

SUMMER 2017 קיץ תשע"ז

HaYidion

הידיעון

SUMMER HOMEWORK



PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools

HaYidion

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Please contact Elliott Rabin at elliott@prizmah.org or by phone at 646-975-2807.

Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools

254 West 54th St., 11th floor, New York, NY 10019 • 646-975-2800 • info@prizmah.org • www.prizmah.org

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SUMMER HOMEWORK

*Hello Muddah, hello Faddah
Here I am at Camp Granada
Camp is very entertaining
And they say we'll have some fun if it stops raining.*

One of the joys of parenthood lies in introducing children to the things that we loved when we were young. Alan Sherman's "Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah" is a classic that my children have listened to over and over on YouTube. The song humorously captures the voice of a child who is attending Jewish sleepaway camp for the first time. (The camper's Jewishness is not mentioned but is patently obvious.) Suffering from homesickness, the camper writes a letter to his parents while waiting in his bunk for the rain to stop. After only one day, he's begging to go home, recounting a litany of exaggerated woes designed to convince them: poison ivy, ptomaine poisoning, alligators in the lake, malaria... Crucially (spoiler alert!), after many hilarious episodes, the last stanza reveals a radical change: the weather clears and he discovers that he actually enjoys camp. Swimming, sailing, and baseball—"gee that's bettah, / Muddah, Faddah kindly disregard this letter."

If we look a little deeper, the song reveals some of the benefits that summer and summer camp bring to the lives of our students and children. They learn to adapt to new environments, away from the familiarity of home and their literal and metaphorical comfort zones (bunk beds! bug juice!). They meet new people, learn to make friends quickly and work as a team (chores! color war!). They spend time outdoors, on walks and hikes, swimming in the lake and enjoying a wholesome environment (snakes! camping!). They learn to confront their resistance to new challenges, overcome fears and gain resilience and confidence. Sherman captures the anxiety and the joy, boredom and exaltation that children experience at camp. Indeed, the kinds of learning that students experience over the summer are as valuable as, but very different from, school learning.

The articles in this issue begin with a recognition of the difference and legitimacy of summer experiences, their necessity for the personal, social and spiritual development of children. Authors accept the notion that children need time away from school, not merely as "downtime" but as an opportunity to have experiences that will be meaningful and important to them for their entire lives. They need to swim, climb trees, play hours of soccer, spend time with friends and make new ones, to improvise, cope with disappointment and exercise some control over their lives. All of the authors acknowledge that there is value in not assigning summer homework.

And yet, at the same time, day schools do not conceive of themselves as artificial boxes that students enter in September and step out of in June. They are rather microcosms, model worlds that students are meant to take with them throughout the year and throughout their lives. Parents send

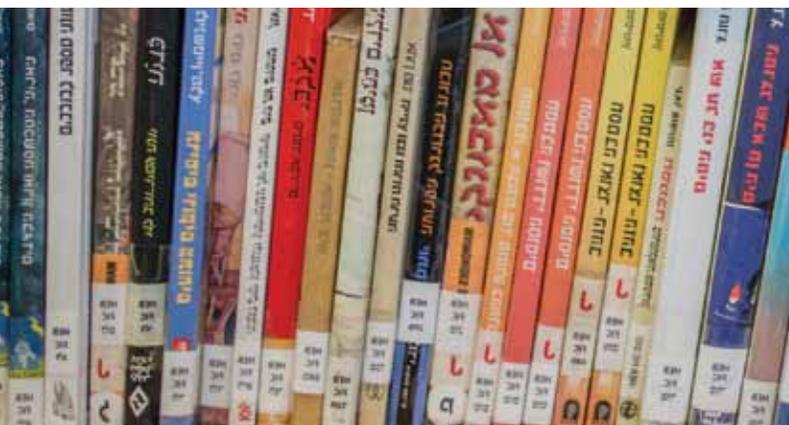
children to day school in the hope that the school will help shape them into people who are ethically alert, intellectually curious, disposed toward active participation in Jewish life and community. Assignments are a way for the school to ensure a continuity between the ethical and intellectual life at school and the students' lives beyond campus.

How can summer assignments accomplish that lofty goal without squelching students' needs for fun and exploration? In the first section, teachers and administrators wrestle with this challenge, and offer solutions from various perspectives. **Ablin** advises against heeding the boggy of the dreaded "summer slide," often the uninspiring rationale for summer homework. **Wise** turns to Daniel Pink to tap into student motivation for summer reading. **Landa** proposes a host of projects that would combine ethical with intellectual goals. **Lubner** urges authenticity, imagining ways for students themselves to craft their summer study. **Grebenu** asks how we can find meaningful ways to assess student summer work, and **Krieger** argues that summer assignments should be crafted with the same eye toward student differentiation that teachers direct toward classroom assignments.

In our spread of pieces from schools, students describe summer experiences, from overseas trips to Shabbat dinners, that exerted an impact on their Jewish identity. The next section looks at summer work for school professionals. **Andron, Markel and Solomon** describe the benefits of administrators learning together as a team in their professional development. Prizmah colleagues **Eisen, Heller and Loewenstein** suggest using the summer to strengthen teacher professional development, throughout the year. **Dohn** proposes summer reading circles to strengthen faculty learning and cohesion. **Fridman and Weinstock** envision the summer as an invaluable time to gear up for development work during the school year. And for parents preparing their children for college visits and applications, **Geller** offers a bounty of ideas that college counselors can present.

Two concluding articles bring us back to the connection between camp and campus. **Grinberg** explores the underlying philosophical question of how these two pillars of Jewish education relate: opposites, complements, or wholly other? **O'Brien** presents a vision in which educators who work in day schools and camps learn from each other and strengthen each other's practice.

May this summer be a time of refreshment and renewal, of housecleaning and new learning, of personal discovery and inspired teamwork, for your students, faculty, administrators and lay leaders and everyone at your school.



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MEET THE AUTHORS



Jason Ablin is the principal at Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy in Beverly Hills. jablin@hillelhebrew.org



Rabbi Dr. Joshua Wise is assistant principal in the upper division at the Magen David Yeshiva Elementary School in Brooklyn. joshuadovwise@gmail.com



Alison Landa is a literacy coach and classroom teacher at Yavneh Academy in Paramus, New Jersey, who is passionate about engaging students in authentic learning activities that concurrently bolster their social and academic skills. Alison.landa@gmail.com @landa_alison



Rabbi Craig Lubner is the chair of the science department and the Israel advisor at the Yeshiva of Flatbush Joel Braverman High School in Brooklyn. clubner@flatbush.org



Rabbi Maury Grebenau is the principal at Yavneh Academy of Dallas. mgrebenau@yavnehdallas.org



Yael Krieger is the director of educational support at the Jewish Community High School of the Bay in San Francisco. ykrieger@jchsofthebay.org



Michelle Andron is the general studies principal, **Esther Markel** is the vice principal, and **Rabbi Levi Solomon** is the principal at Emek Hebrew Academy Teichman Family Torah Center in Sherman Oaks, California. mandron@emek.org, emarkel@emek.org, lsolomon@emek.org



Melanie Eisen is the associate director for professional development, **Shira Heller** is the director of student and teacher learning, and **Shira Loewenstein** is the program director for teacher and leadership development, all at Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools.

Melaniee@prizmah.org, Shirah@prizmah.org, Shiral@prizmah.org



Hadar Dohn is the Sager Principal at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Metropolitan Chicago. hadar.dohn@schechter.org



Nanette Fridman, MPP, JD, is founder and principal of Fridman Strategies (www.fridmanstrategies.com), a consulting firm specializing in strategic planning, financial resource development, governance and leadership coaching for nonprofits. She is the author of *On Board: What Current and Aspiring Board Members Must Know About Nonprofits & Board Service*. fridmanstrategies@gmail.com

Jennifer Weinstock has more than 20 years of experience in major gifts and development and is currently the director of development at Gann Academy in Waltham, Massachusetts, and a Wexner Field Fellow. jweinstock@gannacademy.org



Sherri Geller is the co-director of college counseling at Gann Academy in Waltham, Massachusetts, and president of the New England Association for College Admission Counseling (neacac.org). sgeller@gannacademy.org



Wendy Grinberg is a Jewish educational consultant, the director of Jewish education at URJ Eisner Camp, and an EdD candidate at the William Davidson School of Education at Jewish Theological Seminary. grinbergconsulting@gmail.com



Kate O'Brien is the director of Jewish education at the Foundation for Jewish Camp, where she provides Jewish educational insight, direction and coaching for the breadth of FJC's programs. kate@jewishcamp.org

FROM THE
CEO



PAUL BERNSTEIN

THE GROWTH OF A YEAR

Summer is a time for growth, both in nature and in ourselves. As the trees around us grow and change, Prizmah is blooming, too. This time last year, Prizmah did not exist. We were five separate organizations. The idea was merely a seed of inspiration. And now, we are together, operating as a unified pan-North American entity, preparing for summer and working toward an even stronger future for Jewish day school education.

I cannot help but reflect on our progress. This has been a year of connecting and learning. We have hosted virtual coffees and meetings with more than 150 heads of schools and principals, traveled to 16 cities, visited more than 50 schools and talked directly with more than 1,000 school professional and lay leaders. Learning will always be an important part of Prizmah, and your input will continually help us understand what matters and how Prizmah can better serve you.

We broke new ground with the Prizmah Conference: The Power of Story. Bringing together 1,000 of our peers from 215 schools to discuss stories of leadership, education, triumphs and challenges. We heard from leaders, speakers and each other. We played, laughed, ate and, most importantly, learned as we embraced the notion that the future of Jewish day school education is a story for all of us to tell.

We have united disparate programs to become Prizmah programs, strengthening our ability to offer what schools need and to broaden their reach, in leadership, financial vitality, student learning, placement, coaching and professional development.

It has been a year of inspiration. We have seen many examples of schools pushing the boundaries of education, from STE(A)M programs that integrate with Jewish studies programs, to day school partnerships in cutting-edge school movements such as Alt School and recognition as Apple Distinguished Schools. And we've seen schools where the soul of Judaism is embodied in the ways that children celebrate holidays, rejoice in the state of Israel, and embrace those in their communities who are less fortunate and need their help.

It has been a year of coming together. With bomb threats that did not weaken our faith, but instead showed our strength. I am so appreciative of the way schools handled the situation to protect children and staff, and to reassure parents. I am grateful that Prizmah was able to work with experts in security and safety to bring resources to schools and enable school leaders to connect with and learn from each other, offering mutual support, advice and experience.

This past year has built a strong foundation for what we want to achieve in the future. Through our engagement with schools and the

experience of Prizmah programs and services, we learned a great deal that will shape Prizmah's future. Your feedback affirmed Prizmah's core goals: advancing educational excellence, enhancing financial vitality, and building support for Jewish day schools. It also affirmed how critical the network of day schools that lives in Prizmah can be.

Our focus for next year will be building the network connections and strengthening our work towards the three core goals. A critical component to accomplishing these goals is excellent leadership at every level. Why leadership? Henry Adams once said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." We want to influence and inspire great leadership, because Prizmah is not just about delivering results for a year; it's about supporting and influencing Jewish day school education for years to come.

Prizmah has partnered with The AVI CHAI Foundation to conduct an in-depth analysis of existing leadership programs. Rooted in this research, we plan to invest in our leaders with more programs that support heads of school, teachers, board chairs, senior leadership teams and administrators. We will continue to expand existing leadership programs, such as Head of School Professional Excellence Project (HOSPEP) and YOU Lead. We will look for new opportunities for growth, such as strengthening lay leadership development in partnership with the field leaders at BoardSource, and providing strong coaching support for schools.

At Prizmah we are thinking about not only individual schools and school leaders, but also the communities in which our schools reside and the field that they, together with other education organizations, nonprofits and federations, comprise. What does the day school field need as whole in order to thrive? How can research help us make data-driven decisions for schools and the field? In what ways can Prizmah connect leaders with each other to benefit from the rich diversity that our field brings? What do schools need in order to face the challenges of enrollment, raise the funds necessary to thrive, and recruit the Judaic studies teachers that are so hard to find? How do we help make the case for day schools at every level? These are questions that the professionals at Prizmah are working on every day. We don't have all the answers, but we continue to seek the input of schools and communities on our shared journey toward a future in which Jewish day school education is the first choice for Jewish families.

Together is how we created Prizmah. And together is how we will lead Prizmah. I invite you to share your ideas on ways we can improve Prizmah and support your school's success. May you find time this summer for growth and relaxation. I look forward to all that next year brings for all of us at Prizmah.

Five current Prizmah board members who served on the boards of the legacy organizations discuss their observations of Prizmah's growth during this first year. **Participants: Paul Bernstein, moderator; Michael Bohnen, Jodi Hessel, Nathan J. Lindenbaum, Joseph Steiner and Dara Yanowitz.**

WATCHING THE FLOWER BLOSSOM

Paul: After nearly one year, what are people saying about Prizmah?

Dara: As we all know, it's an enormous undertaking to have five established Jewish organizations choose to come to a table and try to create something new. It's pretty unheard of, and I think that people were skeptical but also excited that we were willing to go through this process.

Joseph: I think that the skepticism has dissipated and been replaced by a real optimism as to what the merged organization can do for the day school world, and a lot of that had to do with the conference. I'm sure all of you heard it from the people in the elevators and corridors, not just that they were impressed with the conference, but they were grateful that it had been convened.

Dara: People would look at our badges and say, "Oh, you're on the Prizmah board? Thank you." We were observing the materialization of the dream.

Paul: Michael, having been at the Jewish Funders Network, what were your impressions of the conversations in the wider philanthropic realm?

Michael: Just like with any investment, you have early stage investors, who are excited by a new idea, and others who wait and see what you actually do. We certainly have been very successful with some of the early stage investors, and I think we still have a job to do with some of the funders who want to see the product. I'm confident that the more they see, the more people will come on board.

Paul: How does Prizmah support schools to reflect their distinct religious identity or worldview?

Jodi: The schools didn't want to lose their identities. Everyone is very excited to see that that isn't happening. Prizmah is representing everyone, yet also keeping the customer service of a favorite store where they greet you by name and give you a smile, and you feel like you've got a friend. Prizmah's school advocates are those people. They are really making the schools feel comfortable.

Nathan: I think that we took the fairly conservative route in year one, to replicate almost everything that the founding organizations were doing. The challenge lies before us on a couple of levels: first, to achieve cross-pollination, to take the best programs from each of the founding organizations and get schools from all different streams to take advantage of them; second, to do something new.

Paul: What opportunities and challenges do you see for Prizmah in year two?

Michael: We need to help change the culture so that all schools realize the value of membership. Membership is important because it reflects Prizmah's value proposition: schools get goods and services in exchange for what they pay. But it's also important that they belong to this venture, that they feel a sense of unity and see that their participation can really help them meet their challenges.

Dara: One of the reasons we created Prizmah was because of the wealth and breadth of opportunity. Innovative programs that would appeal to schools across the streams, large and small. Collective lobbying for things that day schools need, whether it's endowment or government help or funding. Professional development for day school teachers fieldwide. A think tank for donors to discuss the big questions that affect all day schools: financial stability, enrollment, sustainability.

Nathan: We're going to develop innovative programs that are unique for Jewish day schools, and we're also going to make available programs that already exist and are appropriate for our schools. Through collaboration we can bring programs to the field that are not accessible or affordable for a single school.

Michael: The challenges that schools face—affordability, excellence, advocacy—are becoming even more difficult. Prizmah can address all of those issues on a collaborative basis for the entire day school field.

Paul: Could you touch on the question of schools, Prizmah, communities, and federations working together: Where's the collective impact opportunity?

Nathan: I've been intrigued by the notion of Prizmah focusing on working with communities, not just with individual schools. Some communities are already organized, and we should leverage that. In other communities, we can be the catalyst that brings individual institutions together. We can honestly say that we can effectively support all of the schools in the community.

Jodi: While most of us live in or near large Jewish communities, for schools in small, isolated communities, Prizmah is their lifeline. When we empower them to network with similar schools, they understand and support each other, and that's just such a blessing for those schools.

Paul: What are you most excited about as you move forward?

Michael: Prizmah as a model for cooperation of people from different movements and viewpoints, hopefully one that can be replicated elsewhere.

Jodi: The idea of getting more Jewish tushies in schools.

Joseph: The potential to get schools to work together across the continent on educational excellence and on viability.

Dara: Continuing the momentum, seeing the business plan be fleshed out, watching the flower blossom, and doing what we set out to do.

Nathan: The notion of raising the profile of the day school movement generally. If we can continue to operate at a high level, we will see philanthropists and community leaders lining up to support our movement and move us forward.

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JASON ABLIN

Forget the “Summer Slide”

The Thud

The school year typically ends with the sound of a thud. It is the sound of an envelope or folder (usually manila), occasionally wrapped with thick rubber bands, landing on a student's desk. Like an exhausted dock worker, the student sticks this envelope under her arm or in his backpack. The child emerges from the last day of school and climbs into the backseat of his car to a parent asking the hopeful and joyful question, "How was the last day of school, honey?" The student takes that manila package or folder out, like a messenger serving legal papers to the newly indicted, and drops it on the front seat of the car in disgust.

Parents pick up the plague-riddled object and have either one of two reactions: "Oh no. Another 10 weeks of needing to harass my child to do her work. When does it end? Isn't it the summer?" Or, "Good, my child needs to be busy. This will keep him out of trouble. We are going to get this done!"

The idea of summer work has all types of good intentions behind it. We are trying to convince our children that learning is not just for school time, but year round. Why should we lose the gains of the school year during the 10 weeks of summer? Children should retain some semblance of the school "routine" so that the next year does not feel like a shock to the system.

So, we cram these envelopes with xeroxed sheets, math games, reading lists, even vocabulary flash cards (yuck) and summer writing journals, in which our kids are supposed to be moved by the moment and pour out a strange paroxysm of adjectives, expressing their deepest feelings about going to the neighborhood pool for swimming lessons.

Often, these packets are handed out by the student's previous year's teacher—a parting gift of love and affection. Who is going to look over all of this work? Not my concern, says last year's teacher as they are closing down their classrooms. Next year's teachers hand them out as a "welcome-to-my-world access pass" to the next grade. On that instructional letter there are veiled threats that the folder, the entire folder, needs to be completed or the first week back to school will be filled with doom. What a great way to start a new school year! Aren't we all excited?

