Agudah’s Rockland Office Hosts New Schools Training

June 2, 2022
Rabbi Shragi Greenbaum, Director, Agudath Israel Rockland Regional Office, presenting

Rabbi Yehoshua Pinkus, Director of Yeshiva Services, presenting

Rabbi Ami Bazov, Associate Director of Yeshiva Services, presenting
Earlier this week, the Agudath Israel Rockland Regional Office hosted a New Schools Training in the Monsey area. As the general Monsey community rapidly grows, new schools and yeshivos are opening to meet the demand. This presentation, geared towards school administrators, was organized because Agudath Israel’s Yeshiva Services division recognized a demand for a comprehensive review of the regulations, requirements, government programs, and funding available to yeshivos in New York State. Though the program took place in Monsey, school administrators from as far as Brooklyn and Long Island took advantage of the unique opportunity.

Interest in the program exceeded expectations. Administrators of new schools were in attendance, as well as new administrators for existing schools and seasoned professionals looking for a refresher course. Attendees walked away with a clear understanding of what it takes to start and run a school in New York State.

Rabbi Yehoshua Pinkus, director of Yeshiva Services commented, “New York State’s funding and programs for nonpublic schools come with a substantial regulatory burden. There is nowhere else that a school can go to become educated regarding the full range of opportunities and requirements. Agudas Yisroel is proud to be able to present this and stands ready to assist schools with the myriad issues that arise.”

Rabbi Shragi Greenbaum, director of Agudah’s Rockland regional office, said, “It was my pleasure to host this event as part of the services that the Rockland regional office makes available. I am happy to meet with any school administrator to help ensure that their students are receiving the benefits they deserve.”

“Thank you to Agudath Israel, Rabbi Pinkus and the entire Yeshiva Services team for the informative, comprehensive in-service. It was invaluable for those of us starting new yeshivos, B’ezras HaShem!” said attendee Rabbi Sheftel Skaist, Menahel of Yeshiva Derech HaTorah of Monsey (YD HM).
Thank you!

June 2, 2022

Thank you.

Thank you Klal Yisroel.

You took the time to make your voices heard, a united 250,000+ strong people commenting to the New York State Education Department, saying loudly: We value our mesorah. We value the autonomy of our mosdos. We value our rights as parents. And we oppose your proposed regulations.

The comment period is now over, but our hishtadlus was certainly strong. May our tefillos about this potentially devastating issue be accepted. As we approach Shavuos, chag matan Toraseinu, our effort on behalf of limud Torah will surely bear fruit, and, with Hashem’s help, may we hear good news soon.

A special thank you to the many people and organizations across the spectrum of kehillos in Klal Yisroel who joined with us in organizing their communities in gathering and submitting comments. Most notably, Torah Umesorah and PEARLS took a leadership role in communicating with their constituencies and helping bring Klal Yisroel, k’ish echad b’lev echad, to this point.

Agudas Yisroel of America
Rabbi Labish Becker speaking about Shavuos

June 2, 2022

HaRav Simcha Bunim Ehrenfeld ZTL, Mattersdorfer Rav speaking at the 10th Siyum Hashas.

June 2, 2022
Agudath Israel Disappointed at High Court’s Declining to Hear Case Involving Antisemitic Harassment of Worshippers on Shabbos

June 2, 2022
Agudath Israel of America is deeply disappointed by the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision not to hear Marvin Gerber v. Herskovits, et al., a case involving antisemitic protests outside an Ann Arbor, Michigan congregation on Shabbos mornings. In April, Agudath Israel, joined by nine other Orthodox Jewish organizations, filed an amicus brief asking the Court to hear the case.

Every Shabbos morning, for nearly twenty years, the Beth Israel Congregation and its worshipers have been subject to antisemitic harassment as they attended prayer services. Signs displayed by the protesters include anti-Jewish slogans such as “Resist Jewish Power,” “Jewish Power Corrupts,” and “No More Holocaust Movies.” This hateful intimidation has brought extreme emotional distress to congregants, including one of the plaintiffs, a Holocaust survivor, who has stated that the harassment at times prevented him from attending Beth Israel services.

Beth Israel congregants originally turned to the City of Ann Arbor for relief, asking it to enforce its law requiring such protests to obtain a permit, but the city refused to take action. They then took the case unsuccessfully to federal trial and appellate courts. Eventually, two Beth Israel members asked the Supreme Court to hear the case. One of the petitioners, Marvin Gerber, selected noted constitutional attorney and scholar, Nathan Lewin, to bring the case before the justices, as Mr. Lewin enjoys an extensive and compelling record arguing religious freedom causes before the High Court.

