

## A High School Dropout? Not Anymore

*By Sarina Roffé*

“In New York City, more than 50 percent of high school students – many of them immigrants - drop out,” said Dr. Ephraim Buhks, Director of Bramson ORT College in Forest Hills and Bensonhurst. “These are children who are challenged or cannot meet the Regents requirements, either because of language difficulties or because they have no support system.”

“They are vulnerable. Many need to work but after a few years of working in low paying jobs, they realize they cannot advance without a high school diploma. So they come to Bramson ORT,” said Dr. Buhks, who hails from **Israel**.

A project of American ORT, Bramson ORT College allows students with no high school diploma to work toward their high school equivalency diploma, or GED, while at the same time earning college credits. Once the student has completed the courses required for the GED, with a grade of C or better, then he/she can apply to the state for the GED. Once the GED is received, then those same 24 credits can be applied toward an associate’s degree.

“We became a magnet for these students because the course we built meets state requirements,” said Dr. Buhks. “Many people don’t realize that the Regents requirement created more dropouts among immigrant students than the regular populations. For them, a high school diploma – and with it the American dream - became impossible.”

In the two decades since Bramson ORT opened its second campus in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, the school has served 50,000 immigrants from 40 countries, with an average age of 35. Open for 25 years, the Forest Hills Campus, had 143 students in its last graduating class. On a recent visit, students from Albania, China, Italy, the former Soviet Union, Syria, Iran, Israel, and Russia told their stories, each filled with the challenges of attempting to succeed in a new country where the language and culture was strange. By attending Bramson ORT College, the students are counting on its job placement rate of 85% when they graduate.

Steve Tychin, a Russian immigrant who dropped out of Brooklyn Studio HS and attends the Bensonhurst campus, said he couldn’t get a Regents diploma so he left. His father is a musician and computer programmer, his mother a nurse, and his sister an NYU grad, so clearly education was important in his home.

“For the past three years, I have been driving for a car service,” said Tychin. “Now I am getting my GED and I am completing my AA in business management.” Tychin intends to transfer his credits to a four year college, like New York Institute of Technology.

Another advantage for immigrant students is Bramson ORT College’s expertise at handling student visa applications such as the I-20, F-1 or M-1. “An F-1 visa enables a student to attend an academic or practical program for one year, but it can be extended.

Once the students get the training and apply for an internship, which is permitted under the F-1 visa, if the employer wants to keep them on, they apply for an H-1B Visa. This enables them to work for that specific employer only because of the job skills they acquired and is the first step toward a green card, or work visa,” said Dr. Buhks.

Ms. Janet Goldstein, English and Liberal Arts Coordinator, said that the curriculum is filled with ways that students can also learn American culture. “An English lesson assignment will include a field trip to the New York Aquarium or the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, with a list of things to look for, followed by a writing assignment based on what they learned,” she said.

Like all ORT schools around the globe, Bramson specializes in meeting the needs of at risk populations and training them with job skills that will help them enter the job market and live dignified and independent lives. The ORT global network of schools, colleges, technology centers and online courses, educates more than 300,000 students in 60 countries annually. In its 125 year history, ORT schools boast more than three million graduates.

The training programs at Bramson ORT College include medical assistant, computer information systems, business management, accounting, office technology and electronics. For example, the medical assistant programs may include courses on blood fluid analysis, taking blood and vital signs, doing EKGs, and giving injections. There are also courses in medical coding and billing, necessary when working in a doctor’s office, as well as database management. In the electronics program there are courses in heating and air conditioning repair and security.

New courses are available on line or through ORT’s innovative E-Learning Center, for example, where students can take a course in Hebrew language with a teacher in Israel using a web cam in real time. The teacher teaches the lesson, which is on a main screen in the computer lab, followed by questions and answers. To avoid confusion with students asking questions simultaneously, the teacher must recognize the student, who then speaks. Assignments are submitted electronically.

Bramson ORT is part of ORT Operations USA, supported by American ORT, with technical institutes in Los Angeles and Chicago, and computer centers in Miami, Atlanta, Cleveland and Detroit. Bramson ORT College is accredited by the New York State Board of Regents.