The Talk

The conversation regarding summer work and the infamous "summer slide" has as much to do with how we think and talk about school as it does with what a great summer of learning looks like. Much of the literature concerning summer loss describes the student's school year experience in profoundly negative terms, as if kids have been in a coal mine for the last 10 months. Language regularly used in these articles to describe the school year include words like "burden," "routines," "rules," "endless work," "long hours," "discipline," "boredom" and my favorite, "drudgery." Drudgery comes from an old English/French origin. A drudger is one who does farm work, separating seeds. It is repetitive work, appearing endless, and causes suffering. It is work to be endured. Why would any right-minded person want to do this? If school is the opposite of joyful, engaging, purposeful, meaningful and just fun, then, by extension, summer "work" issued by the school is a form of punishment and degradation. Let's face it, educators: When it comes to summer assignments, we are persecutors.

In reality, our schools are full of important celebratory moments. Most students enjoy school. They love seeing their teachers and friends, they experience meaningful moments, and they grow in all sorts of positive ways. My own days as principal are spent experiencing smiling faces, silly jokes and students too engaged in thoughtful learning experiences to notice me wandering around. So where is the disconnect? How does this bifurcation of time, school-versus-summer, take place?

The Box

Our tendency in American life is to put everything in its proper box. This impulse is driven by our desire to create greater coherence and clarity. If Americans are anything, they are *practical*. Work is work. Vacation is vacation. Work is not fun. Therefore, if school involves working, it is not fun. As parents, we send this message to our kids constantly. Our children are bombarded with the constant intrusion of work into home and family life through technology, with mom or dad saying, "Wait, I need to answer this text or take this call... It's work." Work has so invaded our other life spaces that we have to go to great lengths to convince our kids that it is not the enemy and not a constant source of aggravation.

Our kids are shaped by the adults in their lives, and they model their behaviors based

on the behaviors and attitudes of the adults around them. Do they know adults who express the joy in their work lives? Do they have parents who love their work because it is also a place for them of personal growth and engagement? Or, is work work (read: not fun) and play play, the opposite of work?

Herein lies the contradiction: If "drudgery" is our students' experience of school, how can we also declare that one of the primary goals of schools is to build and grow learning minds? School is the platform for that developmental process. What we teach is that we learn. Learning happens everywhere, and everybody learns. Jewish day schools are places to show students how to learn well, to think deeply, to observe with thoughtful, and sometimes critical, eyes and ultimately how to express themselves as learners throughout their lives. If they work with purpose in school, they learn to become purposeful workers, laborers who have discovered their passions in their professional and avocational lives.

As parents and adults, we are not great modelers of this. Even though many adults turn their vacations and summers into moments of learning (trips to interesting and diverse places, summer cultural events and museum programs), do they make those connections explicitly with their children? Do they say that *all* of this learning is important and essential and part of the same experience? And, conversely, do they speak about the joys of work? About how much they have learned through their professional lives?

Is work like play? Absolutely not. That is not the point. Rather, we are looking for an overall approach that teaches kids to feel general satisfaction with what we call work. And in order to do this, summer work—as an extension of deep, meaningful learning in school—should reflect student interests and passions in a genuine and authentic way. The question is: How do we make it so?

The Web

Built into the rationale for summer work is that it is part of some kind of larger race and, if you do not keep up, you "fall behind." Growth is marked and measured by simplistic notions of linear progress. This is actually not how children learn. True learning is not a staircase that, during the summer, students risk falling down.

We have come to realize only recently that student learning does not really follow the ladder of development outlined in Bloom's taxonomy. How students acquire knowledge and engage with learning looks much more

like a web of connections and representations that become more sophisticated and complex over time. When outlined and unpacked by researchers, these representational webs are unique to each learner, eventually developing complex neural connections reinforced and enhanced over time (Fischer and Bidell, *Dynamic Development of Psychological Structures in Action and Thought in Theoretical Models of Human Development*). The more educators know their students and understand their unique interests, expressions and experiences, the more we can shape learning to support this broader and more complex development.

Our goal of summer learning, then, is to strengthen the multiple pathways to learning and access points. How one child builds on knowledge is wholly distinct from another. If you work off of children's interests and frames of reference, you are more likely to tap into their webs of learning. Student choice during the school year is an important strategy; during the summer, it is essential. Take away the structures and routines of school, and student desire and attitude

regarding learning is essentially all you have left. Summer is a ripe opportunity to build thoughtful, happy learners.

The Engagement

If we want the summer to be a productive and engaging time for our students, then we need to end the school year differently, respecting our students and celebrating their hard work and growth over the preceding months. Structuring the final two to three weeks of school to include serious year-end reflection, coupled with teacher articulation for the coming school year, should also include students actually designing their own summers of learning.

Imagine a first grader sitting with her or his teacher or teachers and, through written assignments and oral portfolio review, defining what work made the year meaningful, what learning projects or assignments engaged him or her the most. Then the student could begin to build summer assignments that integrated various learning modalities and skills. Parents could be involved by filling out a quick survey about

their family plans for the summer. Is there any way a family trip or experience could be incorporated into the student's planning for the summer?

If done thoughtfully, this summer-planning process is also an excellent opportunity for the next year's teachers to get to know and be introduced to their new students. An entire "step up week" could be planned, during which students meet, one on one, with their next year's teachers and answer a series of questions regarding the summer and what they hope to accomplish. Instead of the relentless rush to complete curriculum, clean cubbies and lockers, or administer benchmark exams, the end of the year becomes part of an educational philosophy regarding student reflection, engagement and autonomy. Through such a process, every summer packet (or sheet, *singular!*) is uniquely designed for and by every student, depending on his or her needs and self-directed paths.

Students have plenty of thoughtful ideas and feelings about what they might accomplish during the summer. We just need to ask.

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JOSHUA WISE

Summer Reading

Moving Past Carrots, Sticks and Lollipops

As the end of the school year comes closer, I can't help but think back to my own childhood summers and the summer reading program at my local library. To be clear, I was what might be called a reluctant reader. But my mother brought my sister and me to the library on a regular basis, and eventually, I'd find a few books that didn't look too terrible. My sister, on the other hand, was a voracious reader, no matter the topic.

The summer reading program at the library worked like this: For every two books read, a sticker with your name on it was added to the Wall of Books. There was a separate section on the wall for kids who read 10 books, another when a reader made it all the way to 16 books—and a lollipop prize, and finally, the long awaited choose-your-own prize from the librarian's bin, when 25 books were completed. This was 1984, and a lollipop and a blue bouncy ball were coveted prizes. This past summer, my own kids entered into a drawing for an iPad mini and Amazon gift cards at our library's summer reading program, but the point remains the same. The motivation for reading was, and still is, externally driven.

Rewind for a minute to my childhood. My sister and I would check out a stack of books (that was the easy part) and return a week later to heroically announce to the librarian that we had done the reading—as did many of the other kids in the neighborhood—and the Wall of Books quickly became crowded with the names of kids who read two books. The 10-book section of the wall had a little more breathing room, and the 16-book section had even more room, even though anyone who was anyone knew that that was where the potential for candy was hiding. (I love candy, and yet I rarely made it to 16 books. My sister, she always did.) And the 25-book



section of the wall? My sister's sticker hung there and not that many others, which, looking back, seems strange because that's where the real prizes were. Past the 25-book mark, there were no more prizes to be had, but there was an extra star sticker for each finished book.

Thus, the essential question is, did the incentives make any difference at all?

The children who dropped out before the first few incentives were obviously not sufficiently motivated by having their name printed on a sticker or by earning a lollipop. And the children who seemingly were incentivized by the prize bin kept on reading past the 25-book mark without the lure of a reward at all. How do we reconcile the two?

Ask almost any teacher about summer homework, and you'll usually be met with a heavy sigh, maybe even a couple of furrowed eyebrows. Why is it that after all these years, we have not figured out a system that works to prevent the dreaded summer slide?

Collectively, as educators, it seems that we've tried it all. We have offered students who have completed their summer work prizes, pizza parties, ice cream sundaes and even points on a report card. We've tried offering consequences to students who do not complete the work by giving a zero for the work, having students stay after school the first week of school to complete the work, sending the packets home again, and even leaving the delinquent out of the pizza or ice cream party. But by now, I think we all know that these methods (both the positive and the negative) are not terribly effective. However, they do all have something in common: They are all extrinsic in nature.

In his book *Drive*, Daniel Pink laments about an overreliance on resorting to carrots and sticks. He discusses the use of these extrinsic approaches, why they fail, and how anyone, not just teachers, can use his ideas to motivate others. His primary idea revolves around the need of the boss/parent/educator to change focus from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic by using the ideas of autonomy, purpose and mastery.

Autonomy

To start with, provide kids with autonomy, control over what they read. We could debate how much autonomy students should have over their learning during the school year, but during the summer, when students and teachers don't see each other for more than two months, it can be extremely powerful to give students a chance to drive the bus.

For a lot of teachers, though, this can be a very difficult idea to swallow.

The concern from a teacher who is obviously doing a wonderful job and thinking ahead to September might go something like this: "If each student reads a different book, how can we discuss the book as a group once school starts again?" One solution might be to allow students to choose a book from a short list with diverse topics, and come September, the class would break into groups based on the chosen book. Another option might be to place a greater focus on the skills that can be derived from the book, such as finding and

understanding the plot or character development, rather than on the story itself. And finally, there are always book reports or presentations, paper or digital, to fall back on. And I know from watching my own students, working on projects with my own children, and looking back at my own summer reading escapades that a student will always be more willing to do the work when he or she enjoyed the book.

Purpose

Some students are more inquisitive than others, and it's usually the inquisitive ones who need to see a purpose in what they are doing. Why are we reading these books/doing these math problems/learning about volcanoes? Sometimes it is the extra bright kids who ask these questions, but oftentimes, it is the student who struggles and does not see the value in his coming to school every day. And it's this other group of students who really do have a deep need to understand the value in their work to motivate themselves.

How can we help students see a purpose in their summer reading?

This is an ongoing battle in many classrooms. Some students just don't see what they get out of school. For many students, their sense of purpose only comes from the deep relationships they develop with their teachers. Pleasing their teacher, making their beloved teacher proud, is often the main reason that students who struggle make any effort at all.

For students like these, who need a purpose in order to accomplish schoolwork, teachers can go a long way in helping. I have often found, especially in the middle grades, that students will work for a teacher who shows that she cares, and I believe that one of the biggest issues standing in the way of accomplishing summer reading is that students don't read because they think no one cares whether they do it or not. Easy ways to further this goal could be having the students submit their summer homework to their beloved teacher who actually assigned it, and not to their new teacher whom they have not yet had the chance to bond with. Another way might be for a teacher to mail simple postcards or send a quick email to her former students over the summer, checking in and asking how the assignments are coming along.

Mastery

The final step in the process of cultivating intrinsic motivation is teaching the value of mastery. In any given class, students may be reading on several different levels, but no matter the reading level, there is a book for every reader, and it's on that reading level that summer reading should be assigned. Forcing students to read on a level that is too high (or too low) for them will always backfire. Either the student will have no understanding of what he is reading or he will find the book boring and too easy.

So, how do we find that Goldilocks zone? Metacognition, some self-assessment and a little variety should do the trick. Getting students to think about their thinking—metacognition—has been shown over and over to boost student academic achievement levels. This activity helps students appreciate and value the process while taking the spotlight

off of a “results-only” perspective. In addition to giving their autonomy a boost, giving the students the opportunity to assess their own mastery levels will remind them that they are partners in the learning process. Finally, giving students multiple options for demonstrating, and advancing, their mastery level will help students see how they can improve their ability for all types of reading, not just what’s been assigned to them.

But having to think about thinking about what you’re thinking? That’s enough to give any teacher, let alone every student everywhere, a headache. There are, though, simple steps that can be taken to effectively teach metacognition, but the steps need to be practiced, ideally several times over the final weeks of the school year, so that students can then put their new skills to good use over the summer.

First, begin by teaching students to set clear goals. What do they hope to learn from this book? How can they read more critically to find what they are looking for? These are intense questions, and attempting to answer them can feel awkward and might leave more than one student staring at a blank page, but the more often students are asked to set personal goals, the easier it will become.

Second, introduce the idea of using a checklist or rubric while reading. The rubric works best when students familiarize themselves with it before starting the book. Using the same rubric for every book or essay assigned gets students comfortable with this method, enabling them to stay on task well before the summer even begins. Once using a rubric becomes second nature, students can design their own, asking themselves questions before, during and after reading.

Third, model the behavior that you are looking to instill—and model it again. Reading comprehension is a skill that can be taught to all students. Show the class how to read a passage, to pause, to reflect. Show how you might take notes as you read, or highlight a sentence that speaks to you. Engage the five senses while reading: How might it feel to be in this story? What does it look like, smell like? Often, students will have a thought while reading, but because they have not been shown how to pause and sit with that thought, they just keep reading and in turn, lose out on what might be, for them, the point of the story.

For years, researchers have tried to better understand the dreaded summer slide and to find ways to prevent it, or at least to mitigate its effects. The research has often focused on the idea that certain students have advantages over other students, but I think we can break away from that entire argument. When we can turn the motivation internally—by allowing them to choose, by demonstrating that we are in it for the long haul alongside our students, and that we are genuinely impressed by what they can do, and they should be as well—it is a game changer. By teaching them *how* to actually learn and *how* to think, instead of having them spit back what they are taught in class, we can turn the summer from a place of losing ground to a season of growing.

Just imagine a world where students read because they want to, and think because they know how. And a world where the local librarians get to help kids choose books that they will cherish, instead of spending their summer checking their inventory of star-shaped stickers and lollipops.



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Building Scholarly Habits Through Summer Experiences



Summer homework has increased in recent years. Frequently, these assignments include highly prescribed activities, even though evidence of their utility is scant. Educators should pause to analyze their goals and approach in assigning summer homework. In order to truly support students' growth, teachers must value students' interests, their summer experiences and all factors that contribute to students' academic prosperity.

The birds are chirping, the classrooms are sweltering, and as the last bell of the year rings, students race out the classroom door into the bright, summer day. They inhale deeply as they explode with the contagious excitement of summer and all that it has to offer. Their loads should be light, but increasingly their backpacks contain the encumbrance of summer homework, generally containing some combination of English and Chumash reading, math and Ivrit worksheets. When students are given summer homework, the assignments frequently remain buried until the last week of summer. As the impending school year approaches, the summer “dump” finally creates enough anxiety to regain students' attention.

Research has shown that weak skills at the beginning of the year are most likely rote skills that can rebound with practice (Jim Smith, *All Things Assessment*). One must question why it makes sense to burden students with summer homework rather than simply wait until the return of school, when teachers can better track and support practice. Moreover, it's possible that summer assignments may cause students to miss out on social experiences and increase their anxiety. Despite our best intentions, educators lack data to connect their practice of assigning specific books and worksheets to long-term academic success.

For schools that are committed to assigning summer homework, they should consider aligning assignments with recognized markers of student academic success. The best predictors of success are the development of good habits, internal motivation and perseverance. For example, students' use of reading as a leisure activity is the best predictor of

comprehension, vocabulary, reading speed and high performance on standardized tests (according to studies by Scholastic Summer Challenge and National Endowment for the Arts). With learning or developing second language skills, such as Ivrit, motivation is actually the best predictor of successful learning (Anne-Marie Masgoret and Robert C. Gardner, “Attitudes, Motivation, and Second Language Learning”). Finally, in math, research by Kenneth Levasseur and Al Cuoco relates that students possessing a mathematical state of mind are most successful because they immediately approach new problems by employing specific strategies (drawing a picture, creating a table, working backwards, etc.) with perseverance. Students must develop grit and the ability to utilize multiple strategies (Cindy Bryant, “Mathematical Habits of Mind”). Taken together, teachers need to be more focused on ways to generate true engagement and habits of mind.

Rather than focus on grade-level content in summer assignments, teachers should serve as guides to help students find interesting topics and activities that necessitate the use of pertinent skill sets and subject areas. Denise Pope of Challenge Success suggests consideration of the “ABCs of engagement”: Meaningful and effective assignments must engage students affectively, behaviorally and cognitively. Students should be given choice in their reading activities so that they can find materials that are personally engaging.

Teachers can facilitate the development of new habits and approaches to real-world problems over the summer by carefully orchestrating plans that support students' social, emotional and affective connection to academic pursuits

simultaneously. For example, teachers might arrange and support scheduled opportunities to read with senior citizens and peers. The preset schedule would set the stage for reading habit formation and build fluency, comprehension, compassion, and speaking and listening skills. Research shows that availability to materials makes a difference in students' skill performance when they return to school in the fall. Thus, teachers might want to establish a book exchange to increase students' access and likelihood of finding high-interest books, and ensure a continuous flow of reading materials.

Diverse community service opportunities can also harness students' interests to build a wide range of organizational, reading, collaboration, math and writing skills. Teachers could spend the final days of school helping students find service projects, create plans for building knowledge about a subject area, and developing a plan for sharing this new experience with peers in the fall. Teachers could help students set up blogs about a particular topic of interest or experience. Teachers should emphasize the importance of not only sharing, but also becoming an expert who uses background information to guide his or her blogging. Similarly, teachers could guide students to identify mathematical problems in their day-to-day experiences and work together via chats. The students would be expected to report on their experiences, with special attention to the way that they resolve problems.

To bolster Ivrit, teachers should help their students feel motivated to use and build their skills. Most students enjoy communicating with their peers and sharing their photos and ideas. Students could benefit from a Hebrew-speaking pen pal. In addition, teachers could invite students to connect their Chumash learning to their daily summer experiences and showcase these connections via a Padlet or other shared online resource. With appropriate preplanning, the teacher could support habit formation through authentic and meaningful activities that are less likely to become "dump" assignments.

לְכָל זְמַן וְשָׁרָה לְכָל דָּבָר—There's a time for all, and a season for every thing. While summer provides the resources available to support math and reading skills, 21st century teachers must recognize the inherent value in summer experiences. Social learning and opportunities to test new strategies stem from the reduced structure, assignments and time constraints. When summer begins, our students move out of the classroom and gain worldly skills including cooperation, group dynamics, collaboration, teamwork, confidence and independence. These skills are crucial to our students' development. While schools lack standardized measures for these life skills, every teacher has seen the way that increases in these areas lead to overall academic achievement. Perhaps educators should recognize the importance of summer months for the growth of the whole child and allow students to build these areas without the constraints of highly structured assignments.

