

Life After Graduation from the New School of Monmouth County

High schoolers returned March 10 to the Holmdel alternative school to share their experiences

By [Holly Garguilo](#) | | March 11, 2011



Teacher Jay Smith introduces the graduates. Credit Holly Garguilo
Photos (4)

Over 50 people squeezed into the second floor of the New School of Monmouth County for Graduate Night on March 10, giving current families and prospective families a chance to see how this alternative school prepares students for the future.

The New School, founded by current director Susan Chilvers, bases their education model on the Montessori system where students learn at their own pace, explore areas of interest to them, and receive a more individualized curriculum. The only testing comes in the form of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), which is necessary for high school placement.

But how do these students from the small alternative schoolhouse fare when they transfer to mainstream high schools? Eighteen graduates now attending high school came back to answer that question.

"My friends in high school think one bad grade makes them bad at something," said Varun Kambhampati, a freshman at High Tech High School in Lincroft. "Because of the New School, I learned to look at what I did wrong, know I can do better, and realize that one grade doesn't quantify my intelligence."

"Every New School kid has a sense of intellectual curiosity," said sophomore Kayla Bashe, who is currently homeschooled while taking college level English classes at Rutgers. "We care about learning and want to learn new things, while other students want to get the best grade with the least amount of work."

Academically, New School kids have proved competitive with students attending High Tech, Communications High School in Wall Township, Christian Brothers Academy in Lincroft, and their neighborhood schools or private school.

Winchell makes short films, Bashe has had two articles published in the Sentinel, Gabriel Baum is an honor roll student involved in the literary magazine, and Rosie Wood-Yesline, a senior at St. John Vianney High School, has started two non-profit organizations: one for battered women, and one to send relief in the form of T-shirts to Haiti.

Students recounted learning about Canada in Canada, monthly trips to New York City, reading whenever they felt like it, putting on plays, being able to interact with the staff, and learning conflict resolution.

We learned conflict resolution here, and now we don't avoid problems but try to work them out, Winchell explained. We also learned how we can make the choice to not be part of the problem, he said.

Some students did experience some bumps in the road to transition, such as Wood-Yesline's difficulty conforming to being on time to school, Baum's initial realization that the other kids already all knew each other, and some struggled with the understanding of what exactly a teacher expected from an assignment that could not be deviated from.

"Overall he was very well prepared for high school," said Stephanie Baum, Gabriel's mom. "The report writing he wasn't used to, but the teachers seem to make clear the format they want," said Baum who brought Gabriel here each day from Monroe Township because she wanted a school who was cognizant of who her child was and not just material they needed to cover, she explained.

Prospective parents had questions answered by the graduates who offered insight into the learning experience, both socially and academically, at this alternative school. Another factor they will have to consider is tuition, with the cost being \$11,250 for the first child, with discounts offered for each additional child.

