

# Mesivta 404



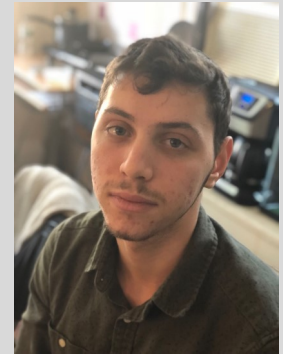
Our Story



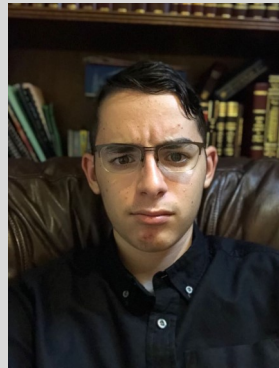
**Mendy Belinsky**



**Meir Schack**



**Zalmy Belinsky**



**Yoni Ben-Oni**



**Shuey Werner**



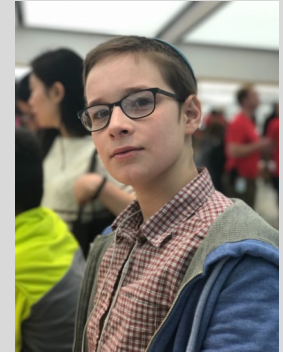
**David Schack**



**Eli Zilberman**



**Nisi Schlanger**



**Levi Albuherk**



**Rabbi Yehuda Fenton,**  
Jewish Studies Teacher



**Reb Vadi Albukerk,**  
ETC Student Services



**Morah Rivkah Schack,**  
English Studies Teacher

*“ At Mesivta 404, we challenge traditional roles of schooling. Students are teachers and teachers are students. We are a community of co-creators that are constantly on a journey of discovery. ”*

**Meet our Designers**

# What is failure?




Morah Rivkah talks about failure

When the Kohelet Prize was announced this year, we knew we had to tell our story. If there is any group who not only failed, took a risk, failed, reached for success, took more risk...and the cycle goes on...it's us. This is what has made us what we are!

We are Mesivta 404. Mesivta (in a box) not found.

To be 404 you first have to throw out all of those limited definitions of important words like success and failure. When learning and growing, there can't be static labels for a constantly-developing process that never ends.

# fail·ure

/ˈfālyər/ 

## Noun

1. Lack of success.
2. An unsuccessful person, enterprise, or thing.

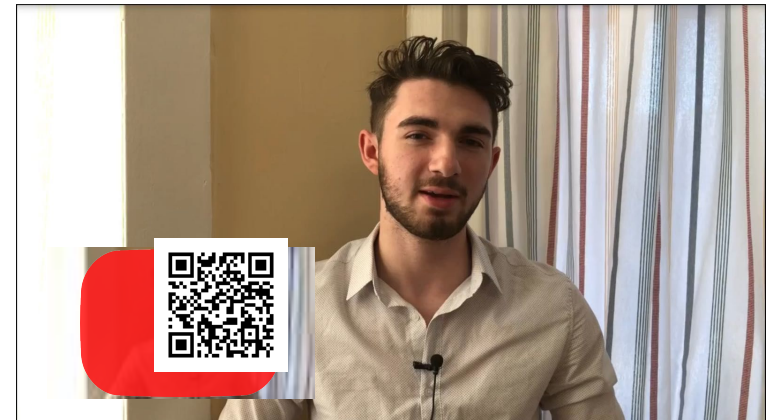
## Synonyms

failing - fault - fiasco - breakdown - bankruptcy

*“...when you come out of a situation without having gained anything from it...and even if you succeeded and you never learned why you succeeded —then it’s not really a success. It’s just blind luck.”*

Dovid Schack

12th Grader



Mesivta 404 students talk about failure





Morah Rivkah talks about starting Mesivta 404

*“ I guess at that moment I made an equation that risk couldn’t be any worse than the failure that they were already experiencing by being squeezed in the system...” ”*

*Morah Rivkah  
Mom and Teacher*



Stories of 404 students about their education journeys



In many ways, our community's education structure for boys needs an overhaul. Speak to just a few high school students and you will hear stories of feeling controlled, shamed, hemmed. You will also realize how many are just not realizing their thinking or spiritual potential. Judaism values the unique mission of each of us...yet our schools struggle to allow for that discovery.

***A student's connection to Torah and his desire to adopt our community's values are at risk.*** Equal to a boy's feeling of accomplishment and belongingness is his chance at finding his place among our people. But departing from the path of least resistance is hard. Taking the risk to do something different might just have to come from desperation. That is the origin story of 404.

