Department of Education
Chancellor Richard A. Carranza

December 19, 2019

Bais Ruchel Elementary
68-84 Harrison Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11211

Dear Mr. Mandel:

By letter dated July 27, 2015, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) received a complaint about certain yeshivas listed in the letter. Your school was included in the list. According to the complaint, the signatories expressed their concern that the named yeshivas were "not providing an education that meets the requirement of substantial equivalence," as set forth in New York State law, including that English and mathematics instruction was insufficient, and that "[o]ther secular subjects are not taught at all, let alone taught in English."

The DOE appreciates the role that yeshivas play in our pluralistic society. Furthermore, the DOE applauds the efforts made by Parents for Educational and Religious Liberty in Schools (PEARLS) to develop Common Core aligned, culturally responsive curricula. On June 30, 2017, your representatives (PEARLS and counsel) provided documents—aligning a section of the Jewish studies portion of the yeshiva curriculum in grades one through four to the NYSED Common Core standards—that suggest that Common Core learning standards, skills and secular subject matter may be taught through Jewish studies.

As you may know, New York State Education Law Section 3204(2) requires that "[i]nstruction given to a minor elsewhere than at a public school shall be at least substantially equivalent to the instruction given to minors of like age and attainments at the public schools of the city or district where the minor resides."

On March 11, 2019, to fulfill its responsibilities under Education Law Section 3204, a team from DOE visited your yeshiva. Having previously visited another site of the same school (at 241 Keap Street), DOE team members met with school leaders at this site, who provided a brief overview of the school, before the DOE team visited classrooms. School leaders stated that the core mission of the school is to:

- Engage students in problem-solving and promote character development;
- Involve every student in the learning process; and
- Train students for a life of learning.

School administrators explained that the school strives for excellence on every level. Professional development, provided by the principal and curriculum leader, is ongoing and includes one-on-one coaching as well as working with teacher teams.

During the school walkthrough, which included classroom visits, the team saw:

- A sixth grade science laboratory class, taught in English, in which the teacher led students in conducting an experiment, using boards, bulbs, and wires to create an electrical circuit to light a bulb. Teachers created a worksheet using the textbook *Prentice Hall, Physical Science,* which students used to complete their assignment while they worked in small groups at each table. Administrators told the DOE team that students take science classes two to three times per week.
- An English Language Arts class (unspecified grade), taught in English. The class focused on spelling and exploring the meaning and context of words (prefixes and suffixes); students refer to a textbook published by *Mostos Publishing.* The teacher conveyed that correct spelling is required in every piece of writing.
- A sixth grade science class, taught in English, in which the teacher conducted a lesson exploring the physical properties of objects, *e.g.*, color, shape, weight, texture and state. Students referred to a textbook titled Science Interactions as they studied chemical changes in objects. Examples included water transforming to a gaseous state.
- A fifth grade mathematics class, taught in English. The lesson focused on the subtraction of fractions. The teacher used manipulatives on a whiteboard in front of the classroom to illustrate "2/6 = 1/3." Students were taught to find the common denominator so that fractions can be added and subtracted.
- A fourth grade English Language Arts class, taught in English. The class focused on grammar and, specifically, the use of adjectives. Students worked from a *Houghton-Mifflin English* textbook and discussed what an adjective is, and then used adjectives in sentences.
- A fourth grade science class, taught in English, focusing on how sediment forms and where it can be found.
- A third grade mathematics class, taught in English, on how to tell time. The teacher illustrated the process of computing changes in time by writing a specific time on the whiteboard, adding/subtracting minutes and questioning students about the revised time.

On June 19, 2019, as a follow-up to our school visit, we sent you a letter with a survey attached requesting additional information about the secular instruction provided at your school. Data from the State Education Data Reference File (SEDREF), aligned with your BEDS code (331400226444), does not indicate the grades you serve.