We want our students to feel rejuvenated and excited about learning when they return in the fall. The summer "dump" creates last-minute anxiety and fails to mimic the regularity of academic activities during the school year. Teachers should appreciate the type of learning that naturally occurs during the summer. If summer homework is necessary, teachers should exploit the increased social opportunities in summer in order to bolster habits of learning and grit that will serve them well, within the classroom and beyond.

Possible Summer Activities to Support Reading/Math and 21st Century Skills

Habitat for Humanity. Speak with local representatives to ensure that students are shown blueprints and encouraged to discuss plans and distances. *Spatial Reasoning, Measurement, Collaboration, Problem-solving*

Reach Out and Read. Students can work together to collect books for waiting rooms as well as serve as reading volunteers. Volunteers spend time reading in waiting rooms to children and model reading aloud to parents. Students may use these books to build their own reading skills by explicitly stating the comprehension skills applied while reading. *Reading Comprehension, Cultural Awareness, Leadership*

Organize a book club or book pass. Teachers and students generate a summer book list. Students electing to participate start with one or two books. Once a student reads a book, he or she adds an entry to share his/her opinions about the book. Then, the student passes the book along to any other student in the school. Students may reread books multiple times in order to compare their own ideas to their peers. *Reading Comprehension, Collaboration, Cultural Awareness*

Create a new thread. Students love to share their experiences. Keep up the communication by encouraging students to digitally share updates about their experiences on a shared webpage. Students will build reading and writing skills through their discussions. They can also gain global awareness and opportunities that each might not personally experience. *Global Awareness, Leadership, Reading Comprehension*

Design Thinking challenge. Ask students to post problems they discover during their summer activities. As a group, teachers and students can work together to try to design and test solutions. *Leadership, Reading, Problem-solving, Research Skills, Collaboration*

Required service. Organizations, such as Volunteer Match, will help students find local volunteer opportunities in a wealth of areas. Ask students to complete at least one volunteer activity over the summer. *Research, Math, Cooperation, Organization, Oracy*

Start something new. Require students to find an interest, create a learning plan, and learn something new in order to bring this experience and learning to class on the first day. Examples: care for a pet, learn guitar, babysit/tutor, plan a trip. *Research, Reading, Organization, Grit*

CRAIG LUBNER

Authentic Summer Homework

Asking the Right Questions

I am guilty as charged. Spring is in full swing, and there is still an untouched pile of summer assignments sitting on my desk. Luckily (or perhaps not) my students have never once asked about them, what grade they earned, or whether they would be returned. Evidently, something is wrong with the model; no value, significance or meaning has been dispensed to the summer work. While the assignment was certainly conceived with the best intentions, it clearly did not have enough value *post facto* for it to be graded in a timely way, to be the source of useful initial feedback to the students or to be used as a starting instructional tool. It also seemed to hold little significance to the students, from whom it never got a subsequent passing thought.

What went wrong? I believe that the missing component was *authenticity*. A quick gloss through some of the classic meanings of the word yields a humbling reality. “Not false or copied, genuine and real”—mostly culled from others’ work sourced on the Internet. “Representing one’s true nature or beliefs; true to oneself, or to the person identified”—no, I don’t believe in busy work and try to be a practitioner of intentional, thoughtful practice and expect the same of my students. “Executed with all due formalities”—well, yes and no. Yes, I created an assignment, even defined a few goals for it, distributed it and answered questions about it. And yes, there was a due date and submission instructions, and the students *did* turn it in. It appears all “due formalities” were completed. But no, I missed the most essential formality: I did not question the true authenticity of the assignment.

What makes a summer assignment authentic? In my mind, there are three fundamental questions that help decipher authenticity.

Is there enough intrinsic educational value to this assignment to warrant distracting students from their summer activities, or creating this pressure/burden for them during their break?—*Why am I giving this assignment?*

Are there clear instructional goals for the assignment—both as an independent unit and as a segue into the new year of learning?—*What do I want students to learn?*

How is this assignment going to be assessed?—*How will I know whether the students learned anything from it?*

While these questions are formulated specifically for summer homework assignments, they can be easily adjusted for any homework assignment.

Why am I giving this assignment?

“I want students to get a head start with the material. I have a huge curriculum to cover and never seem to be able to get through it in the time given for my course.” “I want students to review some of the concepts that they learned previously so that we can hit the ground running as soon as school starts.” “I want students to understand that this is a rigorous course that requires a tremendous amount of work. (Let that message sink in during the hours of work I am assigning.)” We can all relate to, or even own up, to some, or all, of these iterations. Each, indeed, has merit—getting started with the work, reviewing and reinforcing acquired skills or concepts and communicating rigor and expectations are all noble endeavors, ones that I am sure administrators and principals would endorse and encourage. I wonder though, whether these stated intentions align with our core educational beliefs. Do they accurately reflect the culture we are trying to create in our classrooms? In short: Do they embody *authentic purpose*?

What if these were some of our “whys”: “I want to ignite the students’ passion and interest in my subject.” “I want students to broaden their experiences in a way that will make them more thoughtful about my subject.” “I want students to be excited and intrigued as they anticipate the first day in my class.” With these, expressions such as “real,” “genuine” and “true to one’s own beliefs” start to resonate with new, clearer meaning.

What do I want students to learn?

At the core of every summer assignment is a measure of learning. The learning is usually described as one of the following: engaging with new content, acquiring a new skill, reinforcing an emerging skill or reviewing concepts already taught. The goal: We want to ensure that our students don’t have a two-month brain freeze during the summer. We therefore make sure that students leave with packet upon packet of materials, mandatory or optional, attempting to elicit some cerebral activity during the summer months. Is that all we want? Is this what *authentic practice* looks like?

Of course, I want my students to be using their brains, empowering their minds and thinking critically. The key question is, can I do this authentically (still within the frame of a reworked “why”), without the assignment being a burden or an enthusiasm-drainer? I find myself asking the following questions to assess the level of authenticity: What learning practices do I want to introduce through this assignment? How can I have students use these practices in an engaging

and productive way? How can I get students to make their thinking visible, alive and tangible? The assignment must enlist and excite different learning modalities and engender reflection about the learning.

How will I know whether the students learned anything from it?

In a growing climate of plagiarism, information infidelity and students looking for quick fixes, assessment has become increasingly complex. (As one of my colleagues puts it, “Students are consumers who are looking to get the least for their money.”) The quest for ensuring the integrity and authenticity of student work has intensified, and summer homework is no exception. How will I know that the student did the work him- or herself? How do I make sure that the assignment is not one that can be easily copied from a friend? And then, how will it be graded or assessed in a way that is meaningful and that offers maximum useful feedback (hopefully, without creating an unrealistic expectation of the teacher)? Is there a model of *authentic assessment*?

These questions describe two components, the authenticity of the work and the authenticity of the assessment. In the past, my goal when grading summer homework had always been, grade for completion. Did the student *do* the work? If yes, full credit. An epic fail on both accounts. I did not get any real idea if the work was authentic, and the grade was essentially arbitrary and meaningless. I never looked at it as an opportunity for meaningful feedback, or as a means of shaping the culture of my classroom. Yes, I wanted to make sure that the students did the work, but realized that there must be more to glean.

This is what I needed to own and the questions I needed to ask:

A summer assignment is the first encounter students are having with me and my course. What are students going to learn about me and the culture of my classroom?

This is my opportunity to learn as much as I can about my new students. How am I going to engage them in sharing information about themselves?

For me, this reframing has turned the tables on assessment. Now it is not so much about what the students have learned, but more about how successful I have been at defining the culture of my class and how much I have learned about the students. This model has the potential to be both reflexive and reflective.

My guess is that the first day of class will be the best tool for measuring the success and authenticity of this year’s summer assignment. Do I see students who are eager to find out what the first day of class will bring? Are they excited to get their hands and heads into the first learning module? Are they curious about the interesting things I might reveal? Are they looking at the artifacts of the lesson with broader and brighter eyes? If I succeed, I will be arriving with a richer sense of who the students are, where their passions lie and what excites them about learning. Best of all, come next spring, there won’t be that ominous untouched pile of summer assignments sitting on my desk.

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CULTIVATING VOLUNTEERS: THE ABCS

We are a small school in a small community with limited staff. We rely heavily on our volunteers for support. It seems like the same people keep showing up, and I am afraid we are wearing out our volunteers and their goodwill. What should we do?

You are not alone, and the issue of effectively engaging volunteers is not unique to small schools, though perhaps felt most acutely, especially in small communities. The good news is that there are successful strategies you can use. You can keep the current volunteers you have excited about their commitment. At the same time, you can cultivate a cadre of new volunteers to join the force and ensure that you and your staff are supported in your work. A little planning and effort can go a long way.

First, follow the simple rule of ABC: **a**lways **b**e **c**ultivating. Don't wait until you need a new PTO president or someone to lead your school's fundraiser to start the search. Always be on the lookout for new talent and train your current volunteers to **talent spot**. We learn about the hidden talents of our parent body by engaging our families and broader community in conversation about their passions and in meaningful work. This is also one of the ways we make people feel a part of our community.

Understanding why your volunteers are choosing to dedicate their time, and knowing their talents and areas of expertise so you can use their time well, are critical to developing long-term commitment and ensuring you can place them in positions that will engage them.

Provide new volunteers with a smooth transition. Make sure there is a simple process to onboard volunteers and that they have the tools they need to do their job well. Do they know whom to go to if they have a question? Do they have the names of the people they will work with? Are they aware of the tools and resources that are at their disposal? Investing the time to explain procedures upfront will pay dividends in the future. Consider implementing a shadow opportunity to learn how to run events.

Next, consider the variety and flexibility of volunteer positions. Do you have multiple ways for volunteers to engage? Your parent body likely includes both people available during traditional working hours as well as those with less flexible schedules. Offering opportunities for both groups of parents is an important

way to communicate that you understand their needs and that everyone's contributions matter.

Sweat the small stuff. Asking volunteers about their family, paying attention to detail and following up remind volunteers that you care about them and their commitment. When they feel acknowledged and part of a community, volunteers sense the positive impact they are making on the organization.

Volunteering is often a social experience. Think about the ways you can help veteran and new volunteers get to know one another and share social interactions outside of school events.

Volunteers want to feel they have contributed meaningfully, and that they are accomplishing and finding success with their work. Think about what you can do in advance to ensure their time is used well. Their satisfaction at a job well done is one way to build opportunities for future engagement.

Encourage volunteers to seek support when needed. The idea isn't for volunteers to have all the answers when they start. Volunteers should feel welcome to ask questions, seek clarity and request assistance when needed.

And finally, think about how you show appreciation to your volunteers and check in regularly with them. We all benefit most from feedback and gratitude that is specific and genuine, and not a general thank you. Make sure there is an opportunity for volunteers to give their feedback as well, and engage them in the evaluation process after an event.

Volunteers are critical to the success of our schools; their contributions make all the difference. We engage volunteers to support the work, but the real reason we rely so heavily on our volunteers is to ensure we are building community one person, one program, one event at a time.

**Have a question about day schools that you'd like answered?
Submit it to advice@prizmah.org.**

Assignments that Count

Goals and Assessment of Summer Work

Summer work

In the Jewish high school I attended, each year there was one book assigned for our summer homework. Some of us would read it, some relied on Cliffs Notes, and others would try to wing it. Now that I have become a principal of a Jewish high school, I find that while summer homework has expanded significantly, the challenges of engaging the students and keeping them accountable are still present.

Although summer work was previously limited to a reading for English class, recently we have broadened the scope of assignments. The math department now gives out packets for students to complete before school resumes, and our Advanced Placement (AP) classes give summer assignments as well. These assignments include focused review of previous material, readings of new material with accompanying essays and completing an online preparatory course. Part of the impetus for enlarging the scope of the summer work was an examination of the purpose behind summer work and a reexamination of our own practice.

What is the purpose of summer work?

Summer work may be a way to keep students engaged in the learning process. Research has shown that students lose a significant amount of academic progress over the summer. One study approximated the loss in reading over a summer as equivalent to a full month of school. These results tend to be mainly for

those from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background; for much of the day school population this may not be as much of a concern, since most of our families have easy access to books. However, even within the Jewish day school population, there is still a variance of access to reading material and desire to read. Summer work can provide a basic level of engagement for all.

Summer work can also have more specific goals, such as retention of specific skills in a language, math or other academic area. Other summer work is preparatory, so that a class can jump right into learning in the fall. By introducing concepts and reminding students of previous material in the summer, less class time is spent on setting the stage before diving into a topic.

We have found summer work to be particularly relevant for advanced classes such as AP classes. Assuring certain prior knowledge helps relieve some of the time pressure in an advanced class, which has a more robust curriculum to cover and frequently needs to move at a quickened pace. Aside from academic preparedness, summer assignments can serve as a way to have students demonstrate the necessary commitment and effort outside the classroom that they will need to succeed in an AP course.

Assessment and challenges

Students are more likely to complete work when they know that they are accountable for that work. This is true of classwork and homework over the year and even more so in the case of summer work. Unlike the classroom,

with summer work there is less supervision and less contact over the course of the assignment. For this reason, how the assignment is assessed is even more critical.

The manner of assessment should be directly connected to the goals of the assignment. The decision of how to assess the assignment can help to shape the way that many of the students will approach the activity. For example, the math packet has been graded to count as the first assessment of the new class, which provides impetus for students to complete the packet but does not discourage either rushing through the work or copying someone else's answers. The online preparatory class, on the other hand, allows for more oversight and tracking on how long and over what period of time the work was done.

When all of the work is done outside of class and the finished product is handed to the teacher, there is increased opportunity for academic dishonesty. My own experience has been that it is challenging to verify if students have completed math packets on their own. Students have also plagiarized material for essays and prompts on books they were to have read in the summer. Some of my teachers have sought to avoid this temptation by having students write an in-class essay on the summer work as an assessment.

In-class assessment can also help to solve another issue. Frequently students are completing summer work for a teacher that they have never had before, and they find it difficult to gauge the teacher's expectations. This can be especially true in a subject such as English, where to a certain degree students tailor their writing for each specific teacher.

Having students pen the essay in class after experiencing the teacher for a few weeks helps to alleviate this concern.

Another challenge is to ensure that students spend the time needed to accomplish the teacher's learning goals, instead of cramming the assigned work into the last few days before school begins. Requiring them to show the work as they go is one way to match the accountability to the goal; for example, having them annotate, comment in a journal or summarize by page or chapter for a reading assignment (Sarah Mielbye, "7 Ways to Make Summer Reading Count for Your Students"). A parallel strategy is having some way to track their progress electronically, such as an online course or other device that time stamps when they have completed specific steps.

Research shows that choice of assignment can increase interest, although it does not seem to help with cognitive engagement in the content. Choice can also discourage academic dishonesty (or at least make it easier to identify), since fewer students will pick the same method or topic, and similarities will be easier to spot. Another strategy to encourage students to think for themselves

is to assign something that has a small footprint on the Internet. One of our English teachers assigns books that have been published within the last year. This guarantees that there will be scant searchable resources about this book, cutting off a frequent source of academic dishonesty as well as encouraging student-driven analysis.

Does this apply to Judaics?

As much as we may choose to expand summer work based on our goals, there is a need to balance school assignments against a real vacation, which energizes them and allows them to return refreshed. We all understand that many of our students' summer experiences contribute to their overall growth in ways which complement their lives at school. Our academic goals should not impinge on these experiences.

For day school families, extending the learning into the summer may reap rewards, although we need to take into account the rich Jewish environments that many of our students enjoy at camp. There is a need for more experimentation and research into

rewarding some Jewish engagement over the summer for our students. What experiences would we want our students to return to school with as the summer ends? Might there be Jewish family activities we could ask our students to experience and document before returning to school? Can we reward those experiences and encourage them in our missives to our students as they head into the summer? If summer work is about skills and consistency, then Judaics seems a natural place for such work.

Schools are complex machines with all sorts of interlocking systems. Each school has a culture and a set of practices, some of which have been followed for so long the reasons for them have been forgotten. As teachers and school leaders, we have all experienced the process of examining an aspect of the school and ensuring that it is in line with our educational, and other, goals. May and June can frequently be times when we are in high gear busily planning the next school year; summer work doesn't always get the scrutiny it deserves. Taking a deeper look at our policies of summer work, and how we assess and monitor that work, is a worthwhile investment.

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NATURE'S "MAKERSPACE"

What's the big idea?

The genuine desire to "innovate" has led many schools to embrace new pedagogies and technologies. There is a growing recognition by schools of all types that in order to personalize, to better differentiate, to incorporate 21st century literacies, to increase choice and student ownership of learning, to add so-called "soft skills," etc., it is necessary to provide students with cutting-edge experiences. Examples include STEM/STEAM, Robotics, Project-based Learning, Blended Online Learning and Makerspace, and we've dedicated our two prior columns to just these kinds of ideas.

However, it is critical to remember that innovation does *not* necessarily equal nor require technology. In fact, sometimes the most important innovations lead us out of the school building altogether. In the UK and Scandinavia, there are a growing number of schools that are looking to the forest, perhaps nature's original Makerspace, to transform teaching and learning.

"Outdoor learning" as an educational philosophy goes all the way back to philosophers like Locke and Piaget and is connected to play-based learning, place-based learning, experiential learning, Montessori and environmental learning just to name a few. In order to facilitate cognitive development, develop self-confidence, increase social skills and build up intrinsic motivation to learn, students and teachers go outside and engage in a variety of outdoor learning activities. The outdoor space varies by topography, and the activities vary by season, age and interest. Outdoor learning activities are designed to be interdisciplinary and holistic. What might a school look like where the forest provides all the tools you need to achieve? Well, the aptly named Forest Schools is a great place to start.

Who's doing it?

"It is the joy and exuberance that becomes so noticeable when children are playing in nature, becoming co-inhabitants of the space and totally integrated with the cycles, interrelationships and magic. It is the awe and wonder that connects, surprises and gives children that sparkle in their eyes. Without this connection, life can be very different, and I believe all the poorer," says Sarah Blackwell, founder, CEO and chairman of Forest Schools.