“This is an astounding and chilling outcome to a twenty-year saga,” said Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, executive vice president of Agudath Israel. “The harassment and intimidation in this case are not protected free speech but included antisemitic epithets that historically have led to violence against Jews. We will continue to fight these cases, which at the very least constitute vicious interference with the congregants’ constitutional right to worship freely.”
Final Push to Send your Letter

June 2, 2022
Substantial Equivalency Opposition Comment by Educators

June 2, 2022

Total submissions: 2,164

To submit your letter, please copy the text below into an email, add your name, and send it to seregcomments@nysed.gov, by 11:59 PM EDT on 5/31/22.

May 27, 2022

Ms. Christina Coughlin
89 Washington Ave., EBA Room 1078
SORIS, SE Regulation Comments
Albany, NY 12234
seregcomments@nysed.gov

Educators Oppose the Proposed Addition of Part 130 to Title 8 NYCRR (Rule ID# EDU-13-22-00025-P) to Strictly Regulate Private Schools

Dear Ms. Coughlin and Honorable Members of the Board of Regents:
We, the undersigned, are professional educators. We serve in a variety of settings as teachers, principals, curriculum specialists, consultants, special education specialists, school psychologists, and guidance counselors. Our ranks include lecturers and professors at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels. Our qualifications include master’s or doctoral degrees in education or other fields, and state teacher’s licenses or comparable credentials. We are also all proud graduates of yeshivas — Jewish elementary and high schools that maintain distinctive academic programs incorporating both Judaic and general elements. The overlap of our personal and professional experiences uniquely qualifies us to comment upon the proposed rules and methods for determining instructional equivalency.

In our view, the assessment rubric contained in the present proposal is an inadequate measure of the value of yeshiva education as compared to public-school instruction. By arbitrarily excluding content taught in a language other than English, the rubric virtually guarantees results of extremely limited validity when applied to schools where significant educational content is conveyed through readings in other languages. Even if implemented in full good faith, the proposed assessment rules fail to meaningfully consider the beliefs and purposes that inform our schools’ educational philosophies, omitting any metrics or mechanisms that might accurately capture the advanced intellectual, interpersonal and self-regulation skills whose acquisition lies at the heart of yeshivas’ unique educational model. And good faith is not guaranteed: the assessment process can be triggered by frivolous or even malicious complaints, and the proposal lacks robust mechanisms for assuring the impartiality or cultural competency of the personnel conducting these high-stakes audits.

Our role as educators has also shown us, in our own considerable collective experience, that yeshiva students and graduates thrive. They are consistently among the most intellectually curious, studious, and respectful students we have taught. We urge you not to interfere with a system that has produced such laudable results.

The targeted nature of these regulations is of particular concern at a time when public education is undergoing a major reckoning. Schools and
education officials are working seriously to develop culturally responsive teaching and assessment tools for students hailing from minority ethnicities and nationalities. In this context, we find the present proposal’s failure to ascribe academic value to Judaic studies inconceivable. Our society is at present grappling with the legacy of its past sins; it is shocking that the recapitulation of some of these — forcible acculturation of minority children and disadvantaging traditional language and methods of instruction — is being contemplated in the Empire State once again.

These draft regulations, intended to provide guidance to State and district personnel evaluating nonpublic-school instruction, in fact appear to describe a backdoor school licensure regime. They provide very little specification of the guardrails and limitations to which these personnel are subject, and very little to assist in the thorny but critical problems surrounding meaningful cross-cultural school evaluation. Explicit guidance on the civil rights guaranteed to individuals and families, or detailed best practices to ensure valid and ethical cross-cultural evaluation, are almost entirely absent; any future version of this guidance must focus on its intended purpose of regulating the conduct of State and district personnel, over whom it has clear and direct authority, instead of families and nonpublic schools, over whom it does not.

The instruction that we received enabled us to successfully pursue higher education at the undergraduate, graduate, and — in some cases — doctoral levels. In our own experience, instruction in generalized academic studies was provided at a high level by the schools we attended. More critically: the Judaic studies that form the core of yeshiva education are neither sinister nor a mere distraction from education, as implied by the proposed assessment rubric. On the contrary, we believe that instruction in the rich and challenging texts of the Judaic literature constitutes a unique and irreplaceable educational and developmental experience. Together with the moral framework and inspiration they imbue, the skills obtained through Judaic studies — close reading of texts, literary analysis, logical reasoning, business law, history, and civics, to name a few — have directly contributed to our own subsequent academic, professional, and personal success.
We fail to understand this Department’s years-long, single-minded focus on reforming yeshiva education. History documents that yeshivas have been part of the educational and social fabric of New York life for well over a century. The first one, Etz Chaim Talmudical Academy, was organized in 1886 at 85 Henry Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan by refugees fleeing anti-Jewish riots in the Russian Empire in the wake of Czar Alexander’s assassination. Judaic education has flourished and developed between that time and the present day.

