

## Hidden Sparks School Leader Program, 2014-15

*May 2015 meeting and site visit with renowned educational leader, Shimon Waronker, Founder and CEO of The New American Initiative, Inc.*

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### Local School Leaders Focus on Best Practices

Local principals like Barbara Deutsch of Hebrew Academy of Nassau County and Dr. Evelyn Gross of Shulamith School for Girls need a forum for cultivating their skills as school leaders, and that is where Hidden Sparks steps in. Mrs. Deutsch and Dr. Gross, along with their colleagues in the Hidden Sparks School Leader program, participated in this school year's culminating principals' program with a meeting with Shimon Waronker, Founder & CEO of The New American Initiative, Inc., to discuss the best practices of school leaders. Mr. Waronker, a renowned educator and Lubavitcher Chasid who has transformed a violent NYC public school and opened three flourishing schools welcomed the school leaders to his Brooklyn Charter School, the New American Academy, on May 11.

The morning began with participants observing collaborative team meetings, an important component of Mr. Waronker's innovative model. Participants also heard from Mr. Waronker, who made a dynamic presentation on tenets of leadership and his philosophy of focusing on teachers and the degree to which he empowers his teams of teachers to be active

decision makers. He stated, "We focus on teachers like a laser beam because we believe that teachers are the key to unlocking kids' potential."

Debbie Niderberg, Executive Director of Hidden Sparks, commented that the presentation was both valuable and meaningful for participants. "Shimon Waronker talked about humility, empathy, and courage as important qualities to being a Jewish leader, and that's what you see when you visit the New American Academy schools he and his team have transformed. As school leaders from across a range of day schools and yeshivas, each of us was so inspired by what they have managed to create, and by Shimon's vision for shared and empowered teacher," she related.

This program follows on the tail of a leadership training day that Hidden Sparks hosted this past winter featuring Professional Learning Community experts Melanie Eisen, Associate Director for Professional Development at Yeshiva University's Institute for University-School Partnership, and Jane Rotunda, the former principal of the West Side Collaborative Middle. On that day, administrators were presented with a panel



discussion and structured consultancies which provided time for exploring the particular needs of individual schools in an atmosphere of peer support and collegiality.

Mrs. Deutsch of HANC appreciates the range of programming for administrators that Hidden Sparks provides. "I know I have a forum where I can be open and comfortable... I need opportunities to grow and adjust my thinking," she states, and that is what Hidden Sparks provides.

Hidden Sparks is a nonprofit whose purpose is to help children with learning differences reach their full potential

in school and life. Founded in February 2005, Hidden Sparks' goal is to increase the capacity of Jewish day schools to address the varied needs of children with learning difficulties, particularly children whose struggles might otherwise elude identification. In 2014, Hidden Sparks was recognized for the fourth year in Slingshot and was included in the newly released Supplement for Disabilities. Now in its eighth year, Hidden Sparks has trained 150 coaches and is being used in 50 Jewish day schools in four U.S. states and Israel, creating a unique community of educators and learners.