Forest Schools are long-term programs—sometimes extracurricular, sometimes co-curricular and in even rarer cases, *the* curriculum—within a natural space, led by a qualified practitioner. They focus on developing personal, social and emotional life skills through learner-led, nature-based learning. Initially, projects run from their own grounds/gardens/playing fields (where appropriate), allowing the children to become comfortable with an outdoor approach to education and play while in familiar surroundings. The programs are run by Forest School leaders, who receive training and credential in their unique approach. Once a group is established in the woodland and routines are set up, the program develops through a child-led approach, with opportunities for projects to continue indoors. Forest Schools are just beginning to explore working with schools in the States and have recently opened two Forest Schools kindergartens.

How can I learn more?

Check out the vision for Forest Schools Kindergarten.

Read up on the research that supports Forest Schools' philosophy and examines its efficacy.

Want to beta test a Forest Schools program in your school? Email them! They are interested.

What's the charge?

Go outside!

I am not aware of Jewish day schools that have invested serious resources in outdoor learning experiences, but am happily corrected if mistaken. If you are one of those schools, or would like to be, Prizmah is interested in serving as a means to connect fellow travelers, facilitating conversation and linking to organizations in and outside the field of Jewish day schools.

Schools interested in "Innovation" are encouraged to continue the conversation across through Prizmah's Reshet groups, including the dedicated Reshet Innovation.

Dr. Jon Mitzmacher is Prizmah's Vice President of Innovation.
jonm@prizmah.org



Yael KRIEGER

Summer Assignments

One Size Does Not Fit All

Today, words like “differentiation” and “multiple learning styles” are inextricable from the lesson planning processes. Accommodations, modifications and alternative modes of assessment are embraced by teachers who are thinking about their instructional choices and taking into account the neurodiversity in their classrooms. With summer homework, teachers should extend this same level of pedagogical flexibility or creativity to their assignments. If they do not, summer homework can end up being too broad and unscaffolded, or too time-intensive.

MEET THE BOARD

GAIL NORRY

Tell us something about yourself.

I am a product of a Jewish day school education, and am so proud that all three of my children are as well.

I believe my Jewish education had a major impact on my life, eventually leading me to become a full-time volunteer in the Jewish community.

I feel extremely fortunate to be able to give back to the Jewish community and have received so much more in return.

Most of my work has been on behalf of the Jewish Federation, both locally in Philadelphia and on a national basis.

My family and I have been so enriched by our shared involvement in Jewish philanthropy, and I want to continue sharing that passion with others.

Concerning Jewish education, what are you passionate about?

I think Jewish education is where it all begins. It has been documented that our leaders in the Jewish community mostly come from our day schools.

I also love Jewish camping and have traveled to Israel countless times, but there is nothing that has the same impact as a strong Jewish education.

Jewish camping and Israel trips have had wonderful support in the last decade. I believe we have to do the same thing for day school education, and Prizmah can be that vehicle.

What do you bring to the Prizmah board?

I think that I can be a resource to Prizmah regarding special needs education.

My husband and I were involved in starting a program for children with special needs in the Jewish day schools in Philadelphia, called Orot.

I believe we should strive to educate all children, regardless of their abilities. Not only is it the right thing to do, it is one of the Jewish values that we teach.

In order to strengthen our day schools, we need to increase accessibility, whether it's through funding sources, transportation or special needs accommodations.

What is your favorite Jewish teaching?

My favorite teaching is *Kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba-zeh*, all of Israel is responsible one for another.

As Jews, if we don't take care of each other, who will? Not only is it our responsibility, but we are stronger as a Jewish community when we work together and look out for each other.



The distance of the student from the teacher, the potential isolation of the assignment from the year's curriculum, and the long span of time for completion means that teachers must exercise an even greater level of scrutiny and care than usual when sculpting their assignments, taking even greater consideration of student needs. How well does a summer assignment engage the student? Can the student find meaning in the assignment? Is the student able to do the assignment independently?

During the school year, students have access to a lot of scaffolding and support. For long-term projects, there are benchmarks and check-ins that allow teachers to monitor student progress and students to feel comfortable seeking help. This is not the case for a summer homework assignment. Students with weaknesses in the executive function domain or with limited home resources are at a significant disadvantage. It is important to keep this contextual reality in mind. More time is not necessarily a blessing. Even without a specific diagnosed weakness, many students struggle with procrastination, time management and long-term planning. Thinking about the root causes of procrastination in relation to the assignment can help integrate those support structures into the assignment itself.

Teachers need to ask themselves the following questions when crafting a summer assignment:

Am I confident that my students have mastered the skill sets needed to complete this assignment?

Does the amount of time this assignment requires take into account the students who may struggle with time management?

Do students understand ways that the assignment can be modified to accommodate learning needs?

Do I clearly communicate the goals for this assignment?

Does the assignment allow for choice and tap into the multiple ways students move through this world?

Teachers should see the summer as presenting unique opportunities for students to stretch beyond the standard academic skill sets that are constantly demanded of them during the year. Summer assignments should be exciting and alluring. Teachers should assure that an assignment allows for choice and enables all students to tap into their talents and interests. Summer is a time when students who feel less capable in the academic realm can shine—whether at different types of specialized camps, family adventures, or even in mastering the 100th level of their favorite video game.

Summer vacation is an amazing opportunity to let the creative juices flow. One popular summer homework assignment at my school is given in AP US History. Students are asked to select one of four films based on history and watch it a few times. Then they are tasked with doing research and writing about the historical accuracy, or inaccuracies, of the film. They are given a list of sources and have the option to find more. This assignment is strong because it accesses multiple modalities of learning (film watching, researching online, reading, writing), and students can exercise choice in several areas.

There is no greater culprit to avoidance than a student's lack of clarity of how to do a task. Therefore, summer is not the

time for students to be trying to teach themselves new skills. Summer homework assignments should utilize skill sets they have been engaged with all year. For example, it is problematic to ask all incoming ninth graders to read and annotate the same text. Since ninth graders come from many different middle schools, their skill sets vary widely. Many may struggle with an assignment like this because they have not yet learned the skill of annotation.

Students' motivation to engage in an assignment is deeply linked to their ability to find meaning and relevancy. Teachers need to be transparent with students about the reasons driving the assignment. At my high school, the driving force behind summer assignments is to create a thematic foundation upon which to build a curriculum for the entire year. Our entering twelfth grade English AP students, for example, must read and annotate Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, which at 691 pages is a hefty assignment, one that students often find difficult to complete before the beginning of school. A more explicit articulation of the assignment's relevance to the twelfth grade class and to ideas that high school students often grapple with would, I believe, help to tap into deeper levels of student motivation. Imagine how the assignment might be received if it was prefaced with the following:

Your summer reading book, *East of Eden*, is a vital foundation upon which we will build the Existentialism unit in both your Jewish Thought and English classes next year. In these classes we will explore questions like, Why is there evil in the world? and, How do people respond to evil? You will be asked to connect themes and excerpts from this book to the Jewish philosophical ideas you will explore in Jewish Thought. Read closely and annotate (tab, highlight or underline), taking time to absorb the work's complexity and deep meaning. Note allusions (especially Jewish and Christian allusions), themes, connections to other texts you have read, character development, literary devices, and any questions and comments that arise as you read. You will rely on these annotations heavily in both classes upon your return to school on many writing assignments throughout first semester.

Finally, teachers should explore ways that enhance a student's feeling of responsibility towards and ownership of an assignment. In classes, teachers sometimes utilize the "jigsaw" method, where students or groups of students are each assigned a different component of a reading or assignment. Without their engagement in the task, the whole cannot be completed. Would knowing that they would need to teach what they've learned to the rest of the class (who did not do the same reading) increase the student's sense of responsibility?

Summer homework is not about keeping kids busy, and teachers should feel confident that their assignments are meaningful and worthy of student time. Embrace the individualization of the summer assignment, perhaps engaging students in crafting their own summer project (as others authors in this issue propose). Teachers need not feel defensive about summer homework. When they create summer assignments with sensitivity to the needs, talents and abilities of their students, then students are more likely to be excited about, find meaning in, and be invigorated about their learning endeavors.



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COMMENTARY

IS THERE VALUE IN HOMEWORK?

I hold conflicting beliefs about the efficacy of homework. On the one hand, I agree with Kohn that homework is often, if not usually, more detrimental than beneficial. Students in Jewish day schools already have extended school hours to accommodate the additional curricula, and asking them to spend even more time engaged in intellectual work in the afternoons seems cruel. We say we value well-rounded dispositions, but homework interferes with participation in extra-curriculars and even simple "downtime," which is becoming more widely recognized as essential for general well-being.

On the other hand, homework seems to be necessary in some situations. For example, I wish I could provide ample time to grapple with the conceptual applications for new mathematics skills, *and* practice the skill enough so that it sticks, all in the span of one class period. The reality on the ground, however, is that there simply is not enough time to "do it all," and the repetition of skills is necessary for proficiency in mathematics. Additionally, reading a novel needs to be done outside of school so that in-class time can be spent doing the complex work of organizing ideas, debating beliefs, elaborating upon thoughts and analyzing text. In the midst of these competing values, I have tried to strike a balance by only assigning homework that is absolutely necessary.

Samara Hendin Soiref, fifth grade advisor and teacher, JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School

Homework seems to be one of the most debated topics among parents. While some parents believe children learn only if homework goes home every night, others would like the burden of homework completely removed. Rather than continuing to fuel the debate about quantity, and before we can develop new homework criteria, we need to shift the conversation to focus on value. What is the value of homework? By asking the right question, sharing the research, and grappling with the options together, we can be the change agents that facilitate creating criteria for determining the value of homework. If we are successful, not only will we change the conversation, we will change school culture.

Jodi Hirsch Rein, elementary school principal, Geshar Jewish Day School, Fairfax, Virginia

What parents and teachers need is support from administrators who are **willing to challenge** the conventional wisdom. They need principals who question the slogans that pass for arguments: that homework creates a link between school and family (as if there weren't more constructive ways to make that connection!), or that it "reinforces" what students were taught in class (a word that denotes the **repetition** of rote behaviors, not the development of understanding), or that it teaches children self-discipline and responsibility (a claim for which absolutely no evidence exists). Above all, principals need to help their faculties see that the **most important criterion** for judging decisions about homework (or other policies, for that matter) is the impact they're likely to have on students' attitudes about what they're doing. "Most of what homework is doing is **driving kids away from learning**," says education professor Harvey Daniels. Let's face it: Most children dread homework, or at best see it as something to be gotten through. Thus, even if it did provide other benefits, they would have to be weighed against its likely effect on kids' love of learning.

**Alfie Kohn,
"Rethinking Homework"**

While we will never make everyone happy on the hot topic of homework, we, as educators, have to really look at the quality and purpose of the work that we are sending home for our students to do. While traditionally homework was used to practice and reinforce concepts, it often leads to frustration by parents who cannot help their children. Practice should be done in school with the guidance and support of the teachers. If we're sending work at home to do, we have to make sure there's a purpose for it, and not just because it's always been done. Make the work meaningful and engaging.

So what could we send home? A flipped lesson where students are accountable for watching a video. Students could then come to school and complete a formative assessment so the teachers could reinforce the skill or enrich the students who don't need the support. A baking assignment when teaching about measurement. Reading or being read to. Research for a Genius Hour or passion project. Work for home should be personalized, offer choice and be meaningful to the students. Most importantly, administrators and teachers have to have the hard discussions and create schoolwide policies on their beliefs about homework and its place in our schools.

Elyse Haber, director of English studies and technology integration, Hebrew Academy Elementary School, Montreal

As both an educator and parent, I have always opposed homework because of the many negative side effects. This is especially true for children who are enrolled in dual-curriculum school programs, where long days and the double burden of homework assignments can be overwhelming. In my opinion, homework rarely accomplishes what it is purported to, and instead becomes a source of anger, frustration and conflict for many children and their families. Homework often detracts from a child's free time, which I believe is essential for their overall health and well-being. I see the effect directly in my own son (whom I happen to teach). When he has no homework, he is relaxed and has positive feelings towards school.

However, I do see value in helping my students establish healthy study skills, which they will need over the course of their educational careers, and so when I assign "homework" it consists of an interactive study guide (full of creative fun activities) to review material already learned, in preparation for a test.

Rabbi Ouriel Hazan, fourth-grade Judaics rebbe, Gindi Maimonides Academy, Los Angeles, California

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Jewish Summer Experiences



BATYA BOSIN

Eleventh grade,
Goldie Margolin School for Girls,
Memphis

Confronting Our Past, Singing for Our Future

Seven countries, five weeks, 40 teenagers, one program. JOLT, a summer program of NCSY (National Council of Synagogue Youth, the Orthodox student movement) and words cannot do it justice. Maya Angelou comes close: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” I went to three countries, Poland, Austria and Israel. Each place was chosen to mark a particular focus: past, present and future. And each place made me feel a deeper connection to my Jewish values, especially when we visited Poland and connected with our shared past.

We visited mass graves, listening to the stories of those killed and singing as tears streamed down our faces. Then, we learned in a synagogue, filling it with Torah again, and singing with joy and happiness. From my journal:

July 20th Today, we were not told where we were going, but got up again at six o’clock with very little sleep and headed to davening. We packed up lunches and hopped onto the bus, unsure of what we were about to see. On the bus we were each handed three pieces of clay and told to mold them into anything we would like. Finally, we arrived and one by one we got off the bus and began to walk through a city that had not existed prior to the war. We began walking down a road that leads into the forest. There, we were still unaware of what we were about to face. The deeper into the forest we walked, it became

apparent to us exactly where we were. The mass grave of hundreds of children, in Zbylitowska Gora.

Here, I am ashamed of what I wrote. Ashamed I called a pit dug in the center of a large forest a “mass grave.” Grave? A grave in Judaism is usually covered with a monument in order to beautify that person’s place of burial. I remember the pit was surrounded with a blue fence that was put up years later, covered in stickers and balloons in order to “beautify” the ditch in the forest.

At the site, each participant read a poem, line by line, loud and clear about life, hopes and dreams, and death. Afterwards, each teen was handed a piece of paper with a name of a child on it. One by one, we went around reading the names and ages aloud for everyone to hear. We ended the ceremony by saying Shema and singing Hamalach Hagoel, words said by Yaakov when he blessed Ephraim and Menashe. My entry concludes:

We sat down and began to journal. Some of us wrote letters to our future children, others just wrote down their feelings and thoughts. We walked away from the grave site listening to Vezakeini, a song of hope of parents for their children.

Walking away, getting on the bus and heading to a tisch, a gathering with joyous singing, food and words of Torah—this describes JOLT. That is what we do. We go from witnessing death, to enjoying and appreciating life.



JONAH HEINRICH

Seventh grade,
Chicago Jewish Day School

Making Connections Across the World

Last year at summer camp I met two amazing people, Samson and Isaac. They were my counselors at Olin Sang Ruby Union Institute (OSRUI). They came all the way from Uganda, Africa. Throughout my four weeks at camp, I spent a lot of time talking with Samson and Isaac. They told me about their daily struggles and tried to paint a picture for me of the details of their life in Uganda.

These conversations really made me think deeper, and I tried to put myself in their shoes. What would it feel like to barely have enough water and food every day? To eat the same cassava, a dry tasteless vegetable, at every meal because it will fill your stomach and ease your hunger? Jobs are very hard to find because employers are often corrupt and employ their relatives over others who might be more experienced or more educated. This makes Isaac and Samson feel that their education is useless. Also, many employers don't want to employ

someone Jewish because they won't work on Saturday. To a large extent, job opportunities are the greatest hardship they face as a minority religious community.

For these reasons, Samson and Isaac had been trying to start a business selling kippot handmade by women in Uganda. They wanted to help their community as well as help themselves. Each kippah is handmade by a woman in the community in Mbale, Uganda. Some of these women are from the Abayudaya Jewish community and some are from the general community. They are all living in dire poverty and working together for a better life. Samson and Isaac planned to buy the materials from community members, pay the women who make the kippot, donate a portion of the income to their synagogue for the most impoverished people, and support themselves. I felt compelled to do something to help.

I decided to try to help Samson and Isaac start their kippah business. We talked about how I could help by selling kippot here in the USA. My parents and I gave them money to get the materials for about 650 kippot, which we committed to selling for them. We received the kippot in October, and my Mom and I started to brainstorm different ways to sell them. We got a list of synagogues in the Chicago area and started calling their gift shops and finding out about their holiday fairs. So far we have sold 400 kippot through holiday fairs, family and friends, and we were helped by an article about my project in *Wilmette Life*, which led to orders from all around the country. We have been able to send \$6,000 to Samson and Isaac, which has helped them with college tuition, medical bills, food and so much more. I will continue to sell the kippot as long as I can to continue to support Samson and Isaac.

Jewish Summer Experiences

My Note at the Kotel

NICOLE DINER

Sixth grade, Adat Ari El Trana and Ronald Labowe Family Day School, Valley Village, California

Last summer I went to Israel for the second time, for my mom's cousin's wedding. We stayed in Israel for two weeks in Herzliya at the Marina. My family and I stayed in the same neighborhood when I first went to Israel.

The most vivid and important day for me in Israel was when we went to Jerusalem. I had a full day in Jerusalem where we did many things. My grandma and grandpa came with us to Jerusalem. On the way to Jerusalem, my nine-year-old brother and I recalled my dad telling us the last time we went to Jerusalem that you can still see these type of old war trucks so we started pointing to all of them.

When we got into the city of Jerusalem, the first thing I thought was how pretty the city was with all of the buildings and nature. The first thing we did was going to the Mamilla Mall. Last time we went and it looked exactly the same. We had some really good bourekas, and I drank a lemonade with mint that was very delicious. My grandpa took us through the market to get to the Kotel. Some people think that it is dangerous to go through there, but we didn't have any encounters with anything. One of my favorite things to do is take photos so I took many photographs of the little market and all of its wonderful colors.

When I walked in to see the Kotel, all these memories came flowing back in. The first time when I went to Israel, I was seven years old and when I saw the Kotel for the first time, the first thing I did was stand there and sing *Hatikvah*. I don't remember why I did, but that was the first thing I did when I was seven.

We spent about three hours at the Kotel. When I went to pray and put a note in the wall, I realized how lucky I am that I have a wonderful family that loves me and takes me to places. I have been to so many places in the world. I have been to Europe, Canada, Israel, and a lot of places in Mexico and the United States of America. I have a great family, and I appreciate them so much. I didn't pray for me to have a better life at the Kotel, I prayed for everyone in the world to have a great life. Going to Israel was one of my favorite trips.