We received your responses to our letter on July 31, 2019. Your response provided the following information regarding instruction for students in elementary and middle school grades at your school:

- Secular subjects taught: English Language Arts, mathematics, science, social studies, US history, geography, health education and hygiene, civics and NYS history
- Sample lesson plans were provided in the following content areas:
    - *English Language Arts* (curriculum for grade seven including spelling, reading,

grammar, comprehension and writing)
- *Mathematics* (Prentice Hall Mathematics Course 2 curriculum for grade unspecified, including number and operations, algebra, data analysis and probability, problem solving, developing and evaluating mathematical arguments, reasoning and proofs, geometry and measurement)
- *US History, Geography, Civics, NYS History* (Glencoe: The American Journey curriculum overview for grade unspecified)
- *Science, Health Education, Hygiene* (Globe Book Company: Concepts of Challenges in Life Science Prentice Hall Science Explorer: Human Biology and Health curriculum for grade unspecified including science process skills and their relationship to scientific method, scientific method and experimental design, scientific measurement, microscope study, needs of living things, cells – tissues – organs microscopic study)
- *Health* including nutrition and nutrients, digestion, support and movement, transport, fighting disease, vision, nervous system
- *Hygiene* including dental hygiene, good posture for breathing, sanitary health habits

Based on our visit of March 11, 2019, and your responses to the June 19, 2019 letter, we believe that your school is providing instruction that is substantially equivalent to the instruction provided in the public schools in your district. However, we note that we did not see evidence of instruction in history or physical education.

We are pleased that you are providing this secular instruction and we offer our support to assist you in improving instruction in your school.

Please contact Ms. Bernadette Fitzgerald, Senior Executive Director, Office of Nonpublic Schools, who can be reached at BFitzge2@schools.nyc.gov, with any questions.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Carranza, Chancellor

cc: Avi Schick

Department of Education
Chancellor Richard A. Carranza

December 19, 2019

Bais Ruchel Elementary
241 Keap Street
Brooklyn, NY 11211

Dear Mr. Mandel:

By letter dated July 27, 2015, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) received a complaint about certain yeshivas listed in the letter. Your school was included in the list. According to the complaint, the signatories expressed their concern that the named yeshivas were "not providing an education that meets the requirement of substantial equivalence," as set forth in New York State law, including that English and mathematics instruction was insufficient, and that "[o]ther secular subjects are not taught at all, let alone taught in English."

The DOE appreciates the role that yeshivas play in our pluralistic society. Furthermore, the DOE applauds the efforts made by Parents for Educational and Religious Liberty in Schools (PEARLS) to develop Common Core aligned, culturally responsive curricula. On June 30, 2017, your representatives (PEARLS and counsel) provided documents—aligning a section of the Jewish studies portion of the yeshiva curriculum in grades one through four to the NYSED Common Core standards—that suggest that Common Core learning standards, skills and secular subject matter may be taught through Jewish studies.

As you may know, New York State Education Law Section 3204(2) requires that "[i]nstruction given to a minor elsewhere than at a public school shall be at least substantially equivalent to the instruction given to minors of like age and attainments at the public schools of the city or district where the minor resides."

On November 8, 2017, to fulfill its responsibilities under Education Law Section 3204, a team from DOE visited your yeshiva. In a meeting with school leaders prior to the tour of classes, the NYCDOE team was informed of the following:

- The school was founded by the Satmar sect as a Pre-K through eighth grade yeshiva for girls with the fundamental goals of teaching religious values and the study of the Torah.
- They further stated that the school seeks to cultivate law-abiding citizens and to educate them well. The school's mission is that students be self-learners, capable and competent, not afraid of the written word. According to the administrators, students must be problem-solvers and, post-graduation, they are highly sought, for such positions as teachers and secretaries. The school focuses on verbal and written communication skills, as these skills are "needed for healthy homes and healthy relationships."

- The principal and curriculum leader, who informed us that they have been working as a team for 30 years, stated that teachers are typically hired when they are young because it ensures that they are dedicated and open to learning and being guided.
- They stated that professional development is ongoing and includes one-on-one coaching as well as working with teacher teams. They added that the curriculum leader's office is located in the teachers' room in order for the curriculum leader to provide constant support to staff and convey the message that teachers must "continuously grow."
- They explained that teachers use bi-weekly formative and summative assessments to measure not only student learning but also teacher performance.
- The administrators stated that secular instruction is provided at the school every afternoon. It is designed to engage students in discourse where they are asked to explain themselves, encouraging deeper thinking. The curriculum advisor noted that the students are English as a New Language (ENL) students.
- They stated that the school has 10 Academic Intervention Services (AIS) classes.
- The administrators stated that the parent body and PTA are very supportive of the school. Parents receive regular newsletters, which explain classroom content, as a means of keeping them involved in their children's learning.

