

קיץ תשע"ה
SUMMER 2015

הידיון

HAYIDION

RAVSAK



EXCELLENCE

HaYidion is a publication of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network. It is published quarterly for distribution to RAVSAK member schools, associate members, and other Jewish and general education organizations. No articles may be reproduced or distributed without express written permission of RAVSAK. All rights reserved. Subscriptions are \$36/year.

Executive Editor: Dr. Barbara Davis

Editor: Elliott Rabin, PhD

Design: BusyBee GD

EDITORIAL BOARD

Rabbi Marc Baker, Gann Academy, Waltham, MA

Beth Fine, Jewish Day School of Metropolitan Seattle, Bellevue, WA

Jerry Isaak-Shapiro, Agnon School, Beachwood, OH

Dr. Robin Judd, Columbus Jewish Day School, New Albany, OH

Brian King, Milwaukee Jewish Day School, Milwaukee, WI

Rabbi Ari Leubitz, Oakland Jewish Day School, Oakland, CA

Dr. Jonathan Levy, Tanenbaum CHAT Kimmel Centre, Vaughan, ON

Dr. Andrea Lieber, Silver Academy, Harrisburg, PA

Rabbi Harry Pell, Schechter Westchester, Hartsdale, NY

Eric Petersiel, Leo Baeck Day School, Toronto, ON

Nancy Pryzant Picus, Schlenker School, Houston, TX

Dr. Lila Pinto, Colegio Hebreo Maguen David, Cuajimalpa, MX

Sarah Porten, Austin Jewish Academy, Austin, TX

Rabbi Yehuda Potok, Striar Hebrew Academy, Sharon, MA

Tali Rosenblatt-Cohen, Beit Rabban, New York, NY

Dr. Yoni Schwab, Shefa School, New York, NY

Dr. Sarah Shulkind, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

Amy Wasser, Hillel Academy, Tampa, FL

ADVISORY PANEL

Sandee Brawarsky, Dr. Jeremy Dauber, Rabbi Eddie Harwitz, Aron Hirt-Manheimer, Mark Joffe, Margot Lurie, Alana Newhouse, Dr. Renee Rubin Ross, Daniel Septimus, Dr. Jonathan Woocher

RAVSAK BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rebekah Farber (Chair), Uri Benhamron, Ann Bennett, Lisa Breslau, Dr. N. Shira Brown, Dr. Barbara Davis, Cassandra Gottlieb, Matt Heilicher, Dr. Marc N. Kramer, Zipora Schorr, Joseph Steiner, Arnee Winshall (founding chair), Lesley Zafran

ADVERTISING INFORMATION

Please contact Marla Rottenstreich at marla@ravsak.org or by phone at 646-450-7280.

RAVSAK

254 West 54th Street, 11th floor, New York, NY 10019 • 212-665-1320 • fax: 212-665-1321 • info@ravsak.org • ravsak.org

The views expressed in this journal do not necessarily reflect the positions of RAVSAK.

RAVSAK would like to thank our associate members:



DEFINING EXCELLENCE

TAKING CONTROL:
DEFINING ACADEMIC
EXCELLENCE

12

Declaring excellence as a goal is easy; defining what a school means by it, and establishing steps to achieve it, is hard. Here is the path one school took in its quest for excellence.



Dr. Barbara Gereboff is the head of school at Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School in Foster City, California.
bgereboff@wornickjds.org

SIGNIFICANCE,
NOT JUST EXCELLENCE

15

In the author's view, academic excellence is a given but not a sufficient goal for Jewish schools.



Rabbi Lee Buckman is the head of school at TanenbaumCHAT in Toronto, Canada.
lbuckman@tanenbaumchat.org

WHEN WE STRIVE
FOR EXCELLENCE,
WHAT DO WE LOSE?

17

The relentless, explicit pursuit of excellence can have an impact that is counterproductive, even harmful, on students, teachers and school culture.



Dr. Rona Novick is the dean of the Azrieli Graduate of Jewish Education and Administration, co-educational director of Hidden Sparks and a child psychologist whose work with children, educators, schools and parents

often centers around the promotion of resilience.
rnovick1@yu.edu

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE
JEWISH PEOPLE: PAST,
PRESENT AND FUTURE

20

Interview with Gidi Grinstein

The founder of Israel's Reut Institute and author of *Flexigidity* answers questions about the characteristics of Jewish society throughout history.



Gidi Grinstein is the author of *Flexigidity* and founder of the Reut Institute, "an innovative policy and strategy group designed to identify the gaps in current policy and strategy in Israel and the Jewish world, and

work to build and implement new visions." This interview is published in partnership with the Jewish Book Council.