# Decisions, decisions...

# in the beginning...



“

*It was very inspiring at first...now I was learning in a more user-friendly way.*

”

*Dovid Schack*



Dovid and Meir were the first. With no place to turn, they showed up every day to study with a teacher online from Chicago in a preschool coatroom. It was not really a program to build hope, but at least it was not a school doing harm.

We had a design question to test...could Jewish learning online work? If so, how? Could it be scaled? If so, this would open a world of opportunity to boys in our community who are not fitting into a traditional mesivta setting. It would also connect the best educators to boys who might not live in proximity. Could high-quality Regents courses for the English program be delivered through an international accredited school with instructors that would never be available in our community?

At first, our ideas seemed to work. As long as it was the two of them, the classes seemed personalized enough to succeed. But, soon after, when a third and fourth boy joined. The design began to break down.



Dovid and Meir in the early days of learning online. Preschool boys wandered into their coatroom to watch their shiur.



Visiting the Ohel on one of the rare visits of their teacher from Chicago.

*“ We had the complete freedom to do what we want when we want...and that’s what we did. ”*

*Shuey Werner*

*Ninth Grader*



Morah Rivkah and boys reflecting on what started going wrong

The first thing that began to go wrong? Crowd control and engagement. If you are an online instructor it is very hard to see what is happening outside the frame of your camera. It is also difficult to convey warmth and emotion...to sometimes give a physical high-five.

But paying our online teacher left little to no money to hire an assistant. We were going to have to make due. We began to try out new designs. Would using separate headsets and devices work better than one screen? How about using technology to filter and block student's activity during learning times? Was there a preferred way of seating? Scheduling?

Everything we tried to engage the boys during classes worked for a short while, but within a matter of weeks began to break down. Their teacher flew to New York twice to try and simply connect with them. This, too, hardly seemed to matter.

The boys had discovered how little oversight really existed in their new situation. They had gone from the extremely controlled environment of yeshivah to reckless freedom. Yet, with little time or resources, we adults didn't seem to know how to fix it.

# Trying Anything

*“After a while we realized we could just do whatever we wanted and it looked like we were on the screen paying attention...eventually I was just wasting time and playing games while class was on.”*

*Yoni Ben-Oni*

*Tenth Grader*



Morah Rivkah describes a bottom moment

By the time spring arrived, the boys were barely showing up for classes or learning. The few who were enrolled in math and language classes in the afternoon had fallen behind and dropped out. The space they were occupying was filled with clutter, garbage and worse.

They all seemed to spend hours playing video games together.

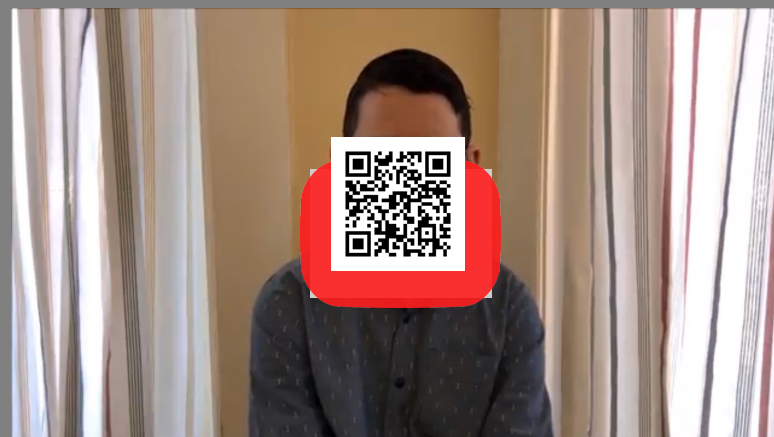
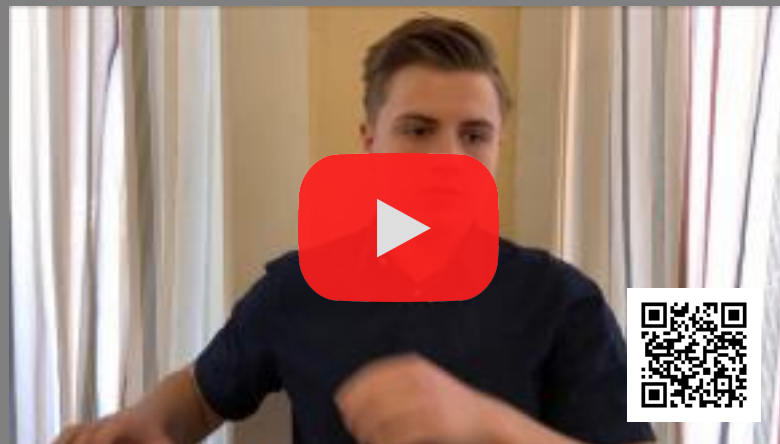
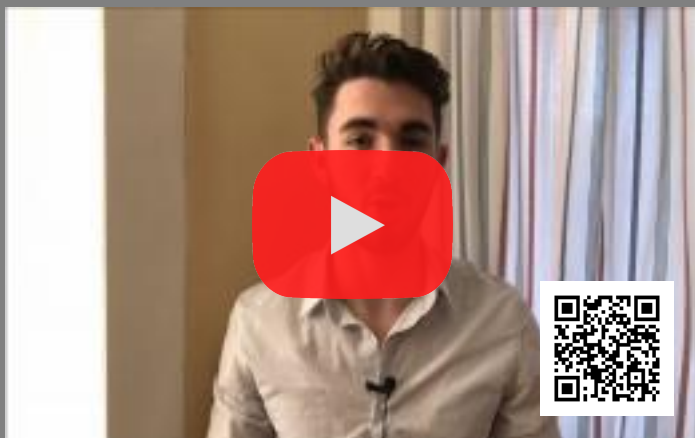
And they didn't really seem happy. Although it must be every teenaged boy's small dream to be able to experience true freedom from structure and responsibility. They had arrived in that place to find it quite empty.

