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The new faces of Jewish Studies and Life at Bialik High School

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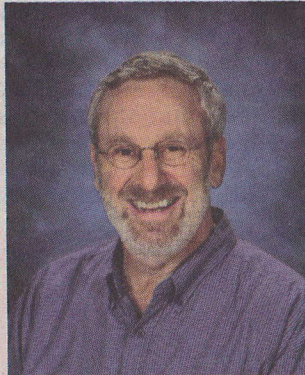
MONTREAL – Perhaps the most visible of the changes to come to Bialik High School in Montreal this year has been the addition of Rabbi Shimon Felix and Rabbi Dov Whitman, two dynamic individuals mandated with the task of re-engaging and re-invigorating the Jewish Studies and Life department.

With a diverse student body that runs the gamut from both extremes on a religious and interest level,

Rabbis Felix and Whitman are tasked with a very difficult challenge.

“We’re trying to take a look at Jewish studies and see what we can do to make it better,” said Rabbi Felix. “We’ve seen so far that it’s clear we’re going to need to really re-think, re-tweak issues like curriculum, schedule and what it is we’re trying to accomplish as a school with Jewish studies.”

Before being hired at Bialik, Rabbi Felix was the executive director of the Bronfman Youth Fellowships



Rabbis Shimon Felix (left) and Dov Whitman, the new faces at Bialik High School, are looking to revamp the Jewish Studies program.

in Israel, and before that, assistant and advisor to the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain.



Rabbi Whitman received a Masters Degree in Education from McGill University where he also worked as a Jewish educator for Hillel and a McGill chaplain together with chaplains of other faiths.

For Rabbi Whitman, he plans to use at Bialik what he learned at McGill.

“On campus, if what you’re offering is not interesting, no one’s going to come,” he said. “It puts the onus on us to create things that are engaging. Before I create a program or an activity, I ask the question, would I be interested in this or would I even go to this? If it’s boring and I wouldn’t come, why would anyone

our standard. If we have classes that we ourselves would be bored sitting in, we have a problem.”

After only a month, the slow process of change has begun to resonate with the student body. Both rabbis are in the process of revamping each grade’s annual Shabbaton and their new Lunch and Learning sessions have steadily grown in numbers. Interest level has also grown for their morning *minyans*.

“Assemblies now take place for holidays and Jewish events. We’re going to try to improve those, make it more engaging and interactive,” said Rabbi Felix.

“Interactivity is a big part of it. It is early for us, we don’t ask for much of a learning curve and we did hit the ground running, but as we move along, we want to make it better, bring the standards up and make Jewish studies as sharp as any other class should be.

“There’s no reason why Jewish studies cannot be sharp, engaging and contemporary. G-d knows that the Jewish community and Israel is in the news every day, other aspects of the Jewish world are in the news all the time,” he added. “That has to find its way in the classroom and to daily life in Bialik.”