SCALING UP
EXCELLENCE IN
JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

21

The authors turn to a popular guide on organizational excellence to draw lessons that resonate with values from Jewish tradition.



Samantha Pack is the English department and Journalism chair and **Rabbi Y. Boruch Sufrin** is head of school at Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy in Los Angeles. spack@hillelhebrew.org and rabbisufrin@hillelhebrew.org.

RAVSAK
NEWS & PROGRAMS

SMALL SCHOOL
LEADERS
CONVENE FOR
BIG INSIGHTS

22

CONFERENCE
RECAP

27

LOCAL AND REGIONAL
JEWISH DAY SCHOOL
LEADERS ATTEND
NATIONAL CONFERENCE

29

HEAD OF SCHOOL
PROFESSIONAL
EXCELLENCE PROJECT:
A LOOK BACK, A PEEK
AHEAD

31

MOOT BEIT DIN 2015

40

TRISCHOOL SHABBATON

48

SULAM 2.0: THE JEWISH
LENS ON BOARD
LEADERSHIP

51

SULAM ALUMNI
SHABBATON

61

HEBREW POETRY
CONTEST WINNERS

68

COLUMNS

FROM THE EDITOR

6

Surprising Insights into Excellence



Dr. Barbara Davis is the secretary of RAVSAK's Board of Directors, executive editor of **HAYIDION** and principal emerita at the Syracuse Hebrew Day School in Dewitt, New York. bdavis74@twcny.rr.com

FROM THE BOARD

8

Excellent Leadership as Co-leadership



Rebekah Farber is the chair of RAVSAK's Board of Directors.

DEAR COOKI

9

Recognizing Teacher Excellence



Cooki Levy is the director of RAVSAK's Head of School Professional Excellence Project (PEP). cooki@ravsak.org

GOOD & WELFARE: NEWS FROM RAVSAK SCHOOLS

11

KEEPING THE VISION

32

Pursuing the Excellence That Matters Most

A trip to a conference in Israel inspires thoughts about the unique value and purposes of Jewish day schools in the Diaspora.



Dr. Jonathan Woocher is president of Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, which supports efforts to connect Jews and others to Jewish wisdom and sensibilities to help them live better lives and shape a better world. Jon@lippmankanfer.org

THE QUALITIES OF EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

24

Two directors of leadership programs run by the Wexner Foundation propose qualities to look for during recruitment and cultivate during employment.



Or Mars is the director of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship/Davidson Scholars Program, The Wexner Foundation. omars@wexner.net

Rabbi Jay Henry Moses is the director of the Wexner Heritage Program, The Wexner Foundation. jmoses@wexner.net

The Wexner Foundation focuses on the development of Jewish professional and volunteer leaders in North America and public leaders in Israel. www.wexnerfoundation.org

THE NEW EXCELLENCE THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING

28

Our notion of excellent teaching has largely shifted from a focus on the average to the individual. In the new paradigm, educational technology plays a growing role.



Eli Kannal is the chief educational technology officer at the AVI CHAI Foundation. ekannal@avichai.org.il

CREATING CULTURES OF EXCELLENCE

30

Questions for Seth Cohen

Learn how one of the leading Jewish foundations conceives of excellence and aims to implement it in its funding choices and work with recipients.



Seth Cohen is the director of network initiatives at the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation (www.schusterman.org), a global organization that seeks to ignite the passion and unleash the power in young people to create positive change in the Jewish community and beyond. scohen@schusterman.org

EXCELLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS

How do school leaders define and pursue excellence in their schools? Read about a range of examples.

How to Define and Measure Outstanding Teaching

34

Rabbi Mitchel Malkus, Head of School, Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, Rockville, MD

When Academic Excellence Isn't Enough

35

Jane Martin, Director of Marketing and Communications, Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy, Overland Park, Kansas

Seeking Excellence: Partnering with Universities

36

Lynn Raviv, Director of Development, NE Miles Jewish Day School, Birmingham, AL

The Shalom Room

37

Mary Grace Lentz, Kindergarten Teacher and Student Support Specialist, Seattle Jewish Community School

Broadcasting Excellence

38

Alan Rusonik, Head of School, Jewish Academy of Orlando

Student Leadership and Advocacy for Israel

39

Dr. Laurence Kutler, Head of School, Herzliyah, Montreal

PURSUING EXCELLENCE

BUILDING SCHOOLWIDE INNOVATION: TWO CRITICAL PLANES 42

A keynote speaker at the recent day school conference sees school excellence in a systemic approach to innovation.