We adults seemed to be at a loss to reign in what had begun to grow into a monster. We tried to hire an assistant to at least provide supervision. They talked right over him. Every way he tried to add structure made them almost laugh.

# ROCK BOTTOM



THE ONLY WAY IS UP







Reflections on the turning point design meeting in which the current program was founded



*“ To have an relationship with adults to make our program better, there has to be a relationship where both you are giving to adults and the adults are giving to you...”*

*Meir Schack*

*Tenth Grader*

# Now what?



Designing our new school

We called a meeting with the boys before announcing that we would be finding a different alternative for next year. We hoped at least to document what had gone wrong and to extract some learning lessons from the experience. Before the meeting, we had decided that we would ask them if they would want to consider forming a more formal high school under the official auspices of Lamplighters, but were pretty convinced that we all would decide to pass.

The room was packed. The boys, a handful of educators who had been involved with the program, 404 parents, Lamplighters board members and guests came together. We started by listing everything we had learned over the year and what we might advise others about starting a program such as 404. At some point, one of the boys suggested we keep a “wish list” for our new school. NEW SCHOOL??? Wait...we thought we were closing!

We casually asked the boys whether they thought we could start a successful program out of the ashes of 404. It was unanimously “yes.”

We shifted our work to start the planning. What would be our vision? Structure? What resources would we need? How would the boy’s attitudes and behaviors need to change? Lamplighters Mesivta had been born. The hard work had just begun.



clear schedule for entire day, but students were able to ~~take~~ take responsibility and successfully manage their time when there were gaps in supervision

MIXED UP SCHEDULE A FEW TIMES TO DETERMINE WHAT WORKED BEST  
RESULTED IN OPTIMAL CLASS PARTICIPATION.

9:00 - School starts  
9:10 - 10:00 - KATZ  
10 - 12 - Hebrew study  
12 - 12:45 - lunch  
12:45 - 1 - English

Friday - Lamplighters schedule  
Sundays - Independent Study  
Not with schedule

Night Seder with lighter topics / Parshas  
X

## SCHEDULING

Reading time?

Short classes over break topics

incentiv system to motivate arrival time and punctuality

### SPECIALS COMMUNITY PROJECTS

- Lablighthouse Pass or comedy service Bar Mitzvah club
- YES! X
- Art Show
- Inter-school
- Construction
- Just HS.
- Competition
- All out to go
- Visual arts...
- Painting
- Book of art
- Computer hacking projects (coding and hardware design)
- Accounting
- Movie making
- Tips to historical
- Master/camping trips
- Friendship Circle
- Things for diff. Mitzvahs/Tank For Chanukah Party
- Student run
- Electives
- Drama
- Music
- Science
- Sports
- Electronics
- Shabatons
- WE CREATED SCALE IN OURS OF MANY CASES BASED ON THE TOP SOURCES
- HAVE JEWISH LEADERS VISIT AND PRINT A PICTURE OF CURRENT JEWISH POLITICS
- WE HAD MORE JES WHO HAD ORBAT IDOLS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND WE LEFT
- Lablighthouse space for community a
- High school students present activities for students of other schools
- Could be a great place to make it more socially in spirit - particularly made it a very healthy experience
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## CURRICULUM + SUBJECTS

Talmud

- history of
- when written
- who written
- how written
- rules of Talmudic logic
- authority of
- chassidic interpretation
- scientific knowledge of the sages
- subjects vs. covering ground
- study a variety of different subjects rather than cover a certain # of pages

- Farming (planting seeds) (urban gardens)  
- Latin rooms

Skill building Activities for Tanach

- general knowledge writing  
- literature  
- Project Based

Personal growth (public speaking) singing, ...

