

New High School Has Distinct International Flavor

By Neil S. Friedman

Over the last five years the New York City Department of Education has created over 200 small high schools with fresh opportunities and choices for the city's public-school students. One of those is a school for immigrant students that opened in Canarsie earlier this month. The International High School at Kingsborough Community College, temporarily located at 755 East 100th Street, is currently accepting ninth graders who have lived in the United States four years or less and whose native language is not English.

The school offers an innovative curriculum whereby students have an opportunity to learn about themselves in addition to traditional classes in several subject areas. The 65-student population is divided into four classes. Students come from 22 different countries and speak more than a dozen languages and do not attend bilingual classes.

Principal Michael Soet explained that all classroom instruction is conducted only in English, which helps them learn the new language at a faster pace.

The largest groups of students include speakers of Spanish, Haitian-Creole, Russian and Urdu, a south Asian language spoken chiefly in Pakistan.

Though the International High School is currently located in Canarsie, it will be moving to the campus of Kingsborough Community College in

Manhattan Beach for the 2006-7 school year, where students will be able to take full advantage of the two-year college's facilities and courses.

This year the school opened with a ninth grade class. Students will move on to the remaining three high school levels in subsequent years. The Canarsie school is still seeking students with the admission criteria to attain the preferred 90-percent maximum enrollment. Eligible ninth-graders can register directly at the school or call 1-718-935-3286 for more information.

The International High School at Kingsborough Community College is a member of the International Network for Public Schools, a network of high schools for recent immigrants to the United States who are new learners of English. There are currently eight international high schools in New York City, three of which are in Brooklyn.

Soet, 34, a native of Grand Rapids, Michigan, who has been in the New York City public school system for seven years, said, "Our school offers small class sizes and individualized attention. We are happy to welcome



Principal Michael Soet (standing in rear) and Class A teacher Kara Bristow are pictured with students at the new International High School on East 100th Street.

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the City University of New York, it was developed over a two year period by two women at LaGuardia — Janet Lieberman and Cecilia Cullen — to provide a model for education English Language Learners (ELL) in an encouraging atmosphere. According to the Department of Education, New York City's international high school strategy became a national prototype. Due to the local success, similar schools will open throughout the country.

The DOE reports that the dropout rate at the city's three oldest international high schools was 27 percent less than ELL students at standard public high schools. It also noted that those students fare better than students in general and had a 63 percent graduation rate compared to 30 percent of comparable students at traditional schools.

This success has led to the creation of more schools and makes them an ideal setting to learn their new language. A cooperative venture of the New York City Department of Education and

new immigrant students from any neighborhood to join our founding ninth-grade class."

He pointed out, "Our academic studies are geared towards allowing the students to learn by understanding and discovering their own identities and backgrounds... And, as they are being educated, they are learning more English."

The principal also said that students do not sit at individual desks, but they share tables, which "allows for a more collaborative effort as they and their teachers work in teaching teams."

"Only by working together," Soet added, "can we ensure that all of our students have the tools to realize their American dreams."

The concept for the international schools for transcultural students came to fruition in 1985 when the first one opened its doors to 60 recently arrived immigrants at LaGuardia Community College in Manhattan.

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