Grant Lichtman (www.grantlichtman.com), a keynote speaker for the recent North American Jewish Day School Conference, is the author of *#EdJourney: A Roadmap to the Future of Education* and *The Falconer: What We Wish We Had Learned in School*.

grantlichtman1@gmail.com

EXCELLENT QUESTIONS FOR EXCELLENT SCHOOLS 46

Schools can create a dynamic culture of growth through the continuous employment of research and evaluation.



Amy L. Sales PhD is associate director and senior research scientist at the Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. sales@brandeis.edu

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EXCELLENCE: ENRICHMENT EDUCATION FOR ALL 48

The perspective of gifted programming inspired an ambitious, large-scale initiative to foster fun, creative, in-depth learning.



Sharon Marson is the schoolwide enrichment coordinator at SAR Academy in the Bronx, New York. marsos@saracademy.org

SEVEN LESSONS IN PURSUIT OF BOARD EXCELLENCE 52

Excellence in a day school board requires creating an atmosphere of rewarding engagement based in best practices.



Orlee R. Turtitz is an executive coach, board governance consultant and program director for RAVSAK's Sulam 2.0 program. orlee@ravsak.org

WHY FIX WHAT AIN'T BROKE? STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE IN HEBREW EDUCATION 56

What does an excellent Hebrew program accomplish? A school that had already achieved a high standard decided to reassess its goals and curriculum.



Dr. Tal Grinfas-David is principal of the elementary school at the Epstein School in Atlanta. Tal.David@epsteintlanta.org

Idit BenDavid is Hebrew and Jewish studies director of curriculum in the elementary school. Idit.BenDavid@epsteintlanta.org

Liat Kadosh is Hebrew director of curriculum in the middle school. Liat.Kadosh@epsteintlanta.org

CULTIVATING PEDAGOGIC EXCELLENCE IN TEACHERS 59

The writers, from the New Jewish Teacher Project, describe the conditions that foster excellence among novice and veteran teachers alike.



Amy Golubtchik Ament is associate director, **Yael Adler Balley** is communications director, **Nina Bruder** is director, and **Fayge Safran** is senior program director at JNTP, the Jewish New Teacher Project of the New Teacher Center. ament@newteachercenter.org yballey@newteachercenter.org nbruder@newteachercenter.org fsafran@newteachercenter.org

BADGES OF EXCELLENCE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 62

A badging program offers one model for online professional development that is ongoing, personalized and job-embedded.



Sarah Blattner is the lead badger at TAMRITZ. sarah@tamritz.org, [@tamritzlearning](https://twitter.com/tamritzlearning)

Dr. Samuel Abramovich is an assistant professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University at Buffalo SUNY. samuelab@buffalo.edu, [@samabramovlch](https://twitter.com/samabramovlch)

TAKING CREATIVITY SERIOUSLY 64

This article demonstrates what a school might look like that implements a vision of creativity with educational rigor.



Tikvah Wiener is chief academic officer at Magen David Yeshivah High School in Brooklyn and is co-founder of the I.D.E.A. Schools Network, which helps educators implement project-based learning (PBL) and educational innovation.

tikvah.wiener@gmail.com, [@TikvahWiener](https://twitter.com/TikvahWiener)



BARBARA DAVIS

SURPRISING INSIGHTS INTO EXCELLENCE

The best companies, like Google, have as their primary goal “strong, numerous, rewarding personal relationships.”

What does excellence have to do with pornography? Only that, as Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said, we know it when we see it.

I live in Syracuse, New York. We are mostly known for the prodigious amounts of snow that fall each year, averaging 120 inches and lasting from December through March, heaped up in very large graying mounds. We are not proud of our snow; we merely coexist with it. What we are proud of is our supermarket, Wegman’s. This is what we show off to our visitors; this is what we take them to see. While this certainly has a pathetic side to it, there is also a positive side: Wegman’s is excellent. *Consumer Reports* recently rated it the #1 supermarket in the country in every category. Frigid, freezing Syracuse recognizes and is proud of Wegman’s, because of its excellence.

All of us promise “excellence” in our schools, but really what we generally offer is “extremely good.” This is not necessarily a bad thing. Excellence does not mean perfection and there is no way, as schools of inclusion, that we can assure “excellence.” We can set it as a goal, we can strive for it, but we cannot guarantee its achievement without sacrificing other values which we hold equally dear. Even the Harvards and Yales of the world can only have limited success in the achievement of excellence, despite their ability to select “the best and the brightest” and the “cream of the crop.” Excellence is an attitude, an essence, a beacon to guide us.

