

Marathon Sessions at Annual Educators Conference

It was well after midnight when **Rabbi Sholom B. Halberstam** of Chicago ended the marathon 13-hour meeting of principals of “out-of-town” Mesivtas. They had convened as part of the annual “Kinus HaMechanchim” – educators conference, sponsored by the Merkos Chinuch Office.

Other than brief breaks for tefillos and meals, the group concentrated on the business at hand, improving their yeshivas and cooperating to help the many hundreds of students maximize the effectiveness of their yeshiva experience.

Nearly one hundred thirty Torah educators from across North America convened at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Danbury, CT, away from the hustle and bustle of their respective communities and away from their offices and classrooms, but with their mind’s eye focusing on their students and their needs. The educators followed a similar conclave of women educators two weeks earlier.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe ZI”A promoted the idea of summer professional development in letters dating back to the early 1950s. The idea that teachers need to rejuvenate and hone their skills resonated well with the capacity crowd in Danbury.

The Kinus program was essentially divided into two sections which complemented one another. There was a strong focus on the development of better pedagogical skills, and there was a deep concentration on the “Nashomo,” the soul of Jewish education.

The general academic program was devoted to the study the Danielson Framework, which helps teachers plan and execute their lessons in a more organized way, and workshops on classroom management – among others. One issue which generated a great deal of discussion was the need for each student to be guided in the development of a healthy self-image. This discussion was led by **Dr. Shloimie Zimmerman**, a psychologist in New York who specializes in the issue.

Rabbi Jonathan Rietti an educational consultant who has developed a wide ranging program to assure maximum participation and sustained outcomes, especially for younger students, presented on sustained reading skills, development and on the fundamentals of teaching Torah to younger students. He also presented, to great acclaim, on a wide reaching approach to teaching Jewish history.

Rabbis Yoseph Minkowitz of Montreal and **Rabbi Mendel Schapiro** of Los Angeles keyed on the essence of the mission of those gathered, to reach the Neshomo of their students, and not only to teach but to inspire them.

One particularly inspirational moment occurred during lunch on Monday, when a group of about fifty formed a round-table to recap how their classrooms had changed since the introduction of the Master Torah program highlighted at last year's conference. They decided to hold similar discussions via Skype throughout the year.

“It takes months of planning and a lot of hard work, not to speak of the financial expense, but when at the conclusion of the Kinus one can feel the tangible inspiration of hundreds of educators who will teach thousands of students next year, all the effort is a small price to pay,” said **Rabbi Nochem Kaplan**, director of the Merkos Chinuch Office – the umbrella of Chabad schools.

Rabbi Kaplan thanked his staff at the Chinuch Office, led by **Rivkah Cohen**, a committee of mechanchim, and particularly **Rabbi Zalman Goldstein** of Oholei Torah, who collectively spent countless hours arranging the program. He added that all attendees are in their debt. In addition he said that his son, **Rabbi Baruch Kaplan**, a shliach in Wallingford, CT and rebbe at the Southern New England Hebrew Academy in New Haven, was essentially the coordinator of all Kinus logistics along with **Rabbi Menachem Kirschenbaum**.