker became religious after he completed college at the University of Maryland in 1990, and a couple of years later joined the *Chabad* movement.

"I realized *Chabad* was the community I wanted to belong to. What I liked about *Chabad* is that our mission is very simple—it is to create a heaven on earth. Whatever action we take has got to be toward that purpose. I told the kids, 'You have a purpose in life; you are unique; you are not alone; your mission here is to create a heaven on earth and to make this a better world.' I needed both the love of *Chabad* and the structure of the military to succeed."



Faces of The New American Academy

It is due to that enormous success that astonished so many that Mr. Waronker received numerous awards and honors including a Knighthood from the French government, the Humanitarian Lamplighter Award, the National Urban Alliance Educational Leadership Award and awards from the Brooklyn Borough President, the Bronx Borough Judges and New York State Assemblyman Karim Camara. He was also awarded a Cahn Fellowship at Columbia University's Teachers College and the Presidential Fellowship at Harvard University. And just this past March, Mr. Waronker received his newest honor, the Association of Orthodox Jewish Teachers' "Elementary School Principal of the Year Award," for his work at The New American Academy.

Mr. Waronker's stunning success story at JHS 22 was also featured on the front page of *The New York Times*, on the *Today Show*, CNN and numerous other media outlets. And perhaps most important, former Chancellor Klein took Mr. Waronker on as his personal protégé. "Shimon and I developed a trusting and constructive friendship during the year I mentored him," Mr. Klein said. "I think he understands that the problems in education are big and not easy to solve. But he is dedicated to putting children first, and I think that will take him a very long way."

Mr. Klein even helped Mr. Waronker make the decision to attend Harvard's doctoral program, which led to the establishment of The New American Academy as a potential model for a revolutionary new public school system.

"Every step of the way, whether it was growing up speaking Spanish, serving in the military, becoming *Lubavitch*, gaining the experience at JHS 22, attending Harvard or interning for Chancellor Klein; all of these things helped make me who I am and helped me shoulder the next burden that I needed to bear. I think this next burden of developing a new public school model is one that needs to be borne for the sake of our children's future and it needs to have happened yesterday." ■