Experiencing Learning

ZACK FOX

Twelfth grade, Bnei Akiva Schools of Toronto



One of the most important parts of education, in my opinion, is experience. I've been blessed to have truly transformative experiences during my summers. Throughout my tenth and eleventh grade, I took part in a program called the Diller Teen Fellows. It is a Jewish leadership program, affiliated in Toronto with the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, focused on building leaders as well as Jewish identity.

A main feature of Diller is that each Diaspora city is partnered with an Israeli city, and the fellows have a short exchange. First, the Israelis come to their partner cities for a week in the spring and live with another fellow. They learn about the Jewish community, volunteer and have fun while there. Then the Diaspora students spend a month in Israel. During this time, there is a week of volunteering in the partner city, and two separate conferences, one with just the international fellows, and one with all the fellows, including the Israelis. Diller also has four main pillars to its programming: Israel, Jewish Identity, Leadership and Tikkun Olam.

Personally, I took a lot out of the program, especially in terms of leadership. One of the highlights for me came during the International Congress (all the fellows), at a panel with 30 amazing leaders where we discussed techniques and what makes someone a leader. I certainly believe that I began implementing the leadership skills and ideas I learned then during my last two years in high

school. The Diller International Congress itself was a highlight, where 500 fellows from four countries were together for six jam-packed days.

This program was a great example of the ideals of Torah, Avodah and Eretz Yisrael. After a week of volunteering in Eilat as well as working with the community, we experienced this meaningful Shabbat, incorporating the Jewish values I had learned through my years of education. An inspiring Carlebach minyan took place. Diller is a pluralistic fellowship, so I found it amazing to be in Israel with so many other incredible leaders from different backgrounds. It was definitely an experience that shaped me, especially as education done informally.

The primary definition for education is "the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university." However, a secondary definition is "an enlightening experience." I think the second definition is overall much more encompassing. For me, education expands far beyond the classroom, and some of the lessons that resonate with me aren't taught on a blackboard, but rather against the backdrop of life. The summer is prime time to take advantage of the many opportunities available and grow in ways that just aren't possible throughout the year. No matter how you spend your time during the summer, make sure that it is an impactful experience that can hopefully last throughout the year.

Jewish Summer Experiences



LAEL SANDERS

Third grade, Temple Beth Am
Day School, Pinecrest, Florida

A Perfect Summer Shabbat

Some kids find their Jewishness in summer camp, by traveling to Israel or by going to shul. For me, this happened right in my hometown, one summer at Shabbat dinner for my savta's (grandma's) birthday.

One Friday in June, I went to my dodah's (aunt's) house. We went to my aunt's for Shabbat dinner because it was my savta's birthday. The smells of the melting candles and delicious food wafting from the house greeted me as I walked up to my dodah's doorstep. When I walked into the house, everything looked extraordinary. As I looked around, I realized that my whole family was in one place.

I joyously greeted each of them with a warm embrace, and just as I was happy to see them, they were equally happy to see me too! Then it was time for the special dinner. We had golden fluffy challah, sweet grape juice, gefilte fish, creamy sweet potato pie and delicious matzoh ball soup. As we recited the blessings over the wine, challah, candles and of course the rest of the meal, we all sang in perfect unison. Then we began our feast. The food was exquisite.

After I ate, I went to play hide-and-seek with my sister and my cousin while the adults were debating about politics. The sounds of our laughter filled my cousin's room as we scurried off to our hiding places. While I hid in the closet, I could hear the adults discussing how nice it was to be all together. I got lost in their conversation, and I realized just how right they were.

Before I knew it, it was time to go home. I didn't want to leave under any circumstances, but it was getting late, and I was exhausted. On the car ride home, as I felt the summer breeze blow through the car window, I reflected on this incredible evening. I realized how lucky I was to be Jewish and to have the opportunity to celebrate Shabbat every week.

That summer, I learned that Shabbat dinner is not just about the food, wine and candles. It's about spending time with your family and enjoying the special times in life. I had a great time at that dinner, and I hope that I have many more to come. I look forward to the day when I have my own family and will be able to carry on this tradition.

ELIANA MITZMACHER

Sixth grade,
Martin J. Gottlieb Day School,
Jacksonville, Florida



Reading Torah at Camp and at Home

This summer will be my fifth summer at Camp Ramah Darom. I love going to Camp Ramah, where I get to hang out with my friends and do so many fun activities. Also, when we pray at camp, it is a lot of fun because we all sing the prayers together. I read Torah for the first and second times at camp on Shabbat these past two summers.

When I was first asked to read Torah at camp, I agreed to try. When I read in front of everyone at camp, I was a little bit nervous, but then I got the hang of it, and I was proud that I did it. That year, I needed my counselor's help to figure out the trope. The next year, I decided that I wanted to read Torah again, because I remembered that I had done a good job reading it the year before. The second time I read Torah, I knew the trope and

could work on learning my Torah portion by myself. So when I was asked to read Torah at home, I agreed to do it because I felt that I would be able to do it well.

Learning how to read my first synagogue Torah portions weren't that difficult because of my camp experiences and because of the trope lessons that my day school class received. When I was learning my portions, I was able to apply the trope to the words easily. When it came time to read in front of the whole congregation, I felt nervous and excited, even though I knew that I could do it. I am really glad that I learned to read Torah, and it was such an honor to read Torah in front of the congregation, my family and my rabbis. Once I read the first aliyah, I didn't feel nervous anymore. When

people complimented me on my reading, I felt proud of how I chanted my Torah portions. I felt extra proud to be able to read in front of my parents and teachers.

Reading Torah at camp inspired me to read at home, because once I read in front of my friends at camp, I felt that I could read in front of the whole congregation in synagogue. When my ritual director told me that I read and understand trope well, I felt happy. All in all, reading Torah has been fun. I learned a lot about reading it over the years, and I enjoyed reading in front of everyone in synagogue. Now, I am working on learning two more portions, and I am looking forward to using the tikkun that was presented to me by the synagogue when I read Torah for the first time.

**YOU KNOW
WHERE
YOUR
SCHOOL
IS NOW...**

**BUT DO
YOU KNOW
WHERE YOUR
SCHOOL IS
GOING?**

TOGETHER, LET'S MAP OUT CONCRETE PLANS FOR THE 2017-2018 SCHOOL YEAR

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PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools



MICHELLE **ANDRON**
ESTHER **MARKEL**
LEVI **SOLOMON**

From Inspiration to Implementation

Team Professional Development

How many times has this happened in your school:

An administrator or teacher attends an outstanding professional-development workshop and comes back all fired up and excited about what has been learned and eager to bring about change. But when the new ideas are shared, they are met with skepticism and shot down by those who didn't attend. The attendee provides a strong rationale as to why changes should be made in the existing system, and yet the resistance continues. Even if the attendee is able to win over a colleague or two to attempt something new or rethink some ideas, the change is rarely long-lasting and is felt only in small pockets of the school. Slowly, the attendee's enthusiasm wanes, until the next PD when the scenario repeats itself anew.

How, then, can meaningful professional development be optimally implemented so that our schools can continue to grow in an innovative, meaningful and more global manner?

We postulate that while professional development is certainly important and valuable for changing individual practices in the classroom, in order to bring about meaningful schoolwide change, a team of colleagues needs to experience the learning together. An even more critical piece is continued coaching following a workshop. In this manner, more stakeholders experience the vision, wrestle with the challenges, and are able to create an environment that supports transformation. In addition, the extended coaching allows the educators to have support throughout the implementation process.

This past summer, the three of us had the opportunity to attend the LEV (Leadership, an Evolving Vision) program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education through the generosity of AVI CHAI. This extraordinary experience gave us the opportunity to reflect on where we were in terms of school culture, student spirit and staff morale and to create a roadmap together as to where we wanted to be. We heard from top experts in the field and collaborated with educators from all over the world. We worked with Harvard faculty and guest lecturers to explore the most effective strategies for building successful schools. The sessions challenged our thinking, gave us focus and direction, and inspired us to envision productive school change.

The program allowed us to rethink our paradigms and reflect together on how we could continue to grow. Their key word here is “together.” Our nightly meetings allowed us to discuss ideas we learned and see how we could make them relevant for our own unique reality. Those meetings recharged us even further so that once we returned, we had a vision and a team ready to implement the necessary change.

While the training we received at Harvard helped us shape our vision and reflect on our direction, it was the coaching we received afterwards from Jonathan Cannon, again with AVI CHAI’s support, that helped us stay on track. He met with us as well as the other members of our cohort to support and guide us in our schools. His feedback was critical to our ability to implement the changes we were working towards. He helped us stay focused on a path of growth throughout the year.

The project we undertook from the LEV program was to change school culture. We wanted to create an aura of positivity in our school that could be felt by all of the stakeholders, staff, students and parents alike. We focused on a three-pronged approach: building more school ruach and pride, revamping our discipline policy, and focusing on staff team-building and better collaboration. As we plunged into the school year, we reached back to our experiences at Harvard to fine-tune our approach and techniques both with our staff and with our students. Despite inevitable bumps along the way, our shared experience has enabled us to support each other and stay true to our vision.

Have we been successful? A comparison of surveys administered to staff members before Harvard and a year later indicate that on all fronts there has been tremendous growth and a much greater element of positivity throughout the school. We feel confident that we would not have been able to realize the same degree of growth had only one of the three of us attended. Participating in this conference as a team

allowed us to formulate a plan together, work out the kinks in its implementation together, and support each other through the year by staying aligned to the vision we aspired to, thus allowing us to continue to work towards bettering ourselves, our team and our school.

This is not the first time that we have seen this form of professional development work. In the last few years, we have implemented a variety of new programs and methods of teaching, such as Responsive Classroom, blended learning, Teachers College Reading and Writing Workshop, Singapore Math, and the L’havin U’lehaskil Chumash curriculum, using a similar model. We start off by piloting the new program with a small group of teachers, sending them to workshops as a team. Once they come back from the training, we bring an outside coach to help with implementing what they have learned.

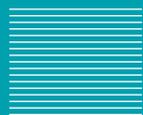
We believe that this is the crucial piece for ensuring the success of the program. Teachers feel more supported, have an expert to guide them when they hit roadblocks, and stay accountable for the goals they have set. If we find that the program has been successful, then we continue to send teams to get training, and we either retain the outside coaching or find experienced teachers to serve as in-house coaches for those starting on the path. By tracking student achievement through our normed-testing data, we have evidence that the teachers have been successful with implementing these new programs.

As day school educators, we are constantly pursuing courses and conferences that will help us grow, enrich our toolset, and maximize the impact we make in the lives of our students. As you seek out opportunities for professional development, boost the outcome for your institution. Send a team of like-minded educators who can bring back what they’ve learned in a manner that will inspire others and bring about a comprehensive change to your school. Ensure the success of the PD you are looking to implement by providing support and coaching as your educators make their foray into unfamiliar waters.



MELANIE EISEN
SHIRA HELLER
SHIRA LOEWENSTEIN

Now that School Is Over, Let's Start Learning!



"If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow." John Dewey

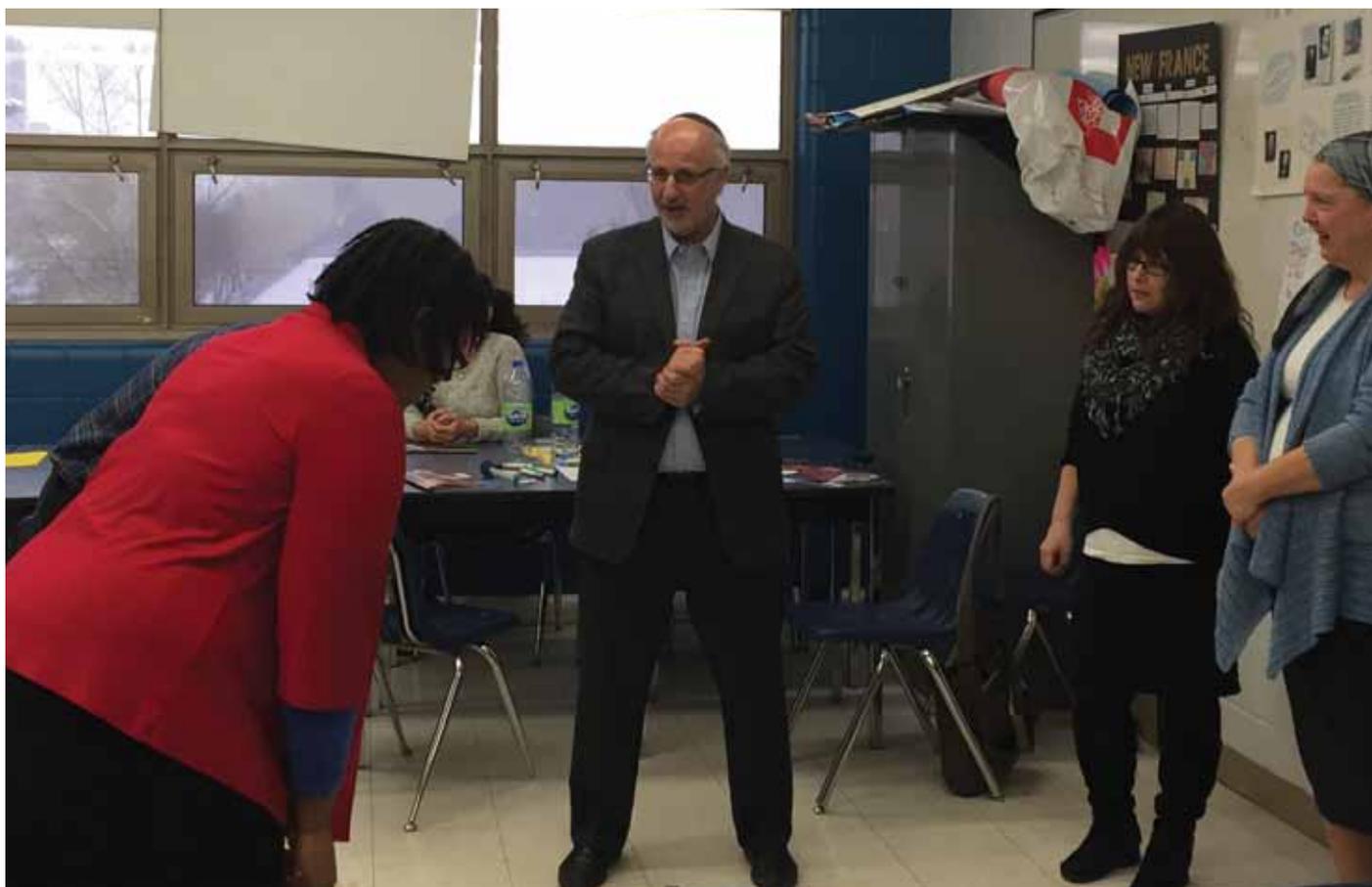
Among the crucial tasks facing the school leader is an examination of teacher learning. While our schools exist to ensure *student* learning, it is the consistent growth and renewal of *teachers* that enables a powerful student experience. Research shows that teachers often teach the way they were taught. Over time, society changes, our understanding of educational psychology and learning changes, and our vision of best practices changes. Professional learning is the only way teachers can develop along with the world around them. It is the only way they can continue to provide excellent environments for student learning.

And yet professional development remains a challenge for many schools. Teachers report that PD experiences are boring and repetitive, disconnected from their classroom work, lack follow through, and take away valuable time from lesson planning and grading. Leaders report that despite investment in PD, they see little change in teacher practice. How can this ineffective PD cycle be broken?

We've put together this list of eight questions to consider when planning professional development that can help break the cycle and guide schools to more effective, more enjoyable PD.

What are the current patterns of teaching in the school?

Using a checklist like the one provided below, have members of your leadership team visit 10-12 classrooms. Look for patterns in areas of strength and areas for improvement. Which practices need the most attention? Tailor your PD planning



to leverage strengths and address weaknesses. Once you've identified an area for growth, dig deeper. How far off target are teacher practices? What's the right starting point for PD?

What are your teachers already learning?

Ask a small and diverse group of teachers what they are already learning. What do they want to learn more about? What support do they want to improve their practice? Learn what your teachers are already curious and excited about. Bringing the teachers into this conversation will invite immediate buy-in and enthusiasm, and increase the chances that real change will happen.

What are your goals for teacher learning?

As an administrator, your faculty are your students. Their learning is your priority. What goals do you have for your teachers' learning? How much time do you have to devote to their learning? What resources and support do you need to ensure progress toward your goals? How will you assess whether the goals are being met? Just as you would plan a unit in your classroom with learning outcomes in mind, so too must you meticulously plan the teacher learning in your school.

Who are your teachers as learners?

Adult learners are every bit as diverse as children. Some are more advanced, while others are just beginning. Some are eager

to learn, change and grow, while others view new initiatives more warily. Teachers may prefer to read an article, listen to an expert, work independently, collaborate with peers, experiment or observe. Consider to what extent differentiation has been part of your PD planning in the past. How might you differentiate PD opportunities in the coming year to better meet your teachers' diverse needs, interests and learning preferences?

What's realistic?

We want our teachers to change and grow, and we are eager to ensure that our students are having the best possible learning experience. Once teacher learning goals have been set, leaders, parents and teachers can sometimes be impatient for change. The distance between current practice and desired practice is often much longer than anticipated. Steven Leinwand of the Connecticut Department of Education says, "It is unreasonable to ask a professional to change much more than 10 percent a year, but it is unprofessional to change by much less than 10 percent a year." How are we reality-checking our learning goals? What other demands are being placed on teachers that might compete with focused time on PD? How are expectations and priorities being made clear?

What innovations do you want to encourage?

George Couros, a prominent educational writer, says, "Want innovation in the classroom? Get people to focus on being



open to new learning and create different experiences for them. They are more likely to do the same for their students.” How are you providing opportunities for faculty to experience the innovations you’d like to see? If you truly teach your teachers how to innovate and model for them how educational innovations work, they will in turn share their learning with their students.

What are you reading and learning?

