

MAKING THE GRADE

Entrepreneur Erik Kimel brings his peer-based tutoring business to Philly's schools. BY UNA LAMARCHE

ERIK KIMEL WAS a 17-year-old high school senior taking AP calculus when he had the idea for what would become his future business.

"We had just taken a test, and everyone had done well," Kimel, now 23, says by phone from Potomac, Maryland, where he grew up and which he still calls home. "The students in that class were so smart. But I realized that my friends didn't know those kids, and that, because of social cliques, they might never know them. I thought that if I could just put them together, great things could happen."

As it turns out, he was right. What started with an ad for tutoring that Kimel took out in *The Potomac Gazette* has expanded into a thriving company that creates jobs for high school and college students and helps hundreds of kids each year achieve academic success. And now, after five years in the Washington, DC, area and a successful partnership with Sidwell Summer, a division of Sidwell Friends School, in 2008, Kimel is setting up a new branch in Philadelphia.

Kimel spent time in the city last year networking with parents and educators, and says he already has the support of the Lower Merion school district, which is promoting Peer2Peer at PTA meetings and through flyers around school campuses.

"Schools want to work with us because we benefit students in two ways," Kimel says. "One, we create good jobs for high-achieving students. Two, we help struggling kids gain confidence and get better grades."

Kimel is committed to working with all families, not just those who can afford the average \$35 to \$45 hourly fee that his tutors charge. Peer2Peer has already partnered with the Montgomery Child Advocacy Project, under the guidance of district attorney Risa Vetri Ferman, to offer free services to students who are victims of abuse or neglect.

Peer2Peer's tutors are exemplary mentors, but parents looking for academic help for their children will be glad to learn that there are adults



on staff. While running the company remotely from New York University from 2004 to 2008, Kimel created the position of management operational mentor, an adult professional who serves as a liaison between tutors and students. The acronym, MOM, isn't a coincidence.

"There's a real family culture within our organization," says Kimel. Not only does his own mother do the company's accounting, but the recently instated Philadelphia MOM, Iris Berkowitz, is also the mother of a friend of Kimel's. "There's nothing else that I know of in Philly that's like this organization," she says. "It's such an amazing network."

To learn more about Peer2Peer Tutors in Philadelphia, call 610-536-6008 or visit peer2peertutors.com.

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