

# BRAUSER MAIMONIDES ACADEMY

# כל הכבוד!

BMA head of school, **Rabbi Yossi Kastan**, shares the inspiration behind their new **Philip Esformes STEM Program** and the logistics and details involved in making it happen.



## Walk us through how it all began...

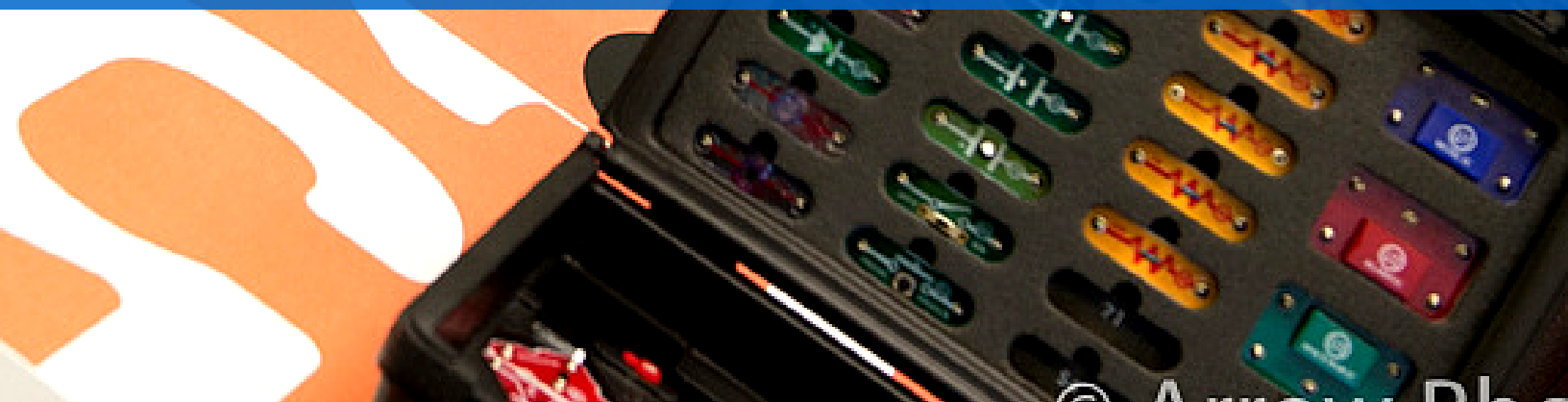
We were approached by the Esformes family who wanted to do something special for the school and asked us if we could dream up something and what it would take to get there. The dream was much bigger, not just STEM, but because the vision was so tied to really being able to develop an approach that would tap into children's inherent creativity and curiosity. STEM was the natural first step.

The hope was that the teachers would be able to see the power of their students' creativity and curiosity and develop their lesson plans with that in mind.





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## Did you bring in outside experts?

We did a number of things to guide us in this process and one of those things was bringing in outside experts. We didn't want this program to be just academic; we wanted it to also be an emotionally safe space for kids. We spoke with a counselor about creating a space for students to de-stress from a typical day. Jane Taubenfeld Cohen connected us with Mr. Adam Tilove who is the Head of School at the Jewish Community Day School of Rhode Island. Mr. Tilove gave us a lot to think about in terms of making sure that we keep it as openly creative and curious for children. We also visited a local school that is running this type of program - so needless to say, we did a lot of research.

It also happens that my dissertation is on barriers that exist in the classroom and one component of this program is the **Mobile Tech Lab**. My research inspired us to do away with the old school computer lab, and bring in a cart with tablets and laptops that a tech specialist brings from room to room. This means that teachers who are not familiar with ed-tech can work with the tech specialist and receive PD in this area. The idea is that the specialist will work with the teacher to integrate technology into that lesson until the teacher becomes more comfortable with it.

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# What are some of the other resources that your students will have access to?

In addition to the Mobile Tech Lab, students in grades 1-8 will spend time in the **Innovation Hub**, which is a science, engineering, digital multimedia, and tinkering “makerspace” area where they can design, experiment, build, and invent. First and second grade students will also have access to **Explore Galore**, which is an area that has things for them to tinker with and build (think: popsicle sticks, STEM type games, a hamster, and a fish tank). Since Explore Galore is for the younger students, it’s really about sensory exploration.



# HOW MUCH TIME WILL STUDENTS SPEND IN THESE SPACES?

In **Explore Galore** (grades 1&2), we will allow four - six students (supervised) for 15 minutes at a time. We don't want them to stay in there for too long or else they will get bored.

The **Innovation Hub** (Grades 1-8) is in lieu of a regular tech class. There may be some connection to what they are learning in their other classes, but not everything has to be tied. It will take on it's own curriculum.

# HOW LONG DID THE PROCESS TAKE - FROM INCEPTION TO LAUNCH?

Six to eight months.

We have been talking about this as a dream for the last two years, but it was just this past year that we were able to bring it to fruition.



## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS THAT WOULD LIKE TO IMPLEMENT THIS TYPE OF PROGRAM?

Yes, but as long as I can give credit to Mr. Tilove...

It has been a dream for me to develop a school that is not all about tests and assessments and metrics, but rather, a place where kids can be kids and use their creativity. One day, I was on a call with Mr. Tilove and my General Studies Principal and Technology Specialist. I was listening to Mr. Tilove describe what he was doing in his school and I asked him how he measured the impact to which he responded: "Stop it."

"Stop it?"

"Yes, stop asking that question."

He went on to explain that he once attended a leadership conference at Brown University and there was a session led by a PhD expert who asked participants to build a paper airplane and try to fly it across the room. For one hour they went back and forth constructing paper airplanes and then regrouped to re-evaluate how to make it fly further.



## ADVICE (CONTINUED)

Mr. Tilove asked me: "What would you do if you walked into one of your classrooms and saw that your students were engaged in building paper airplanes for an hour? What have we done to our world that you have to have a PhD to give permission to build paper airplanes?"

I realized that even within my dream, I have been tainted by the belief that everything has to have a metric and this belief would suck the enjoyment and meaning out of the program. So my advice would be to disregard the notion that fun and creativity needs to be measured, but also, to not run out and buy 3D printers and technology that kids will fight over and teachers will say "BE CAREFUL! THAT'S EXPENSIVE!" That's not what you want. Let kids flex their creativity with simple, everyday objects. That was also invaluable advice that I received from Mr. Tilove and would pass along to other schools.