- good books available  
- Source of significance  
- US vs Global efforts

History

- Hand-writing
- Sat was (stom)

Chassidic Philosophy Practical Halacha Tanach

Technology and Science

- Understanding real science and tech at a deep level
- Tech: from user experience all the way down to the silicon

CompSci

- Building own computers and networks

after school tutoring (OPTIONAL)

hands on subjects

- Shechita

Tales of

POSITIVITY, TRUST OF STUDENTS -- MINIMAL DISCIPLINE

THIS IS SCHOOL You can't just do what you want

LOVE OF LEARNING (all knowledge and skill areas)

STUDENTS LEARNING WILLINGLY IN A CORDIAL AND CONGENIAL ATMO.

CONSTRUCTIVE CONFRONTATION (no bickering)

UNITY and AHAVAH among all

INVOLVED ALERT



OF SUBJECTS/  
PROJECTS TO  
FOSTER INTEREST

STUDENT  
LEAD PROJECTS

OPPORTUNITY  
TO MENTOR  
YOUNGER STUD

GUEST TEACHERS  
+ SPEAKERS

Still student  
"fun"

Space  
big table

A successful phone  
system.

Yiddishkeit  
Yarmulka + Teibis  
Respectful  
language

Keep store were  
they ate supposed  
to be kept instu-  
ments/food at etc.

Self-governing  
- Making decisions  
as a group

Treat others  
w/ respect  
- Kindness  
- Proper  
admission  
skills

Testing to  
determine level/  
advance

Non-fluorescent  
light bulbs.  
Working outlets

organised b-bal cat

**RULES + REGULATION!**

NO watching  
flirt/subtle con-  
tent during school  
etc.

Care of  
Enviro

- Clean  
spaces  
- Keep clutter  
- Each responsible  
for clean &  
maint

give back

Care of  
Others

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**POPULATION**

group activities  
after school Pdg  
form in collab  
with other  
groups

- Thoughtful kids  
- Considerate  
kids  
- Great thinkers  
- Well-sized  
kisses

Non-phone  
addicts.  
No fidget  
Spinners!

Bonding activities  
(such as group  
camping trip).  
and trips in gen-  
eral  
+ Team and character  
building exercises

Interviews and  
trial periods for  
new students  
conducted by students

Had a regular  
minyan of students  
(ON TIME)

u fact between  
student that has  
a list of common values  
line  
connecting/solving con-  
flict.

**TURNING POINT**





Learning to CAT5 wire the building and build our own computers



# 404-Take 2



What Mesitva 404 aka Lamplighters Yeshivah is doing now



*Lamplighters*  
ישיבה



During the summer of 2017, we began the planning of 404 2.0. We identified several basic principles that would need to be structured if we had a shot of succeeding. We would need the right teachers, the right space, the appropriate curriculum and instruction—but most importantly, we would need a commitment from the boys that they would partner with us to build a school that would work.

Several important components needed to be worked out with a delicate balance: using technology in a productive way, implementing a proper schedule that works with the boys' energy, allowing students to be responsible for parts of their learning while providing enough structure and, most importantly, building a positive reinforcement system to focus on the light, rather than to fight the darkness. Each of these components required a whole series of design meetings and prototyping in order to follow through on our commitment to partner with the students, rather than just imposing from above.

The most exciting moment of the summer was when the mesivta boys began to learn how to CAT5 wire and set up the IT network for their new building. They helped with part of the renovation of their new space, including picking out and assembling the furniture, as well as wiring lighting and even acted as janitors of the building. Talk about ownership.