We urge you to reject the present proposal. The interests of children are best protected by loving parents and educators who know and care for them and understand their individual needs. The intervention of the State is harmful, except in genuinely exigent circumstances, and in a manner free from prejudice and cultural bias. We call upon this Department to initiate study of legislative proposals that could provide help and remediation to underperforming nonpublic schools, as is done for failing public schools, in lieu of the punitive measures and the threat of jail for their parent body contained in the present proposal. We ask you to respect our language, literature, and intellectual tradition, and look forward to collaborating with you in furthering the education of our communities’ children.

Sincerely yours,

cc: The Honorable Members of the Board of Regents

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A Record-Breaking 250,000
Comments and Counting: Protest Swells Against New York State “Substantial Equivalency” Regulations

June 2, 2022

As the May 31st deadline for public comments on New York State’s proposed substantial equivalency regulations approaches, some 250,000 people have voiced opposition. The newly released regulations - which seek to have the state control and manage all private schools in a way not seen in any state in the country - has drawn criticism from legal scholars, professional associations, and parents.

The Orthodox Jewish community, which has over 400 schools, or Yeshivas, in the state, is particularly concerned. For them, such regulations raise not only real concerns of independence, autonomy, and conflict of interest, but existential religious freedom issues as well.

In that context, the historic nature of the volume of comments generated by the proposed regulations, and passion contained in those comments, becomes less surprising.

Aside for the many thousands of individual comments submitted, hundreds of professionals – lawyers, accountants, software engineers, and mental health professionals – have joined together to make the voices of their profession known to the State Education Department. Others have debunked the
disinformation that has been used to justify these regulations.

“There are agitators who claim they speak for a silent majority who support these regulations. It’s easy to make hollow claims. For the second time in three years now, seeing the hundreds of thousands of opposition comments flowing in, the facts make this assertion untenable,” said Rabbi Yehoshua Pinkus, director of Yeshiva Services of Agudath Isreal of America.

“It is interesting to see the opposing comments emanating from every sector of Orthodox Jewry,” said Avrohom Weinstock, Agudah’s chief of staff. “While Orthodox Jews are far from monolithic in dress, worldview, and practice, they are staunchly united in their assertion that it is parents who should be deciding how their children are educated and raised, not government. What we are seeing here, en masse, is parents asserting those rights.”

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**Substantial Equivalency**

**Opposition Comment by Yeshiva Educators**

June 2, 2022

*To add your name to this letter, please email KleiKodesh@agudah.org.*

May 27, 2022

Ms. Christina Coughlin
89 Washington Ave., EBA Room 1078
SORIS, SE Regulation Comments
Yeshiva Educators Oppose the Proposed Addition of Part 130 to Title 8 NYCRR (Rule ID# EDU-13-22-00025-P) to Strictly Regulate Private Schools

Dear Ms. Coughlin and Honorable Members of the Board of Regents:

We are graduates of yeshivos who were inspired by our intensive religious educations to choose careers as Judaic studies teachers on the elementary, secondary, or post-secondary levels. Others among us pursue advanced Jewish educations as graduate students in kollelim, or Talmudic research institutions.

We view this path as a most fortunate one. We see no better way to spend our ephemeral lives. By plumbing the depths of law, logic, and G-dliness we strive to uplift ourselves and those around us. Our days are long, but filled with meaning. Our students are many, and we cherish each one of them. The opportunity to impart our values and heritage to the next generation is more than our calling, it is our raison d’être.

We know without question that our own dedication to the texts and ideas of the Jewish religious tradition was seeded in our yeshiva education, and we believe strongly that our careers are valuable – certainly to the Jewish community, but to the broader world as well.

Many of our classmates became wildly successful. Some became professionals; others excelled in business. They all credit their yeshiva education. Our life-paths may not be attendant with great material wealth; we will not be fabulously “successful.” We define our success differently, however. Is that not our right? We feel wealthy in our academic, intellectual, and spiritual attainments, and we would not trade our way of life for anything in the world.
The value of study for study’s sake, and the importance and joys of teaching, are fully accepted in academia. This is not true merely for those engaged in novel engineering advancements and cancer research. Academics whose research may seem to yield no immediate “practical” benefits are readily and rightly recognized as individuals whose scholarship in their subjects of study enrich society. All the more so when our study is not simply academic, but is our strongly held religious conviction.

Had our yeshiva education been more limited in its intensity of religious studies, we would never have been exposed to this beautiful way of life. Our capacities to become the spiritually inclined people we are today would have been foreclosed. We are grateful to our educations which opened this window for us, and allowed us to make these life choices.

We therefore soundly reject any attempt by government to micromanage and control our private schools. Please respect our choices and commitment to learning, and allow our community to continue with its unique educational infrastructure, one that has built “successful” human beings, on so many levels.

Sincerely yours,

cc: The Honorable Members of the Board of Regents
A short message from Rabbi Labish Becker about the Importance of the Substantial Equivalency Commenting Campaign

June 2, 2022