It is nearly impossible to encourage a practice in which we ourselves are not actively engaged. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk said, “If you truly wish your children to study Torah, study it yourself in their presence. They will follow your example. Otherwise, they will not themselves study Torah but will simply instruct their children to do so.” When you see a teacher in the hallway, start the conversation with what are you reading that has inspired you. It might be related to education, child development, management, Torah or a different topic entirely, but this starts a conversation that helps establish interest, a desire to learn about your faculty, and a growing list of must-reads for yourself. Sharing your own learning earns you a second conversation that can be related to a teacher’s professional growth.

How can we get started?

Nearly every school has a teacher in-service week before students return to school. Most schools allocate significant time for Professional Development. This is a great time to restart teacher learning, but should not be the beginning or the end. Too often, these back-to-school workshops introduce a new idea, skill or strategy without a plan to follow up and follow through. Jim Hull, policy director at the Foundation for Excellence in Education, once said that there is a gap between what teachers know and what they are able to do. While ample professional development is often provided to introduce ideas,

there is seldom sufficient support as teachers experiment with implementation. Hull cites research showing that teacher mastery of a new skill takes, on average, 20 separate instances of practice before the teacher feels confident and able to get the new practice right.

Before you plan your in-service, think about how you will introduce the idea to your teachers. How can they begin their learning before August? Think ahead to the rest of the year, not just the week. How will the new ideas, skills and strategies be revisited? Who might support teachers through experimentation and implementation, so that they can persist through 20 separate instances of practice to become proficient?

This summer, let’s make it our homework to plan for better teacher learning. Here are some suggestions for you to share with your staff before they leave school, to prepare for a year of meaningful learning.

- Find a new book that you can read and recommend to a colleague. Offer to host a book club for a group of those interested.
- Find a podcast that sparks your interest (Two Teachers on a Train, Prizmah’s teacher podcast, is a good place to start!), and recommend it to some others who might find it interesting.
- Create a Twitter account (if you do not have one) and participate in a Twitter chat about a new area of learning for yourself.
- Listen to a TEDtalk and share the inspiration.
- Look for a workshop or a course at a local university or area not-for-profit. Enroll with a friend.
- Start a blog of your journey of learning and commit to sharing this learning throughout the next year. (Edjewcon.org provides great guidance on blog writing; Prizmah staff write their own blog posts at Prizmahblog.org.)

When teachers learn at their own pace, in their own medium, they acquire ways to enrich and strengthen their practice, thus enhancing the learning of their students.



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HADAR DOHN

Books Build School Ties for Parents and Teachers

How does one thoughtfully build a collaborative school culture between faculty and parents? This is a question that we at Solomon Schechter Day School of Metropolitan Chicago (SSDS) have been grappling with for a long time. There are many peripheral ways that we currently collaborate at SSDS, but we wanted to look beyond that. We wanted something more meaningful, that would bridge multiple constituencies and have an effect on all aspects of our children. The answer: a schoolwide summer read involving both faculty and parents.

In the course of the year, we strive for balance: in work and home life, communication and stuffed inboxes, and obligations and choices. Day-to-day school leadership offers little time for managing the quest for balance. This is not so during the summers. Summer brings with it a promise of endless possibilities. If you are anything like me, “That’s going on my summer list” is a common thought throughout the year. Summer has the potential for maximizing calm, time and focus. If the school year is filled with obligations, the summer is filled with hope. So how do we leverage the summer to further our school’s mission and build the connections with our stakeholders who are not in session?

In addition to the obvious connections with our community over the summer, such as scheduled posts on social media and sharing information about preparations at school, summer reading offers a bridge between school and home. In schools, attempts to connect and inform often result in lecturing on deaf ears. Shared reading, in contrast, elicits dialogue and evokes thoughtful consideration of common language and purpose.

During the school year, I am constantly reading (at least) two books simultaneously, one to further develop my craft as an educator and school leader, and one for leisure. Overwhelmingly, I tend to read several industry books for every one that I read for fun. In the summer, however, I try to reverse the ratio of reading, more for leisure and less for school. This means that the trade books that I choose to read have to serve a purpose that is beyond my personal growth. If I am to read fewer educational and leadership books over the summer, what criteria do I use to select the books? What books would stimulate professional conversations among the staff and among the parents?

In order to select a book for the faculty, the school's Educational Leadership Team discusses many options. We are painfully aware that any book comes at the expense of another and appreciate the fact that for faculty, summer is the time to be away from school. I strongly believe that while some faculty complain about mandatory reading, overall, teachers enjoy reading to keep current with educational trends. When I was head of school at Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor, the principal (now head), Jennifer Rosenberg, and I came up with an idea that we had not tried before. Rather than selecting one book for all the teachers, we presented them with the five books that we intended to read over the summer. The teachers selected the book that interested them, which created small discussion groups when we returned to school. The element of choice provided an exciting momentum at the end of the school year.

At SSDS, we selected one book for the faculty. Selecting a single book was a conscious decision to have a unifying experience for all of our K-8 teachers. Our intent was to select a book that supports our mission, fits our philosophy and challenges our thinking. The choice was made based on ongoing conversations that went on during the school year, an attempt to get everyone on the same page, and to use the expertise of others to guide us through an internal dilemma. The selected book, *Lost at School* by Ross Greene, has as its premise that children want to do well and if they don't they are lacking the skills needed for success, one that is in sync with our core values. Our Student Support Services Team read the book and held monthly book club meetings throughout the year, which served as a preview to the whole faculty assignment. This team will select another book for their summer reading.

Deciding which book to read over the summer is the school leadership's way of choosing the message on which we want to concentrate. The assigned book is a way of conversing with experts when not surrounded by other professionals. While many teachers attend workshops over the summer, for some, the summer reading is their connection to the professional discourse of education. While summer shifts the work-life balance, the independent reading sets the foundation for the conversations to come. It keeps the faculty thinking about school and their teaching throughout the summer.

At the same time, we are presented with an opportunity to engage similarly with our parent body. The selected book keeps parents thinking about school when their children are not in session. It gives parents insight into the school's thinking, for a better understanding of current philosophy and practice, which could be the basis for new initiatives. This year, we selected Ross Greene's *Raising Human Beings: Creating a Collaborative Partnership with Your Child*. It is the parent's version of the book the faculty will be reading. In it, Greene writes, "The process of solving problems collaboratively with the people at school often starts with a meeting in which you make it clear that coming to an understanding of what's getting in your child's way is the first step. Make sure the school knows you're not trying to make *excuses* for your kid—you are trying to *understand* why he's having difficulty and that the accommodations, adaptations, motivational strategies, and encouragement that they have applied so far have missed the mark because they are missing the information they needed. ... Make sure your kid is involved in the process of solving

the problem." Now, there is a conversation I look forward to having with parents at an initial book club meeting.

I hope our parents will take the time to participate. And I understand that it is challenging for parents to balance their own work lives. While students are not at school, parents continue to manage ways of filling their children's time, be it with camp, enrichment classes, play dates or summer fun. Not to mention that most parents are not off from work during the summer months. Still, I've found that parents are more likely to engage in school-initiated shared book reading over the summer than during the school year. Their equilibrium is shifted with different bedtime routines, no regular homework battles and increased hours of daylight. And for the parents who choose to participate, the level of engagement in the school increases. I found that inviting parents to discuss articles during the year can be a continuation of the summer reading group. The educators and parents can truly shift and strengthen their partnerships through meaningful discussions based on their shared reading.

With these particular books, Ross Greene challenges parents and educators to try a different approach to discipline. The ongoing discussions throughout the year that will follow the initial book club meetings will offer a forum to support implementation of this method. Monthly meetings for parents will be offered to discuss related articles or to use each other for support. The faculty will have monthly conversations at faculty meetings to examine scenarios from their practice.

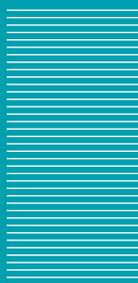
As we think to the future, we might involve our students (at age-appropriate levels) in reading the same summer book as the adults. If we want to model cultural change, then we should think about true collaboration with our students. For instance, how powerful could it be to have our upper grade students reading a book on life-work balance and start off in the fall with a Sunday morning symposium where the community brainstorms the community norms by which we want to live. The thought of this is powerful and exhilarates me.

With summer around the corner, the to-do list grows. We may not be able to accomplish all that we want, yet we are able to immerse ourselves in a different rhythm, at a new pace and with renewed priorities. With this new balance, we set the stage for the following school year. We dream of summer during the school year. Over summer, let's keep everyone thinking just a bit about school.



NANETTE **FRIDMAN**
JENNIFER **WEINSTOCK**

Development Professionals: Maximize Your Summer



If you want to increase your fundraising, improve your relationships, align your staff and get creative, summer is your golden time. As June 30 approaches, we urge you to plan to use this valuable time wisely, even though it can be hard to be a 12-month employee at a school when the majority of your colleagues are off-campus for the summer. Reframe the summer time as a tremendous opportunity, not a burden.

Setting concrete goals for the summer is key. It's important to shift perception of the summer as a "break" from direct donor work to critical and foundational planning and preparation time. We have created four categories of work for the summer: cleanup and organizing, professional development and self-care, nurturing relationships, and preparing for the fall. We suggest some objectives for each category of focus. You can use this outline to create a meaningful summer plan that will help you rejuvenate and give you a head start on the next fiscal year.

Cleanup and Organizing

Often during the hustle of the school year we don't have time to keep up with the mess, both the literal one on your desk and in your email inbox, and the figurative messiness of donor relationships that are complicated. During the year, we generate a lot of correspondence, notes and data that will be needed during the coming school year.

Set several targets for your personal cleanup and also for the development department. You might consider setting aside two days for physical cleanup and tackle projects like decluttering your desk and reordering supplies for the year. Electronic cleanup is also crucial in an age where most of our donor communications happen online. Create a system for filing donor emails in online folders so you can easily find the communication later in the year. Assess your filing system in general and make a plan for organizing both paper and electronic communications with donors over the course of the year. Consider moving towards electronic files for ease of use during the busy season and to be kind to the environment. You may also want to review tools that you are using for intake information and what information is being collected by other departments, such as any grandparents covering tuition for a family or students who are not returning to your school.

Professional Development and Self-care

It is important to take advantage of the slower summer season to focus on yourself. That may mean giving attention to your own self-care by taking a true vacation, exercising during the middle of the day or taking half-day Fridays. To alleviate feelings of exhaustion that often well up by end of fiscal year, set a personal self-care goal for the summer and discuss it with your supervisor so that you can both hold you accountable for recharging your battery and creating more balance.

Summer is an excellent time to make progress on a professional-development goal. Take the chance to invest in your own professional growth while work is at a slower pace. You might identify a particular skill you want to sharpen such as public speaking, facilitation training or data management. If you are able to focus on a specific area of growth and set a deadline to obtain more training in this area, then it will be easier to find the appropriate opportunities. Consider looking into local universities or professional associations in your area

like AFP or NAIS, or consulting Prizmah. The summer may be a good time to start working with a coach as well.

While you and your colleagues are in the summer zone, take the opportunity to reinvest in your professional networks. Make a plan to get together with other Jewish day school development professionals in your area or plan for a road trip. Contact the development professionals at your local independent school to schedule a coffee and start building a relationship and your arsenal of local colleagues.

In addition, spend some time thinking about your personal professional goals for the coming year. Some examples might be experimenting with a new time-management system, committing to blogging or writing, taking on a leadership-development goal within your school and reenergizing a committee that has petered out.

Nurturing Relationships

During the regular school year, we don't always have the time we would like to spend with people and nurture relationships with our staff, new prospects, donors and board members.

Your staff has all worked hard to close the school year. Celebrate the end of the year with your staff. Make the time to debrief, train and brainstorm about what went well this past year and areas for growth. Share your self-care goals with your team and encourage them to prioritize their own objectives for this summer.

Make five new friends. Not everyone is away. Who can you meet for coffee that you don't have time to see during the regular year? Even if your prospects are not available in the summer, chances are fewer organizations are reaching out to them, so you can grab their attention by email or phone and try to set a meeting for the fall.

Summer is also an excellent opportunity to spend time with your top donors out of the cycle of soliciting them. Consider a nontraditional activity such as golf, tennis, a glass of wine in the backyard or a walk around a local reservoir. In addition, look over your entire donor list. Pay attention to people who increased their gifts this year. Are there donors who moved from \$180 to \$360 or from \$1,000 to \$1,800? This is the time to reach out to them and begin building a deeper relationship when you don't have to ask them to renew their gift. Partner with your admissions team to review the incoming students and their families, and queue up any key cultivation meetings that need to happen in the early fall.

Communicate with your board members, if applicable, at their summer locations. Tell them about the work you are doing over the summer and plans for the coming year. Send out the board meeting calendar for the year and update contact information. Ask your president or head of school to go with you to meet with each board member over the summer for an informal meeting to hear their thoughts about their board service and how they hope to use their leadership for the coming year.

Preparing for the Fall

In order to hit the ground running in mid- to late August when families and faculty return, it is important that you have several areas of your campaign organized.

The first step is to review your organization's strategic plan. Did the money you raised this year move you closer to achieving your organization's vision? It is critical to report on the impact of last year's campaign to motivate donors to renew support. Prepare your case for giving and vet it with your professional and lay leadership.

With the marketing department, create a comprehensive calendar that has all mailings, events and solicitation campaigns clearly planned out. Don't forget to mark the community calendar so you can avoid conflicts with other organizations. The Jewish holidays always sneak up on us; consider printing Rosh Hashanah cards in July and having them signed and ready to go in the mail. You will thank yourself later!

Once the high-speed pace of the annual campaign kicks off, it can be hard to find time to focus on prospect review. Use the summer months to evaluate your top 100 prospects. Who

needs to come off, as they are no longer appropriate prospects, and who needs to be added, particularly from your incoming pool of families, including grandparents? Try to do a little research on 25 prospects. Don't worry about Lexus Nexus or iWave, you just need Google and you can even get a summer intern to help you, possibly a school alum.

Your database, social media presence and website all need some TLC this summer. Make sure your database is up to date. Remember all those bounced emails and returned invitations? Use that intern to clean up your database. You can also get ahead by prewriting some social media posts and content for your website and having it ready to go.

The more you use the summer to get organized, the smoother and more productive the fall will be and the better a head start you'll have on achieving your organization's development goals for the next fiscal year. It all starts with reconceptualizing how you think of the summer. Instead of being on break or feeling like you can't move forward because your volunteers are away, use the time strategically to set concrete goals, clean up, develop and care for yourself, nurture relationships and start the fall with a leg up feeling calm, energized and organized.

YOU SHOULD CONNECT WITH PRIZMAH ONLINE

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If there is anything we love more than learning, it's sharing what we've learned—and Prizmah staff is sharing daily! Bookmark our blog for practical tips, in-depth resources, and lighthearted musings that cover every aspect of the Jewish education experience.

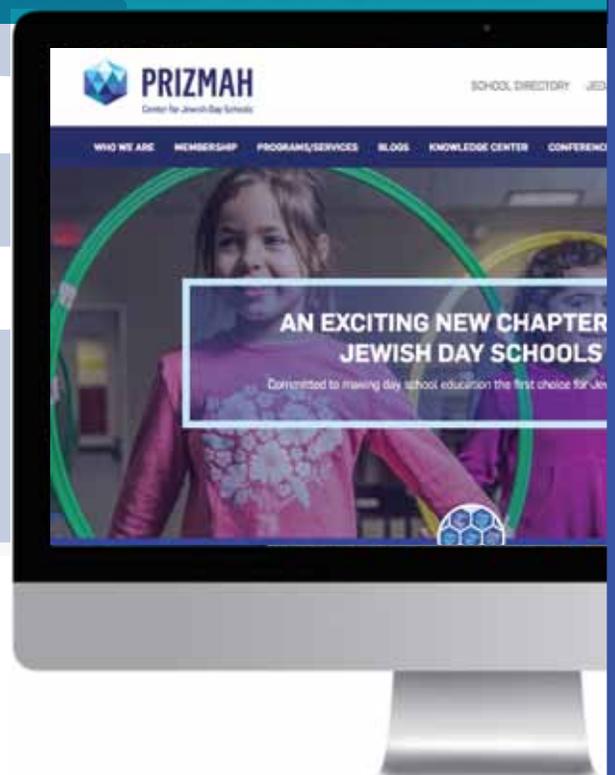
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PRIZMAH

Center for Jewish Day Schools



MEET PRIZMAH'S FINANCIAL VITALITY TEAM

At Prizmah, we view Jewish day school education with a holistic lens, understanding that every facet of a school is connected with another. To that end, we have teams dedicated to helping schools get every aspect of their operations in tip-top shape. And since financial sustainability is at the core of a school's existence, Prizmah's Financial Vitality Team comprises experts in finance, recruitment & retention, enrollment, endowment building, and strategic fundraising. These experts work tirelessly to meet the increasing and ever-changing needs of our schools. Get to know them, and see how they are opening up new possibilities for Jewish day schools by helping to secure a stable, prosperous future.

Dan Perla



Dan is the director of financial vitality at Prizmah, where he oversees a variety of programs that help day schools boost their revenues and create a more financially

stable future. Prior to joining Prizmah, Dan served as the vice president for program and strategy at The Foundation for Jewish Camp and as a program officer in day school finance at the AVI CHAI Foundation. Dan spent nearly 18 years in the financial world. He worked as a security analyst and portfolio manager at leading investment firms and hedge funds, including Iridian Asset Management, Centurion Investment Group and Soros Fund Management. He is a graduate of NYU's Stern School of Business and has an MBA in management from The Wharton School at The University of Pennsylvania.

Adele Yermack



Adele is a program director at Prizmah and is passionate about her work with admissions professionals at independent and Jewish day schools as they strive to build their

school communities with mission-appropriate students. She has been involved in independent school education for more than 30 years. She taught in lower and middle schools and then moved into administration. She served as director of admission and financial aid at Miami Country Day School, and later in the same role at Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School in Northeast Georgia. Following her work in schools, Adele worked as a project manager and school liaison coordinator at Educational Records Bureau (ERB), an organization that focuses on admission and achievement

assessments for Pre-K through 12 students. Adele is a founding board member of the Association of Independent School Admission Professionals (AISAP).