So what kind of “excellence” is desirable and achievable in a Jewish community day school in the 21st century? What characterizes an institution that is at the top of the heap and is recognized by others as outstanding? “The lessons of the ordinary are everywhere,” wrote Warren G. Bennis, a scholar

of leadership, but “truly profound and original insights are to be found by studying the truly exemplary.” An examination of the 2015 issue of *Fortune* magazine’s “The 100 Best Companies to Work For” provides some interesting data. Excellence, according to *Fortune*, is “personal, not perk-able. It’s relationship-based, not transaction-based.” The best companies, like Google, have as their primary goal “strong, numerous, rewarding personal relationships.” Surprised? So was I. The four elements of culture that *Fortune* identifies as essential to excellence are the following:

- **Mission:** pursue a larger purpose and make sure that no one forgets it.
- **Colleagues:** get the best people in order to create a self-reinforcing cycle because the best people want to go where the best people are.
- **Trust:** show people that you think they are trustworthy and they’ll generally prove you right.
- **Caring:** value your employees; don’t just say it—show it.

Think about how we can apply these lessons to our schools. Clearly, we know that our mission is larger than just the 3 Rs and STEM; are we communicating this to our students, our parents, our community? How can we get the best people on our staffs, with our limited resources? What else can we offer to make our schools the best places to work? Google uses food; would this work for us? Do we trust our staffs to do their best, most creative work or do we squelch their enthusiasm with too many administrative demands and the expectation of conformity? Do we really care about our teachers, our students, our parents, our donors and our alumni? Do we just pay lip service to our love or do we actually, on a daily basis, week in and week out, show our appreciation, our support and our concern for them and their lives?

Achieving excellence is no easy task. Excellence demands that we surpass ordinary standards. It takes hard work and sustained effort to achieve superiority, but as coach Pat Riley wrote, “Excellence is the gradual result of always trying to do better.” We hope you will find inspiration, encouragement and insights in this issue of HAYIDION that will help you in your own ongoing quest for excellence.

LOOKING FOR MORE STIMULATING WAYS TO TEACH YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT ISRAEL?

Step Up For Israel offers **THREE** great programs for Middle and High School Students.



STEP UP FOR ISRAEL

A 10-Class Middle & High School Curriculum. Educate and inspire your students to form a relationship with Israel and to independently examine some of the state's fundamental issues.

ISRAEL INSIDE U

A seven-part informal education program for 5th Grade and Up. Build your students' character while strengthening their connection to Israel.

BENEATH THE HELMET

An inspiring coming-of-age story about five Israeli soldiers. Includes the new 5-part "Basic Training" program designed to help students explore a variety of topics.

"Israel education for the YouTube Generation"

Boost Your Israel Education: Teens.JerusalemU.org

or contact: Hadara@JerusalemU.org





REBEKAH FARBER

EXCELLENT LEADERSHIP AS CO-LEADERSHIP

Rather than placing the burden of leadership all on one person's shoulders, it often makes more sense to share the responsibility and capitalize on the strengths and passions of different leaders.

RAVSAK is an organization driven by a commitment to excellence. That commitment begins and ends with service to Jewish day schools: we dedicate ourselves to providing the guidance, support and programs needed to help our schools find their own paths toward excellence. We firmly believe that Jewish day schools embody the best in the Jewish community: the best education, the best values, the best embodiment of *k'lal Yisrael*, *talmud Torah*, and *tikkun olam*. **RAVSAK** takes its obligation not only to support the field, but also to offer leadership, quite seriously.

That is why we see our new model of a shared executive directorship as an exciting opportunity for a fresh discussion of leadership in Jewish education. Like many day schools, **RAVSAK** started small—originally with one full-time employee, Dr. Marc Kramer, working with schools whose number could be counted on two people's hands. As **RAVSAK** experienced growth in membership during the 2000s, the leadership challenges grew as well.

As we all know, executive leadership has many components, and no one person can do them all well, or do them all, period. At the most basic level, there are two equally important, equally demanding roles for a day school CEO: chief executive officer and chief educational officer. Rather than placing the burden all on one person's shoulders, it often makes more sense to share the responsibility and capitalize on the strengths and passions of different leaders. Thus, Dr. Idana Goldberg was brought on board to help shoulder the leadership load. Marc and Idana have been effective and collegial partners for several years now, and our creation of a new leadership model of co-executive directors formalizes their partnership and enables them to serve **RAVSAK** and the field in much more powerful ways.

