

East Brunswick Schechter Names Two Top Administrators

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With two new administrators at the helm, Solomon Schechter Day School of Raritan Valley in East Brunswick is entering the coming school year with plans to broaden the school's outlook and its Jewish and secular studies curriculums.

On July 1, Howard Rosenblatt took over as head of the 175-student school. He replaces Rabbi Scott Bolton, who earlier this year announced he was stepping down after three years in the position.

Also on July 1, Stephan Charton became the school's first principal of general studies.

"They both have broad perspective to help guide the school in both general and Judaic studies," said board president Mickey Kaufman. "We expect with the two programs we are putting in place we will be able to achieve our vision in the next three to five years of becoming the number one day school in central New Jersey. They are the right team to do it with the support of lay leadership."

Rosenblatt, most recently education director at Har Zion Temple in Philadelphia, has spent much of his career in the Conservative movement's Schechter schools, including in Dallas, Montreal, and the Solomon Schechter of Bergen County, now in New Milford.

"I've been in and out of the Schechter system for 19 years," explained Rosenblatt, who has 32 years experience as principal, superintendent, or head of school at Jewish institutions.

That includes a stint at the Akiva School in Montreal, where Rosenblatt also trained Jewish educators and taught biblical literature at McGill University.

"My specialty is Bible," said Rosenblatt, a Boston native now living in the Philadelphia suburb of Wynnewood, Pa.

He came to the Raritan Valley school because of its reputation, strong Jewish studies program, the spirit of its student body, and the robust support he felt he would receive from lay leadership.

"I knew of it from when I used to be in the New Jersey school," said Rosenblatt. "The school has many strengths, but as with any school, it also needs to be developed and improved and I thought this would be an interesting challenge. It is a lovely community. I was impressed by the individuals who made up the search committee and board. I feel it is a place that can really take off."

Charton, who spent his entire career in the public school system, spent the last seven years as principal of Marlboro Middle School. Prior positions include the Illinois Laboratory School in Normal, Ill., and principal of the 2,600-student First Colonial High School in Virginia Beach.

He was inspired to become involved in Jewish education after two summers touring European concentration camps, ghettos, and other sites with teachers and other educators through the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education.

“That is the God’s honest truth,” said Charton, who grew up in the township of North Bergen and now lives in Mount Laurel in Burlington County. “After I came home from the second trip it struck me that this is right. I decided to retire from the public school system. The trips were so wonderful that they got me here. I wanted to be involved in these kids’ future. It felt like it was something I owed and this opportunity just came out of the blue. It just all seemed right — not that I had any complaints about Marlboro; it was a great school with fabulous faculty.”

Steve Talmud, Solomon Schechter’s first vice president, said the board saw certain strengths when hiring the new administrators.

“They have vision, are good leaders, and, as seasoned professionals, they have decades of experience in successfully working with all types of people,” he said in a statement. “These men are motivated by educating children and improving the institutions they serve, and we are very excited to have them join our Schechter family.”

Kaufman said the decision to create the general studies principal position came out of both a need and a desire to take the school to a higher level.

“A general studies principal was sorely needed,” he acknowledged. “Rabbi Bolton was sorely extended. We hope with the excellence of the new curriculum, we will attract students from a broad range of backgrounds.”

‘If not now, when?’

Rosenblatt said his first order of business is working with the faculty and education committee to strengthen the curriculum and set up a system of curriculum review.

“We hope to complete this process and then carry out plans to revitalize the school and grow its student population,” he noted. “We will not be starting anything new at the moment, but we’re looking at a whole range of possibilities — maybe an additional language, a student trip to Israel for eighth-graders, how we can give our kids the richest education possible. We’re looking to possibly see how we can integrate our Jewish and general studies to a greater degree. We’re looking at this as being a school people want to send their kids to.”

Among those it wants to make feel at ease in the school are its minority of Orthodox youngsters, said Rosenblatt.

We really want to make them feel comfortable and welcome,” he said. “We want kids from Orthodox and non-Orthodox homes to respect each other and to understand what the differences are. We may use different prayer books, but we need to respect our differences. We are committed to the concept of the community we all share as Jews.”

This school year will revolve around the implications of a statement by the sage Hillel in Ethics of the Fathers: “If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?”

“I think that saying really encapsulates helping our students understand self-concept and at the same time recognize we have a commitment to our community starting with our class group and Jewish community, the general community, and Israel,” said Rosenblatt. “We want our students to become sensitive, thoughtful people who integrate the values of Judaism and American life as they embark on their intellectual, spiritual, and social quest for meaning. We want to teach the kids that the time to be concerned about something is now. We will be developing this theme in many ways throughout the school year.”

Charton, who received all his degrees from Rutgers University, has master’s degrees in curriculum and instruction and administration and supervision and a doctorate in instruction and administration.

He said he would be examining the school’s ability to meet the state’s required core curriculum standards.

“It’s such a basic, but that’s the starting point for us,” explained Charton. “I’ve met all the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students and they seem extremely happy here. That impressed me very much. They seemed very bright and the teachers seem to be doing a great job. That’s the kind of climate as an administrator you want to walk into.”

For Charton, who is Jewish, coming to a day school after decades in the public school system has been a learning experience.

“It’s a very different climate, and the scope of interest is different in a Jewish school,” he said. “For example, I met with teachers and one of the things we were looking at was how to get students more in the mood for Shabbos. I guarantee you at Marlboro that did not come up at a faculty meeting.”

At a Glance

Howard Rosenblatt, head of school, holds two bachelor's degrees — from Boston University and Boston Hebrew Teachers College — and two master's degrees, in educational psychology from Columbia University Teachers' College and in Bible and education from the Jewish Theological Seminary, which also awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2002. He also attended the Hayim Greenberg Institute in Jerusalem and holds a doctorate in curriculum development and education from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.



Stephan Charton, principal of general studies, holds a doctorate and a master's of education degree in administration and supervision from Rutgers Graduate School of Education as well as a master's degree in supervision and curriculum, also from Rutgers Graduate School of Education.