Helen London



Helen is the director of Generations and Governance & Fundraising Academy, a program whose goal is to strengthen the culture of philanthropy at Jewish day schools and instill

best practices in governance, professional leadership and fundraising. Helen's career has focused mainly in the nonprofit sector, in development and executive administration. For 13 years, she was the executive director of an educational organization providing scholarship and loan aid to college and graduate students. Helen was PEJE's senior manager for the Generations Day School Endowment Project, which she now oversees at Prizmah. The Generations program teaches a school how to embed endowment building into their other development work to ensure the future of the school. Generations schools have raised more than \$100,000,000 in endowments, benefiting Jewish day schools in North America and Canada.

Traci Stratford



Traci is the program manager for Prizmah's Governance & Fundraising Academy and Generations financial vitality programs. She is also the Reform Day School Advocate

and manager of L'Dor V'Dor, the national endowment and legacy donor recognition society. Before joining Prizmah, she worked in Jewish camping, youth engagement, and congregational education in the South and in Boston. Traci is passionate about building

strong relationships and communities. Her work has focused on experiential education, leadership and curriculum development. Traci has an MA in organizational leadership from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, degrees in Jewish studies and nonprofit management from Indiana University, and a certificate in fund development for nonprofit organizations from the IU School of Philanthropy.

Shelly Sadon



Shelly is the project coordinator at Prizmah working on YOU Lead and various financial vitality programs. Additionally, she manages JEDjobs.com, Prizmah's job portal for careers in Jewish education. Prior to joining Prizmah, Shelly worked at a bartender's school, doing administration and recruiting. She lives in Queens, New York, and loves to travel, especially to Israel to visit family.

Elana Alfred



Elana is Prizmah's associate director for Atidenu, collaborating with the program director in managing all aspects of the recruitment and retention efforts of the 16

participating schools. Previously, she worked at PEJE with a primary focus on supporting day school recruitment and retention efforts. Elana started her career as a program coordinator for the NY Region Workmen's Circle. Next, she moved to Chicago to participate in AmeriCorps, working at an inner-city public elementary school. She then went on to St. Malachy Elementary School, where she assisted eighth graders and parents applying for scholarships and high school. Elana has her BA in sociology from Muhlenberg College and an MPA from Northeastern University.

SCHOOL
PROFESSIONALS





SHERRI GELLER

Thinking about College Through a Jewish Lens

A few years ago, while on a visit to Elon University in North Carolina with other college counselors, I had breakfast with a former student from Gann Academy, the pluralistic Jewish day school where I work. I did not know the student well. I was relatively new to Gann when she was a senior, and she had worked with the other counselor in my office. So I asked the student why she decided to enroll at Elon. "I wanted to get out of my Northeast Jewish bubble," she said. "I wanted to leave the Boston area and come to a place that was really different—and I love it here!" Later in the conversation, I queried, "So what are some of the activities you have gotten involved in here?" Her answer cracked me up: "Well, I've joined a sorority and I do some intramural sports, and I'm on the Board of Hillel and am in charge of Challah for Hunger. We bake and sell challah every Friday to raise money for social justice causes."

I've worked in the college admissions/college counseling profession for over 20 years, and am currently the first counselor from a Jewish day school to serve as president of the New England Association for College Admissions Counseling. As a group, college counselors spend significant time focusing on finding the right "fit" for our students—size, location, setting, academic offerings and competitiveness—and for those of us at Jewish schools, the right Jewish community. For some students, finding the right Jewish "fit" is easy: They know they want to be at a school with kosher food, daily minyanim, and a strong, tight religious community. But more secular students who have attended Jewish schools have some big decisions to make. Some will say to me, "I've been in Jewish schools my whole life—I don't want to go anywhere 'too Jewish,'" while others can't imagine what it will be like to be in a diverse campus community, and they can't wait to find out.

Summer and fall provide time when many high school seniors and their parents travel to visit colleges. Over the years, I've learned that students and families don't always know the questions to ask to get to the most helpful answers around the issue of Jewish life on a given campus. What they don't always realize is that the *number* of Jewish students—or even the percentage—isn't what's most important (although having some statistical information is a great start). Rather the *engagement* of the Jewish students and the *culture* of the school's Jewish community are what will most likely lead to best "fit." Knowing the answer to the question "How many Orthodox students attend a school?" is less helpful than knowing "How many days a week can you convene an Orthodox minyan?" or "How hard is it to get a Torah reader for Monday mornings?" The question "How many students go to Shabbat dinners?" may not say as much about Jewish community as "If G-d forbid I need to say Kaddish, how easy would it be for me to find a minyan?"

There's certainly something to be said for "the numbers"—if there are only 40 Jewish students on campus, it's unlikely you'll see too many heads wearing kippot when you take a tour—but the following questions (compiled with input from a number of Jewish day school college counselors across the United States) may help guide family conversations on a more sophisticated level as students assess various campuses' Jewish offerings. It's important for each prospective applicant to identify what matters to him or her under the large umbrella of "Jewish life," and the categories below provide some areas to consider. Would a student *like* to take Hebrew classes, or will he only consider colleges that offer them? In other words, what are the non-negotiables, what are the preferences, and what are the added bonuses?

Students might ponder questions such as: Who are you as a person? Do you look forward to exploring a new Jewish community on your own, or do you need planned programs to get you out of your dorm? If you are at a Shabbat dinner and don't know anyone, will you introduce yourself to people, or will you be uncomfortable being there without friends? Do you want to attend a school where you will meet a lot of other students who have similar religious/educational backgrounds to yours, or do you prefer to meet people who are completely different from those you grew up with? If the Jewish community is small, are you prepared to answer questions about Judaism to peers who may not know too many Jews? Are you comfortable wearing your Jewish star or Hebrew name necklace on a campus?

Here are some important questions that can help Jewish parents and students evaluate their compatibility with college campuses as they visit prospective schools and contemplate applying to them.

Religious Life

- Who is the Hillel rabbi on campus? Is he or she sensitive to your religious needs?
- Is there a daily minyan on campus? Is there a Shabbat evening/morning minyan each week? Are the services Orthodox or pluralistic?
- Where do students go for High Holidays? Do local families host students for chaggim? Is there one High Holiday service or several? Will there be a sukkah on campus?
- How easy will it be to be shomer Shabbat? If the university features high-rise residence halls, can you request a lower floor so as not to have to walk up 14 flights? If the keys are electronic, is there a system that will allow you access on Shabbat?
- Is there an eruv?
- What's the ratio of undergraduates to graduates and other community members involved in Shabbat services?
- Are the residence hall floors co-ed, and does that matter to you religiously?
- How many Jewish students are regularly involved in religious activities? Social programs?
- Does the college have a JLIC (Jewish Learning Initiative) couple on campus to help support religious students? (See oujlic.org for more information about these educators and Torah role models.)

Food/Kashrut

- Is kosher food offered seven days a week for (at least) two meals a day?
- Is it prepared fresh on campus, or is it brought in/packaged from a kosher caterer or restaurant?
- Do students who keep kosher eat in a dining hall or at Hillel?
- Are there kosher restaurants nearby if you'd like to eat out, or places to buy kosher food if you'd like to cook a meal?
- Can you observe Pesach on campus?
- Does the kosher cafeteria have both dairy and meat options?
- If you would eat vegetarian food that's not certified kosher, are there robust offerings?

Israel

- What seems to be the campus climate concerning Israel?
- How many students enroll after a gap year in Israel? Can you get permission to do a gap year easily?
- Does the college offer study abroad programs in Israel?
- If there have been any controversial speakers on campus concerning Israel, how has the community reacted?
- How prominent are the BDS organizations, and how supportive is the faculty of them? Are there active pro-Israel organizations to join? How safe are students who choose to respond to anti-Israel activists on campus?
- Does the school regularly send students on Birthright? If so, how many typically go?

Learning

- Does the college offer courses on Judaism? On Israel? Is there a Judaic Studies department?
- Can students take Hebrew classes?
- Are there Judaic/religious learning opportunities beyond academics? What are they, and how often do they meet?
- What is the policy for students who won't write/test/attend classes on religious holidays?

Programming/Social/Campus Life

- Is there an active Hillel? An engaging Chabad? What types of activities do they offer? How often do they offer programs? How many staff members work for Hillel? If there are both Hillel and Chabad, what is the relationship between the two? Do they work together, or do they compete with each other?
- Is it possible for an observant student to request an observant roommate freshman year?
- Are there enough Jewish students to ensure many opportunities for friendships and choices of friendship groups?
- Off campus: Is there a JCC nearby? Are there other Jewish events in town? Are there synagogues within an accessible radius, and are they welcoming to college students?
- How often—and how well attended—are communal Shabbat dinners?
- Are any Jewish fraternities or sororities affiliated with the school?
- Are there non-religious opportunities to be involved in the Jewish community, through social activities and/or community service? Or through Israeli dance or Jewish a cappella groups?

In searching for colleges, websites such as Hillel.org, theheart2heartproject.org (a grassroots movement of Jewish college students sharing information with their peers), and chabad.edu all have helpful search engines, and quick Internet searches for “Colleges with Jewish Communities” will yield a number of helpful results. In addition, many Jewish day school college counselors are members of CAJUE: Counselors Advocating for a Jewish University Experience, an organization dedicated to helping Jewish students find the best environments. Chances are, your college counselor has visited several of the schools his or her students will be considering, and has worked with other students who have wanted to be active in Jewish life in college.

As students visit colleges, in addition to taking a regular tour it's a great idea to visit Hillel, where students and staff will help families figure out the answers to questions they didn't even know they had. Students might consider spending a Shabbat on campus, eating lunch in the kosher dining hall, or attending a performance by a Hillel theatre group. It's also helpful to visit the websites or social media pages of the Hillels or Jewish student organizations to see the most recent news and programming opportunities, as well as to learn something about the students comprising the Hillel board or serving in other positions. At Hillel, might you meet someone who was the only Jewish student in her high school in Iowa, or mostly students who attended Jewish day schools in New York?

Graduates of Jewish day schools usually go off to college feeling ready to integrate their Jewish identities with their more secular campus lives. Some will choose to be part of a vibrant Jewish community, others will make a difference in a “small and mighty” Jewish organization, and some will be content to have a small group of Jewish friends. Whereas one student may choose a school based on religious opportunities, another may not look as closely at Jewish life but could find herself baking challah every Friday on a campus in a small town in North Carolina, and know that she's found her place.

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SPOTLIGHT ON...

HEAD SEARCHES

Among the portfolio of services that Prizmah offers are placement services, tailored for each school by a team of highly experienced professionals. Prizmah works with schools to implement strategic recruitment practices in order to attract the best candidates, and designs and supports a thorough interview and smart selection process to identify the best candidate. These search processes are conducted in strictest confidence. Below is an interview with a search committee chair at a school that has just completed a successful hire in partnership with Prizmah.

What surprised you?

It surprised me that it wasn't easier to draw many highly qualified applicants. I expected that there would be tons of candidates knocking on our door; it surprised me that we had to market ourselves as an opportunity as much as candidates had to market themselves.

In what areas did you find our services most helpful?

Prizmah presented us with a formal process that was invaluable. We tweaked it according to our needs, but it was helpful to have a process with milestones and timelines. And it was very useful to have Prizmah doing sourcing and some initial screening after getting to know us.

At various difficult junctures, when differences among committee members felt irreconcilable, Prizmah moderated discussions and kept us focused on our strategic priorities. When we were stuck, they asked us the questions that helped us get unstuck.

What were your biggest concerns before you started the search for a new head?

We're a fairly diverse school within the larger modern Orthodox tent; we needed to find a person with connections to the various constituencies in the school, including the range of Orthodox streams along with sizable populations of both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, and more recently, international families. This essential qualification of course was in addition to the leadership skills and educational vision that we were looking for.

Tell us how you formulated the qualities and qualifications you decided to prioritize in your search.

The search committee was made up of people from the various school constituencies, so we felt that many voices were represented on the committee. As well, Prizmah ran several focus groups of parents and faculty for us, providing the expert guidance that we needed to gather information. These initial focus groups were very informative, and helped us ground our decisions in the community's needs and values. We often came back to the results of the focus groups during the process, especially when we were deliberating in the final stages..

What differences in perspective existed among members of the search committee? How were those resolved?

There were differences in people who wanted someone more traditional and others looking for someone more out-of-the-box. Of course, there were some "right vs. left" differences in opinion. While everyone on the committee certainly had their own particular interests as they looked at candidates, everyone also knew needed to put aside personal preferences in favor of what would be best for the whole school.

Now that the search is concluded and the new head affirmed, what is the mood of the school?

We are sad to say goodbye to our much beloved and long-time principal who is retiring. But everyone involved has been so committed to ensuring a smooth transition and the school community is thrilled and excited to welcome our new head of school.

WENDY **GRINBERG**

What Is Summer For?

Reflections on the Relationship between
Day School and Camp



Imagine you are welcoming your students on the first day of school after many of them have been at Jewish summer camp. What is going through your mind?

A) I hope they didn't forget everything they learned last year! Maybe they learned even more in the 24/7 Jewish educational environment of Jewish camp.

B) I can't wait to see how they've matured socially and emotionally after living in community with friends, negotiating intense feelings and close relationships.

C) Summer camp is an adventure! I can't wait to get to know these kids and see how their new experiences will enrich our classroom learning.

As day school educators and possibly camp educators as well, your hopes for what your students can learn and how they will grow over the summer are tied to your conception of camp, the potential for learning there, and camp's goals, in particular with relationship to school. The relationship between camp and school is one that has existed and shifted since the beginning of summer camp. The educational goals of camp can be seen along a continuum in relation to the education that takes place in school. Just as you may have wanted to choose more than one of the responses in the above thought experiment, these goals combine in various ways, and there is overlap in categories along the continuum.

Camp in Place of School

On one end of the continuum, camp is meant to take the place of school when school is out, addressing the loss of learning gains that might occur over the summer when assessed through standardized testing (sometimes referred to as the "summer slide"). In the history of both secular and Jewish camps, this goal is a prominent one. In addition to camp's beginning (most often traced to Frederic William Gunn in 1861 as an outdoor education component of a school program), the rise of camping was in part due to urbanization and industrialization, when fewer children worked on farms and an increasing number attended school with a fixed summer vacation. Camp took hold as part of the educational movement of American Progressivism. In the Deweyan school of thought, camp serves as a laboratory of learning by doing.

Advocates of camp as an extension of school argue that campers can potentially learn more or better during the summer months in the all-inclusive, creative and hands-on environment of camp. For example, summer reading programs have been designed to integrate into the camp day and address any summer learning loss, and recent efforts in Hebrew immersion in day camps seem successful in achieving their goals. Often the promise that camp will give campers an academic advantage is a selling point for parents.

A category along the continuum that exists primarily in Jewish camps but not as prominently in the secular camping world is camp in place of school as a venue for education, that is, the claim that the Jewish education and experience to be had at summer camp is superior to what can be achieved in Jewish schooling. This conception of the educational goals

of camp can result in episodes of camp that look a lot like school. Christian and Jewish summer camps describe similar phenomenon, in which the religious learning part of the day looks much like traditional classroom instruction, albeit in a natural setting, what Ramah Director David Mogilner called a "heder under the elms." This presents a contrast wherein the rest of the camp day campers are immersed in play and experiential learning, but Jewish content is relegated to rather non-progressive educational models.

Alternatively, camps may seek an integrated model in which learning happens while kids are having fun. Here fun conflated with learning comes to mean that learning is less onerous. This stance can cause camps to eliminate time specifically devoted to Jewish learning in favor of an integrated model; this model has been shown to have mixed success. Sometimes the learning is neither broad nor deep—not every topic can be associated with a camp activity, and not much can fit into a fifteen-minute sound bite. At times the Jewish learning segment of an activity still feels like a formal lesson, albeit a shorter one, but one that still interrupts an otherwise fun and recreational day.

Camp as Complement to School

Another goal along the continuum is camp as a complement to school. In this case, camp is for addressing crucial developmental skills that are more peripheral to a formal school curriculum. This kind of learning includes social-emotional learning, such as self-regulating and negotiating interpersonal relationships; leadership development; and experience in the outdoors. Parents of campers and Jewish summer camps also proclaim the many social-emotional benefits of camp: increased responsibility, sense of self and interpersonal skills.

Related to this goal is the idea that camps and schools may be in dialogue with one another, influencing one another through people, scholarship and experimentation. Beyond experimenting with creative curricula and teaching that could make schools more engaging, some camp advocates argue for a shift in emphasis in formal schooling towards the social-emotional goals of education as a result of the educational model that camps provide. These thinkers assert that the positive emotional environment of camp, including close relationships with adult teachers and role models, primes campers for all kinds of learning.

Similar to the way that non-academic growth can complement the academic growth that occurs at school, camp seems to provide a context for Jewish living in a way that schools cannot. Experiential education, learning that comes out of and relates directly to lived experience, could fall under this category, as could Jewish learning that occurs when living a Jewish life in the context of a vibrant, fully encompassing Jewish community. We might call this conception of Jewish education at camp as camp in place of shtetl, family, or some other premodern, all-encompassing Jewish life. In this conception, as the original founders of camp felt that camp was a return to a more pure and holistic way of life before industrialization, some Jewish camp advocates see camp as providing a total Jewish experience that is no longer available in our segmented, modern, hyphenated lives.



Camp in place of family can be found as a goal in secular camping today as well. In his book *Homesick and Happy: How Time Away from Parents Can Help a Child Grow*, psychologist Michael Thompson declares that camp can deliver on many of the things that parents want for their children but cannot actually provide. He argues there are eight things parents cannot do for their children (even though they try): make them happy, give them high self-esteem, manage their friendships or make friends for them, be their agent, manager or coach, be their second family, compete with children's digital world, keep them perfectly safe, or make them independent. In this view of camp, camp counterbalances and counteracts the over-parenting that is stifling children's independence and growth, independence and growth that will allow them to achieve and access the eight items above. The unencumbered and uncomplicated relationships of camp are also seen as a psychological benefit and a necessary antidote to inevitably fraught family relationships. Developing these close extra-familial relationships are key to adolescent development.

Camp as Other

A final category could be described as camp as totally other, or unrelated to school. In his list of the 10 elements that make camp powerful for children, Michael Thompson puts "Camp is not school (no tests, judgments, or evaluation)" at number two. According to Thompson, what camp *is* is even more significant: a place for play and imagination, an opportunity to choose, to be part of a larger community and connect closely with others and nature, and a chance to fully be one's self.

