

# Rookies of the year

A UNIQUE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM FOR NEW  
TEACHERS ENERGIZES THE ENTIRE FACULTY,  
GIVING STUDENTS A WINNING EXPERIENCE

BY ERIN SILVER

In a fast-paced school like TanenbaumCHAT, getting acclimatized as quickly as possible is really important to the success of the whole school community. That's why the school's New Teacher Program is having such a positive effect.

"There's a lot to learn from a technical and day-to-day functioning point of view," says Head of School, **Dr. Jonathan Levy**. "But even more importantly, the New Teacher Program fosters an understanding of school culture and values, creates a feeling of teamwork and builds collaboration, not just among new teachers or within departments, but across departments, too."

The program is led by Vice Principal, **Rabbi Eli Mandel**, who wanted a way to welcome new educators to the school and make them feel like they belong. "We've always had ways to help new teachers be successful, but about five years ago we decided to re-imagine the program," he explains.

Today, the program includes several distinct components. Even before school begins or formal orientation happens, new educators are paired with a more experienced faculty member from another department to meet socially, tour the school and get acclimatized. "This way new teachers can have someone who's more like a friend than a supervisor," says Rabbi Mandel.

Once the year is underway, some sessions are inspirational and designed to revisit the impact that teachers are having on students, while others are on more practical topics. New faculty routinely have the chance to speak to their department head for support with curriculum and to learn cutting edge pedagogic developments. There are also monthly meetings



Rabbi Eli Mandel



Ryan Peters '09



Vince Bruni

that provide newbies with a chance to compare notes. “The whole program is designed to ensure teachers feel supported throughout this journey, like there are others in the same boat dealing with the same challenges,” says Rabbi Mandel.

In addition, last year, TanenbaumCHAT “extended the New Teacher Program so those in their sophomore and junior years can continue to meet to share challenges and brainstorm solutions,” says Rabbi Mandel. “We base those meetings on their personal experiences in the classroom and we discuss what worked.”

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**– Vince Bruni**

Levy enjoys leading newer teachers through “craft knowledge” sessions himself. “I call it the ‘30-minute problem solver.’ This is where beginning staff have the chance to group-think and develop brainstorming skills to find practical solutions to everyday challenges teachers face in their classes. It is peer-to-peer support designed to help everyone leave with a greater number of strategies

to deal with dilemmas inherent in teaching,” he says. Craft knowledge helps teachers combine their cumulative wisdom so they can put it to use in an action setting.

The New Teacher Program is getting rave reviews from participants. That’s great news for TanenbaumCHAT and one way the school is helping to retain outstanding young teachers. Mentees say the program prevents burnout, helps them understand the challenges and gives them strategies to deal with any issues they face.

Another sign of success is the number of new teachers who are also alumni, like **Ryan Peters '09**. He started teaching English and drama at TanenbaumCHAT five years ago and is now a mentor. “I maintained a close relationship with the school from the time I graduated,” says Peters. “Returning here was a seamless transition for me, like coming back home.”

Peters now enjoys paying it forward. “I definitely leaned on my mentor in that first year; I’m glad to be a mentor for someone else now.” He describes the relationship with his mentee as organic, informal and ongoing. “Last year I had a really positive experience,” he says. “My mentee is doing great. For me, it was great to connect with someone I might not have connected with otherwise.”

The New Teacher Program was especially positive for **Vince Bruni**, who started teaching business at TanenbaumCHAT four years ago. “I was entering a new school environment. It was during the pandemic and there was a lot of uncertainty. I’m not from a Jewish background, so for someone in my shoes, it was really





**Matt Reingold '03**

helpful and increased my level of comfort ten fold.”

Now he’s a mentor, and with a background in sports, he says coaching and mentorship really resonate with him. “I’m a big fan of the program,” says Bruni. “It was helpful to have someone outside of my direct discipline to act as a sounding board.”

**“There’s a benefit to being a mentor, too—it gives me fresh perspectives.”**

**– Matt Reingold '03**

For him, the best part about the program is that it offers a catalyst to develop new relationships. “I really value that element. I try my best to foster and nurture relationships with my mentees as individuals and help them feel comfortable in a new environment.”

Now in his 10th year of teaching, Bruni feels this program is something that sets TanenbaumCHAT apart from other schools. “This differentiates the school from my previous employers—TanenbaumCHAT really fosters that community element and they invest in programs that strengthen connections among students and staff.”

**Matt Reingold '03** is currently in his 16th year at TanenbaumCHAT. “There are so many parts to being a successful teacher,” says Reingold. “To have someone there to help you and guide you through the process is really beneficial. But there’s a benefit to being

a mentor, too. I get to hear new ideas from people new to the school and it gives me fresh perspectives.”

Fifth-year teacher **Emily Henderson** teaches English and history and likes the way the New Teacher program creates community. “Last year my mentee taught Rabbis; this year I’m mentoring someone who teaches business. I get to build a connection with someone I wouldn’t really get to talk to otherwise because typically we work with people in our own department.”

With several years’ experience behind her, it’s also validating for Henderson to have been chosen to be



**Emily Henderson**



Jody Berkel

In addition to being part of the New Teacher Program last year, TanenbaumCHAT offered new teachers the option to join [betterlesson.com](https://betterlesson.com), an online learning platform that provides educators from around the world a chance to connect with a mentor or register for a range of additional PD courses. Jody Berkel's mentor is from Israel. "She and I met once a week on Zoom," says Berkel. "This was different from my in-school mentor because we focused on my specific goals. My mentor was there to guide me with her vast experience. I felt supported and learned many strategies that I actually implemented and will continue to implement so I can become the best teacher I can for my students."

a mentor. When she was new, it was helpful to have someone there to respond to her queries. Now it's rewarding to be on the other side. "I like being that person who can answer questions and support others."

**Jody Berkel** is now in her second year teaching Rabbis for New Stream students. The school's New Teacher Program made her feel comfortable from the start. "Becoming a teacher at TanenbaumCHAT was a totally new experience for me, so I was filled with excitement and nervousness." She felt grateful for what she describes as an "incredible mentorship opportunity" and was confident that "TanenbaumCHAT was there to support me in this new role."

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As a result of significant growth in enrolment, there are about 50 educators within their first three years at TanenbaumCHAT. Experienced and new faculty alike report feeling enthusiastic and connected, which translates into a more positive school year for students.

"When teachers feel energized, when they feel their jobs are meaningful and that they're making an impact, it trickles down to students," says Rabbi Mandel. "The New Teacher Program helps all teachers understand how purposeful and important their jobs are."

But perhaps Berkel describes it best. "Last year was the most challenging and exhilarating year of my life. When I began, I knew I would be climbing a mountain... I just didn't know how big the mountain actually was," she says. "I would not have been able to reach this point without the incredible support from the people in my TanenbaumCHAT community, including my colleagues and students. We don't often take the time to reflect, but it's an integral part of the process and gives us the courage and fortitude to keep on climbing." ♦