



# SJ teacher opens education center



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(Photo: Jose F. Moreno/Courier-Post)

MOORESTOWN – There's an old saying that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

Ruchika Arora, who grew up in an Indian household where education was the No. 1 priority, has arrived for her new students.

The Westampton married mother of three young girls wanted to ensure they were prepared for the future.

So Arora became a franchise owner for Seattle-based Best in Class Education Center and opened up the first East Coast branch in March on Main Street in Moorestown.

"Last summer I was doing a lot of research," said Arora, a special education teacher at Westampton Tech for a decade. "My daughter is in first grade and I needed something more for her. The district that I live in is a great district but I don't think she was getting enough of what she needed. I needed for her to be pushed a little more."

Best in Class, which focuses on critical thinking, word problems and application, attributes much of its increased expansion and success to the investment from the South Asian community. A whopping 90 percent of the entrepreneurs the company works with are Indian parents, like Arora, while 80 percent of the students at the centers nationwide are of South Asian descent.

South Asia includes India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, among a few other countries.

According to the 2010 Census, New Jersey's Asian population grew by more than 1,400 percent since 1970, when just under 48,000 Asians called the Garden State home. There were more than 725,000 residents in 2010.

Best in Class Chairman and CEO Hao Lam says the Northeast is an area where the company hopes to grow.

"We're very excited to have the first center on the East Coast," said Lam, who added the Best in Class average cost is \$100 per month. "We have a center in Ohio and the rest are in Texas, California or Washington state... We plan to have maybe about 10 centers in the next three to five years in the New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia area.

"There are a lot of pockets where they have a lot of Asian families. Normally we look at the market and where the competitors are. We want to follow where they are."

The majority of Arora's students are South Asian, including Divya Prajapati, 8, of Deptford and Adnan Maung, 10, and his sister Sarah, 7, who live in Bellmawr.

Manisha Prajapati, who is from India, likes what she's seen thus far for her daughter Divya, who loves coming to the center.

"We came here on the first day on the grand opening," said Prajapati, who brings her daughter once a week for two hours. "My daughter loved it. She never complained that 'I don't want to go back or it's too boring or too complicated.' She's enjoying it so much. She's learning. English is her weakness. She's pretty good at math."

Lay Lay Zaw, Adnan and Sarah's mother, loves the individual attention.

"They're very good one-on-one," said Zaw, who is originally from Burma. "They're very nice talking to the kids. She's (Ruchika) a teacher, so she knows about the kids."

Adnan enjoys the candy and treats they can earn but also says he really likes the one-on-one teaching. "One teacher focuses on you, your needs and your necessities," he said. "I've seen a lot of improvement, especially with writing."

Arora, who has three teachers who work with her, said she was encouraged to target South Asians, "because they will come. Now that I'm seeing it, it is true.

"I think the concept of education is very important overall (in the South Asian community). Education is No. 1. In growing up, you have to be something, you have to have a career."

Arora would like to eventually open up several more franchises in North Jersey, closer to her North Brunswick roots.

Arora, who has taught for 14 years, offers cool incentives, such as Best in Class dollars — fake money earned for completing tasks, doing well on tests or completing rough drafts on papers.

Students can compile those dollars and buy candy or other treats out of the prize case. They will receive trophies and other awards once they complete a year in the program.

"Most of my students are saving money, they're all really cheap like me," she said with a laugh. "They're like, 'We're going to save it and buy big stuff.' They're excited about that.

"Classes are filling up pretty fast."

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