*“ In Lamplighters there is no hierarchy...it is an atmosphere of complete trust. There is no distance between students and teachers. ”*

*Nisi Schlanger  
Eleventh Grader*

Late night furniture purchasing for our new classroom



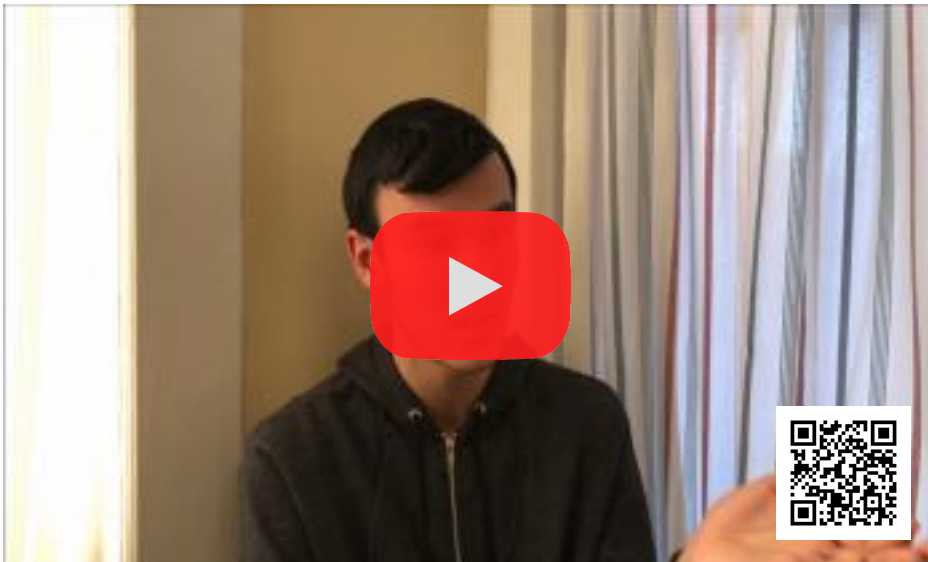
In a school that values process and collaboration there will always be risk.

Whether the risk is being judged for our choice to do things differently and depart from community norms, whether it be experiencing the consequences of the fact that without control students may choose to be non-productive or experiment with “breaking the rules,” or risking our reputation as educators...these will never go away.

But the “what if...” is what inspires us. Therefore, equal to the risk is the reward. Even though we are now Lamplighters Yeshivah, we will always be 404 (school in a box not found).



# Still failing forward...



All about our ongoing risk taking ; Tour of our lounge; Students in class; New students Nisi and Eli on their experience

# Our hope for Jewish education

During the process of building this prize entry we learned so much together. For the first time we captured our stories and perspectives in video. We learned to film and edit. We now know how to design an ebook.

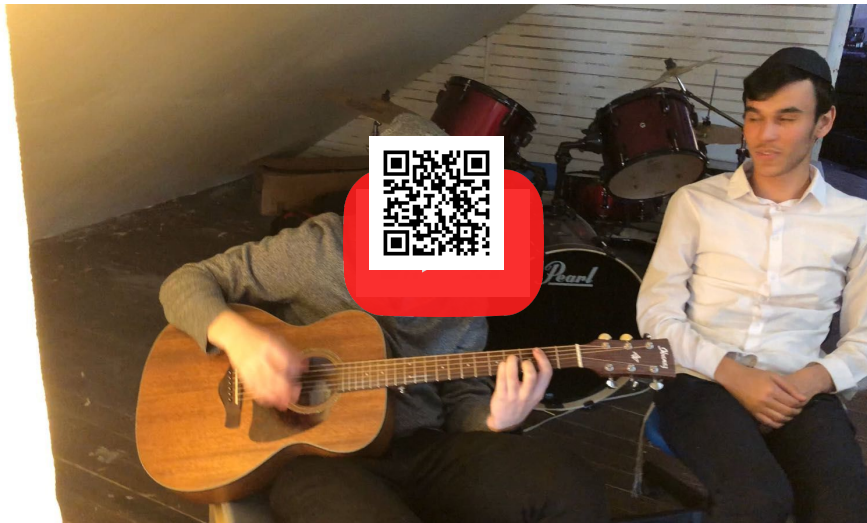
Rabbi Fenton, Morah Rivkah and Reb Vadi took time to reflect on our journey and how fortunate we are to have been given the blessings we experience by being a part of this special community.

We hope our story of risk-failure-opportunity is not only inspirational to others...but becomes a living proof-of-concept. This is already happening, as more and more boys call us to ask to join the program. More and more educators are calling to visit. Other educators are considering what we are learning to be important.

The future is full of possibility.







*“ There is a fear we have as adults that when we let up some control is going let the student drop...and that could be the case but what’s the reward on the other side? We actually see who the child really is...we actually respect him enough to let him become who he is meant to be. ”*

*Rivkah Schack  
Teacher*