

The Business of Learning

Michael Koffler has become an expert in the market of starting schools. He began running schools in the 1980s with his wife, a speech pathologist. It's not something we usually think of as a business, but it takes the same kind of mentality: you see a need and you fill it. This is how Koffler's mind worked when he graduated from SUNY Buffalo with degrees in business administration and accounting, and this is how it continues to work as he opens his forty-seventh and forty-eighth private schools. This September, The Aaron School opens on 45th Street in Manhattan and next year, the Claremont Academy will be open in lower Manhattan. That application process begins in September 2004.



Michael Koffler

The Aaron School is a special needs private school, serving nursery and elementary aged children. The school is well-equipped, featuring 13 classrooms, computer labs, libraries, music, art, ceramics, and physical education. The school aims at helping students with learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and language delays. Koffler realized that this school would be in high demand through his experience running the Claremont School on the West side of the city, since 2001. He saw that 10-15% of families at the Claremont School have a child with a developmental issue, and that these families were having difficulties finding nursery schools for their children. When he saw that need, Koffler decided to fill it with the Aaron School. It is already completely booked for the coming year.

Though the Aaron School is a private facility and enjoys all the benefits that come with this status, Koffler emphasizes that parents can get funded for it if they are able to go through a process with the City that proves that their child fits into one of a variety of circumstances. In that case, they can be reimbursed for about 70% of the tuition.

It is obvious that Koffler doesn't take much time to come up for air. Even as the Aaron School prepares for its first term, he is busy readying his newest school, the Claremont Academy. This is an interesting undertaking. The school is in the Wall Street area, and Koffler plans to utilize that location to the fullest. It will be kindergarten through 8th, with the majority of students in 6-8th grades. The area is ripe for such a market because of the devastation after September 11. There is a huge availability rate of buildings, and the fact that Wall Street has not been a 24-hour community since that time begs for a school. According to Koffler, there are no Middle Schools below Canal Street. Again, he saw the need and decided to fill it.

His dreams for this school are progressive. He plans to bring in professionals from the area to talk to the students about economics, capitalism, and the stock market. The Claremont Academy will be a full mainstream school, influenced by methods from the Princeton Review. John Katzman, who runs the Princeton Review, will be working with the curriculum of the Claremont Academy. Of course, these

methods will be altered to fit the younger students, but Koffler believes that incorporating ideas from the Princeton Review will help kids achieve better on standardized tests.

Koffler works hard to put a great program in place and then to let it flourish on its own. He visits to make sure everything is running smoothly, but he generally seems to put a lot of confidence in the people he hires. He consults with school leaders privately concerning admissions and staff, but he generally takes pride in the fact that he is very respectful of the people he hires.

Since Koffler has opened so many schools, I was interested in learning about how they differ. He said that he caters to the neighborhood. Some schools are more diverse than others, and some are more expensive. However, he tries to keep a level of multiculturalism in all of his schools through his extensive scholarship program. He encourages teachers who speak more than one language, particularly in his schools in Brooklyn and Queens, where the students are from various backgrounds. He finds that in his Manhattan schools, much of his job is catering to parents and assuring them that their children are getting quality educations.

The application process in Manhattan private schools today is almost as intense as college applications. The competition is fierce and the options are varied. Michael Koffler is always aware of what is needed and how he can improve. His business is education, and his mission is to deliver quality.

-Emily J Weitz

The application process for the Claremont Academy begins September 7, 2004. For more information, contact Michael Koffler at mkoffler@metschools.com or call 212 826 5905.