It is not uncommon in the research on camps to find the word "fun" as describing the central goal of camp. Often the advocates of fun and play explain that people learn through play and object to "fun and games" as a critique or description that minimizes the important growth and learning that takes place at camp. They see this kind of unstructured free living as core to learning and becoming. In contrast to the conception of fun that leads to learning (particularly academic learning, which is usually seen as boring), "fun" may

be understood as both an ends and a means. (This outlook is more popular in literature about the importance of play in early childhood, for example.) When fun is seen this way, campers can develop their own theology and practice through interaction and experimentation.

Along these lines, the education that takes place when one is having fun is learning as being, experiencing freedom of self, expression and exploration. "Fun" can be described as fully engaged, free, living of present experience, whereas formal Jewish education could be seen as *learning about or preparing for* the actual experience of living. Some proponents of camp as a totally different way of being and learning reject the current emphasis in education on measuring outcomes. They argue that this emphasis is contaminating and that children learn when they are engaged in solving problems in community and direct experiential learning. In light of this framing, might a potential goal of Jewish learning at camp be simply the unencumbered direct experience of the world and others? Could this be considered Jewish learning, if the experiences take place in a context of Jewish people and a community informed by Jewish values and rhythms?

At the crux of all of these models of school/camp is really a question of what Jewish education is for. As Jewish educators, are we trying to create more learned and practicing Jews (who perhaps know and practice the way we do)? Are we teaching Judaism in service of a better and enriched life for our students? Are we hoping our students will become creative contributors to our Jewish heritage, even if that contribution leads to Judaism looking different than it does now? If we might want some combination of all of the above, which goals are best met by school, and which by camp? Understanding our ultimate goals, not to mention those of our students, can help us answer the question of what summer is for, and then we will be able to promote or design the kind of Jewish learning that might take place during the summer break in line with those goals.

RESHET ROUNDUP

DEBRA SHAFFER SEEMAN

Prizmah's Network Weaver

When JCCs and Jewish day schools around North America received over 150 telephone threats this past spring, Prizmah's response was immediate and comprehensive. Prizmah operated on three different levels to galvanize the power of the network: serving schools in need with effective support; connecting school leaders to one another for guidance, shared resources and lessons learned; and partnering with agencies and organizations outside of Prizmah to ensure the highest level of advice for Jewish day schools.

Support

Real-time responsiveness was the defining factor in Prizmah's approach to the threats. In dozens of one-on-one conversations with school leaders, Prizmah team members heard a number of consistent questions:

- How are my colleagues handling this?
- What are security officials recommending?
- What are the best ways to communicate with our greater community about recent developments?
- How are we going to pay for additional security requests?

As these questions recurred from schools throughout the field, Prizmah created a new webpage to curate resources that can guide schools in bomb-threat preparedness, active shooter guidelines, and additional relevant security information. Prizmah staff consulted with school leaders on campus-specific security concerns.

Connection

Prizmah has a mission to foster meaningful connections among school leaders around the field. In this situation, Prizmah facilitated peer-to-peer groups for both heads of school and lay leaders. Safe spaces empowered school leaders to connect with one another and learn how they were each addressing their campus security needs. Takeaways from those conversations were documented and shared. We created secure folders in which school leaders shared their communications templates, press releases, advice for speaking with students during trying times, resources for parents, and ideas for enhancing security at minimal cost.

Partnerships

At Prizmah, we believe in doing what we do best and partnering with the rest. We brought in US and Israeli experts to advise schools on crisis communication plans, cyber security, accessing US federal funds, security protocols and more. These leading authorities gave webinar presentations to the day school field and worked behind the scenes with Prizmah team members to ensure smooth delivery of services to every school in need. The following agencies partnered with Prizmah to share guidance and support: Secure Community Network, an initiative of JFNA and Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, the Anti-Defamation League, the FBI and Department of Homeland Security, the Israeli Police Department and Department of Diaspora Affairs. As a result of all that the Prizmah team accomplished, other Jewish organizations have solicited Prizmah's guidance in setting up their own field support system on issues of security.

Reshet Prizmah

Weaving bonds of a network is a central means that Prizmah employs to strengthen Jewish day schools. In both smooth and difficult times, for confronting challenges and seizing opportunities, Reshet Prizmah enables schools to learn from each other, establish their own agenda, and leverage their collaboration in a field containing hundreds of schools, thousands of professionals and lay leaders, and hundreds of thousands of students. Want to take part? Go to prizmah.org/membership/networking to learn more and enroll.



CAMP AND
CAMPUS

Hands-on, Hearts-on Jewish Learning

KATE O'BRIEN

The Gift of Camp for Jewish Day Schools

"Knowledge is fostered by curiosity; wisdom is fostered by awe."

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who is Man?*



According to the Foundation for Jewish Camp's 2016 census, more than 80,000 children between first and twelfth grades attended 160 American Jewish overnight summer camps that year. Magic happens in the "bubble" that is Jewish summer camp. Campers' curiosity is stoked by the campfire, in bunks with young, lively and earnest role models, on adventurous excursions, and during Shabbat experiences. Lifelong friendships are forged. Campers who are intentionally guided through Jewish events and experiences determine freely which essential elements of Judaism they will incorporate into their living and learning, both during the summer and long after.

The camp experience in nature, removed from the everyday, fosters the curiosity and awe about which Heschel writes. But what to do when campers return to school, without the mountain or the lake? And what of educators who also have spent the summer as directors of education, specialists and top-level administrators at Jewish summer camp? This small group of day school staff has a unique capacity to invite students into their own learning and to bring some of camp's openness and experiential approach "off the mountain," taking the rich, creative, mind-opening and soul-sustaining essence of Jewish summer camp and sharing that energy with willing partners in local year-round Jewish programs in JCCs, synagogues, congregational schools and day schools. In so doing, camp has the potential to provide guidance and inspiration to students and fellow teachers alike.

The goal of all Jewish education is to cultivate holistic hands-on, hearts-on learning experiences for our children that support their impetus to explore Judaism and to create a lifelong relationship with Jewish religious and/or cultural traditions. We have done our job well if they mature into young adults who make informed, authentic Jewish choices. By design, Jewish camp and day school provide two very different but complementary structures to achieve this goal. The unique structure of Jewish summer camp prioritizes fun, experiential engagement and freedom from everyday responsibilities. Camp relies on an intensive 24/7 peer experience away from home guided by role models who may be only a few years older than campers. These counselors come with a particular kind of Jewish and secular wisdom that opens campers' eyes to a world of wonders in new ways.

Whereas camp is characterized by an intense, brief period of engagement, day school has all of the challenges and opportunities associated with a long engagement with students in their home environments. Students at Jewish day schools luxuriate in an abundance of time with teachers, peers and content in a context that regularly injects Jewish tradition and practice throughout the school day and the school year. Day schools have their own unique ways of building community, not only within grade levels, but also across the school through Jewish



holidays, Jewish life experiences and a focus on developing Hebrew as a common language.

Yet while the settings differ significantly, Jewish day schools and camps are not mutually exclusive. Ideally, they are supportive of one another and are able to present families with options that meet their needs for encouraging and sustaining their children's Jewish lives. On a basic level, both Jewish camps and day schools hope to inculcate a connection to and knowledge of Judaism in children. Both have a desire to build children's character using a Jewish lens and Jewish language. Both also try to strike a balance between keva (set times for tefillah, celebration of sacred moments, adherence to a schedule) and kavannah (intention or mindfulness, teachable moments, coaxing inspiration and action). These points of intersection have the power to crack open the doors of Jewish day schools to let in the light and warmth of Jewish camp.

The process of bringing camp off the mountain means identifying possibilities for transmission and transformation from camp to day school. It emphasizes the liberating educational practices of camp. Collaborating on this effort, Jewish camps and day schools can together provide worthwhile Jewish education that trusts in children's natural abilities to learn, feel and do new things alongside energetic and exciting role models who advance campers' and students' intellectual and social-emotional development. While many day schools invest in the affective elements of their programs, their primary purpose is content-driven, in both Judaics and general studies. Day schools are responsible for the ongoing educational lives of students. In addition, they are beholden to Common Core State Standards and the attendant high-stakes testing.

And yet this reality does not mandate a dry educational experience, nor is it at odds with the ethos of summer camp. Below are three recommendations for day school improvement based on the thoughts and experiences of professionals who occupy both realms of Jewish camp and day school: introducing or enhancing experiential learning, connecting day school and camp professionals, and creating near-peer opportunities for students' engagement with Israel.

Experiential Learning

The design of Jewish summer camp immerses all children in a world of experiential education that fosters discovery of self and subject in a community of peers. As defined here, experiential education is rooted in Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship in which an educator and learner (counselor and camper, teacher and student) encounter each other as whole human beings. They co-create an active experience of a subject

(such as tefillah, Torah or ropes course), reflect upon it and apply that learning to “real life.” Camp is expert at creating experiences that challenge, stimulate and engage children at their level and in their language among their peers. This does not mean dumbing down the curriculum or sacrificing rigor for fun. It means that Jewish education at camp is an organic part of campers’ waking lives—so organic that it is often slipped in while they are not looking.

Day school has great opportunities to make its learning more experiential by pushing activities beyond the classroom (kinetic events like field trips, taking advantage of nature, scavenger hunts and learning relays), connecting content to visual and creative arts, employing technology, and creating spaces for debate and writing. Essential to this project is hooking lessons to students’ prior and background knowledge. Equally important is connecting students with their peers for study and for fun. By engaging students’ senses and creating opportunities for play, students’ minds and bodies are opened to curiosity and wonder.

The key is making learning real by attuning ourselves to the lives and priorities of students and crafting units and lessons that reach them at that delicate point where ability meets challenge (Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development). Students want the answer to “So what? How does this affect my life?” From mathematics to Mishnah, day schools can answer this question effectively if open-minded teachers and administrators embrace experiential education not as another teaching tool, but as a way of being. The result is enlivened classrooms where students reflect upon and apply their learning to the world around them. This is how we create mensches. It is how we raise children beyond textbooks to become, in Heschel’s words, “text people.”

Connecting Educators

Rarely do day school teachers have the opportunity to learn *in situ* with their counterparts at a Jewish summer camp; likewise, few Jewish camp educators and leaders have had the chance to visit fellow teachers in their local day schools. However, some of the strongest levers for change are the day school teachers and leaders who straddle both worlds, working in both day school and camp. The benefits of this crossover experience for schools and students cannot be overstated.

Several of these people shared how significantly their own camp experiences as young people—including the direct impact of young counselors and other role models—influenced their decisions to become Jewish educators, in both settings. These educators, including teachers and administrators, related how deeply those experiences affected the type of educators they have become. These professionals have brought the best of their camp experiences to their day school lives and also have brought strengths of day school education (including content knowledge, deliberate planning and blended instruction) back up the mountain.

What would it look like if we created venues for ongoing learning among camp professionals and day school professionals? Perhaps this takes the form of a series of online seminars enhanced by an in-person gathering during a school vacation. Maybe it looks like Jewish summer camps inviting local day school staff to “shadow” the lead Jewish educator for a day or more. In return, camp educators would visit the same day schools to experience a “day in the life.” It could even be an online *hevruta* in which partners or small groups study a subject of mutual interest and discuss application to their respective settings, such as character education/*mussar*. The effect could be powerful: increased knowledge, respect and open exchange among professionals who have a tremendous impact on the Jewish future.

Engaging with Israel

Day school and Jewish camps share the critical mission of inspiring young people to live involved, meaningful lives. At the same time, both experience difficulties getting “off campus” to put learning into action. This is perhaps most evident in our teaching and learning about Israel. One of the great benefits of Jewish summer camp is the presence of Israeli *shlichim*. In general, campers benefit enormously from being under the care of young, relatable staff who are deeply invested in their learning and their enjoyment every day. Simply by virtue of being somewhat exotic, of having access to a valuable language and culture, and of being this kind of young, hip staff member, the *shlichim* have an enviable status in the eyes of most campers. As such, they make Israel come alive for children through music, discussions, games and more in a way that communicates joy and possibility. Campers are inspired to learn a bit of Hebrew and to try to understand a place that can seem distant and hard to understand.

One of the differentiating strength of day schools, in turn, is their ability to teach Hebrew intensively. For many campers, the two to seven weeks they spend at Jewish summer camp is their only experience of and only connection to Jewish life. For the majority of these families, Hebrew is not a priority. Even recognizing the various degrees to which Jewish camps embrace some Hebrew, and those that are attempting Hebrew immersion, camps by and large are not teaching Hebrew mastery. In contrast, part and parcel of most day schools’ mission is to graduate literate Jews who can navigate the many Jewish worlds available to them. What is lacking is that near-peer relationship with young Israelis that excites campers to learn about Hebrew and about Israel.

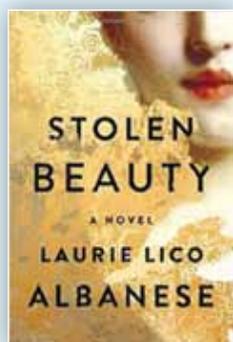
One possibility is bringing those *shlichim* off the mountain to work with as many age groups as possible in the day schools. Day schools and camps might identify collaborative opportunities for employing *shlichim*, or even using *bnot sheirut* who come to the US for their national service (e.g., working two months at camp, then working 10 months in day school). For example, several Jewish day schools in the Greater Toronto Area currently work with a cohort of 24 *shinshinim* (Israelis on a volunteer gap year) who spend the whole year in the day and supplementary schools and the summers at camps. Educators in these schools marvel at how much the children love working with the Israelis and how effectively the *shinshinim* are making Israel come alive for students, teachers, staff and families.

Another approach would be for day schools to take advantage of the camp counselors or older teens in their schools or communities who would be eager to work with younger children to excite them about Hebrew and Israel in similar ways. Such linkage between camp and day school would benefit day schools routinely challenged to find fluent Hebrew speakers. It also would stimulate a new kind of Israel education for students seeking real-world ties to connect them to this critical piece of their Jewish lives.

When firing on all cylinders with knowledge and wisdom, camps foster curiosity and awe in their camp leaders, staff and campers. The rarefied world of Jewish summer camp contains a kind of captivating energy that schools may often find elusive. While Jewish camps and day schools share some modalities, aims and goals, camps have much to offer day schools, particularly in terms of how they create points of entry to learning and how they make Jewish culture and wisdom fun and enduring. This hands-on, hearts-on legacy of camp can enrich day schools’ visions for their future and the future of their students. The Foundation for Jewish Camp is continuing to explore creative opportunities to bring camp off the mountain and to design educational environments for campers and education professionals that allow as many people as possible to access the magic of Jewish summer camp.

ON MY NIGHTSTAND

BRIEF REVIEWS OF BOOKS THAT PRIZMAH STAFF ARE READING



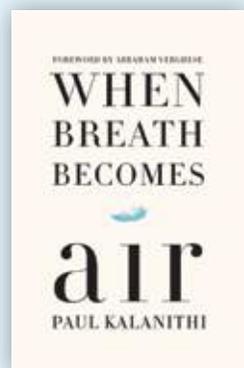
Stolen Beauty: A Novel by Laurie Lico Albanese

Stolen Beauty is a book about the life of Adele-Block Bauer and her niece Maria Altmann. It takes place in the wealthy world of early 20th century Vienna and the rapidly darkening years of the 1930s. You may have heard or seen *Woman in Gold*, the movie starring Helen Mirren as Maria, who sues the Austrian government for the return of her aunt's magnificent painting by Gustav Klimt,

stolen by the Nazis. This book fleshes out the story with fictional accounts of Adele's and Maria's lives.

I saw the movie, then the painting of Adele-Block Bauer on display at the Neue Galerie in New York City as part of the largest Klimt collection in the US. It is dazzling, so when I heard about *Stolen Beauty*, I was anxious to read all about the model and her painter. I was not disappointed. The combination of the art history of the period, a description of the avant garde of Vienna and the Nazi looting of art owned by Jewish citizens makes this a fascinating read. If you pick up this book, don't forget to read the author's notes about her own family's history.

Helen London

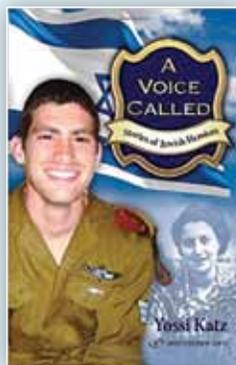


When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi

This book is the memoir of a neurosurgeon who is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Dr. Paul Kalanithi gives his readers a deep look into the doctor-patient relationship. At the height of his career he was directing his patients' care, and the next moment he was the patient looking towards his own doctor for guidance. His book touches on how to live and how to die. When someone looks

towards you for advice, do you give them all your attention? Do you choose your words carefully? These are some of the important lessons that Dr. Kalanithi tries to imbue. *When Breath Becomes Air* is a must read for fans of Dr. Atul Gawande's books.

Odell Epstein



A Voice Called: Stories of Jewish Heroism by Yossi Katz

This is a book that exudes inspiration on every page and with every reading. I first got this book last year when I saw Michael Levin's face on the cover looking at me in the local Jewish bookstore. Michael was an American-born volunteer in the Israel Defense Forces, a paratrooper who died in battle during the Second Lebanon War.

Michael's sister was one of my USY staffers, and I quickly bought the book. Each chapter provides a full story of a Jewish hero; you can read it cover to cover or search for a particular hero's story. I encourage everyone to read the story of Ilan Ramon, and especially of Michael, and to share them with others. On many Shabbat afternoons, this book has given me so much more than inspiration.

Yoni Yares



100 Jewish Things to Do Before You Die by Barbara Sheklin Davis

I had the pleasure of reading this book over my Passover vacation. Passover was my grandmother's holiday, making sure we all gathered together to enjoy food and each other and most importantly to retell the story of our ancestors. This book reminded me of how important it is to continue living our heritage and sharing lessons with our family.

While I enjoyed reading each suggestion, what I enjoyed the most were the items on the list that encouraged people to participate in activities within a community. Whether it is working out at a JCC, joining a Jewish organization or participating in an Israel trip, each one reminded me of how much I treasure being a part of our Jewish community.

Reading this book also reminded me of the moments I have shared with my family, those I have tried out on my own and some I want to pursue in the future. As Dr. Davis states in the foreword, "This is not a how-to manual," but for me it is a complete guide to enhance my life as well as my family's. This book provides a wonderful opportunity to turn a page, try something new and connect more deeply to Judaism.

Robin Feldman

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Center for Jewish Day Schools

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