During the school walkthrough that included classroom visits, the team saw:

- A first grade English Language Arts (ELA) class, taught in English, in which the teacher used "The Keys to Reading" workbook and students sang along with an audiotape of an "ABC" song. The teacher used props and pictures to develop students' vocabulary and their ability to write upper and lower case letters. The teacher sounded out the letter "V" and asked students to repeat the sound after her. She repeated this process using the lower case "v." Students air-traced the letter "v" using their fingers. Students then used two sticks to make the letter "v."
- A fourth grade science class, taught in English, in which the teacher posed a question on the front board: "Why are air conditioners installed on the top of the room and radiators on the bottom?" The teacher provided a diagram of hot and cold particles on the board. During the lesson, the teacher posed additional questions such as, "Which container will be heavier?" and called on different students for answers. The teacher demonstrated that hot air rises by conducting an experiment. She attached the opening of a balloon to the opening of a bottle and then placed the bottom of the bottle in hot water. The air in the bottle then expanded, causing the balloon to slightly inflate. She then told the class that they were going to provide a prediction regarding an experiment, using the scientific method. She provided students with a handout with the following questions: What do we want to prove? What supplies did we use? The teacher used props to demonstrate heavier and lighter objects and asked students to predict which object would fall to the ground at a faster rate.

- A sixth grade science class, taught in English, in which the teacher demonstrated sounds made by a tuning fork and asked student why the fork continued making sounds after it was hit. The teacher asked students to do a "think-pair-share" to discuss their predictions. Students shared aloud. The teacher continued to probe students with additional questions and demonstrated the concepts of resonance, pitch and frequency using a guitar.
- A seventh grade social studies class, taught in English, in which students had social studies textbooks opened to a chapter on Lewis and Clark and the Louisiana Purchase. The teacher introduced a discussion on the pros and cons of the Louisiana Purchase and asked probing questions (*e.g.,* were people happy with the purchase?) The teacher encouraged students to use academic vocabulary and asked them to think like scholars. She asked them: "Did anyone think it was a good idea to make the Louisiana Purchase?"; "Why weren't federalists happy with the purchase?" Students answered questions, and the teacher introduced, read aloud, and then asked questions about a text written by Alexander Hamilton concerning the Louisiana Purchase. The teacher reviewed a handout on presidents, as students followed along.
- A seventh grade science class, taught in English, in which the teacher introduced the study of cells. She asked the class to look at the different shapes of the cell structures of sugar and salt (sugar had an irregular shape; table salt had a cube shape). The teacher discussed the structure of cells (e.g., vacuoles and cell membranes) and the qualities of cell walls.
- An eighth grade math class, taught in English, in which the teacher posed a question on the front board: What is the difference between rational and irrational numbers? The teacher reviewed the concepts of imaginary, undefined and real numbers. The teacher asked questions about square roots, fractions, and decimals and received responses from the students. All students had textbooks.

On June 19, 2019, as a follow-up to our school visit, we sent you a letter with a survey attached requesting additional information about the secular instruction provided at your school. Data from the State Education Data Reference File (SEDREF), aligned with your BEDS code (331400227203) indicates that you serve grades Pre-K through eight.

We received your responses to our letter on July 30, 2019. Your response provided the following information regarding instruction for students in elementary and middle grades at your school:

- Secular subjects taught in your school: English Language Arts, mathematics, science, social studies, US history, geography, health education and hygiene, civics and NYS history.
- Sample lesson plans were provided in the following content areas:
    - *English Language Arts* (curriculum for grade seven including spelling, reading, grammar, comprehension and writing)
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geometry and measurement)
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Based on our visit of November 8, 2017, and your responses to the June 19, 2019 letter, we believe that your school is providing instruction that is substantially equivalent to the instruction provided in the public schools in your district. However, we note that we did not see evidence of instruction in physical education.

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