The thinking behind our new leadership model arose from our internal brainstorming, in response to the question: How can we position **RAVSAK** to be more field-facing? How can we free up our resources to know our schools even better, work with school leaders even more than we have, to be able to achieve our mission more fully? Our new model of co-leadership will do just that, enabling **RAVSAK** to be more nimble in its service to the field. It reflects our commitment to creativity and generative thinking: the same creativity we seek to foster in the field we strive to model at home, inside our organization.

For Marc and Idana, this new arrangement reflects a series of transitions that have been brewing for years. As a longtime executive, Marc is excited at this stage in his career to refocus on his passion for Jewish education, vision, and direct service to schools. For Idana, this transition empowers her to expand upon her portfolio of outstanding strategic leadership work that she has already accomplished with the board, communications and advancement. This partnership is a win-win for both of them and especially for **RAVSAK**.

Both Marc and Idana continue to see themselves as part of an extraordinary team of professionals dedicated to service of Jewish day schools. I know that I speak on behalf of the entire **RAVSAK** Board in expressing our enthusiasm for this new phase in our collaboration. *Aleh ve-hatzlach*—success and blessings!



COOKI LEVY

RECOGNIZING TEACHER EXCELLENCE

DEAR COOKI accepts questions from all school stakeholders. To submit a question, write to hayidion@ravsak.org, with “Dear Cooki” in the subject line.

In my school, as I am sure is the case in many (all?) others, a small number of teachers stand out from the group as a whole. They are not only outstanding in the classroom, but they are committed totally to the well-being of their students and to the mission of the school. They put in more time, energy and effort than the others; they are truly excellent staff members. But rarely do they receive the recognition they deserve. How can they be acknowledged in a tangible way for their excellence without compromising staff cohesion or morale?

I am sure you know how fortunate you are to have such outstanding members of your staff; most likely they are not looking for attention or recognition. But that does not mean they should not receive it, or that they would not appreciate it. But as you correctly state, as head of school you must consider seriously the unintended consequences of singling out individuals. In my community many years ago, the central agency decided to devote a year to “Teachers of Excellence,” asking each school to submit names and biographies of two outstanding staff members for inclusion in an album to be published and distributed. The response from teachers was immediate and completely negative; they were outraged—and the project was dropped. Were the 10% or so of outstanding teachers equally negative, or were they responding to peer pressure? It is hard to know. On the other hand, the Grinspoon Foundation offers a yearly award in many communities for excellence in Jewish education, and, to the best of my knowledge, any initial objections to this attempt to identify excellent teachers have disappeared.

The most tangible reward for excellent performance is financial, and the subject of merit pay (salary commensurate with perceived performance) is often raised. But for most schools, this is not a viable option. Either salaries are determined by a union or government standard, or schools cannot budget increased salaries, or the concept is too unacceptable and fraught with negative consequences. On what basis will the decision regarding salary be made? Will favoritism play a part? What impact will this have on staff morale? On staff teamwork?

Let us, then, consider other possibilities. Outstanding teachers are lifelong learners, always seeking to improve their skills and try new strategies. For them, the opportunity to attend national conferences will be a gift. Plan to send two staff members to the North American Jewish Day School Conference, or to ASCD, or other prestigious meetings. Similarly, recommending them to offer workshops for your staff or your parent body, or at your

community’s professional development day will provide an opportunity to acknowledge their excellence and inspire others. Encourage staff members to write for your school’s newsletter or submit articles to the local Jewish newspaper. Yes, these are all additional tasks for these hard-working teachers, but ones they likely will welcome and appreciate.

Offer leadership opportunities. Allow excellent staff members to take charge of major school programs or projects. Be clear with them as to goals, budgetary constraints, and time limits, and then stand aside and let them lead. Not only will they feel empowered, but you will be training your leaders of the future.

Seek out their opinions. We all like to feel that others value what we think. These teachers are your classroom experts; consult with them regarding curricular issues, textbooks and the grouping of students for the next year. Use their expertise, and let them know how valuable their contributions to the school’s decision-making are.

Never underestimate the value to teachers of a sincere and timely letter of thanks for a special activity, or a “beyond the call of duty” outreach, or the sensitive handling of a very difficult situation, or the like. A personal note, rather than an email, tells teachers that you took the time to reach out. They appreciate knowing that you noticed and like having such letters in their file.

As head of school, you must balance the recognition of outstanding service with the imperative to promote teamwork and staff cohesion. You must also be sensitive to your individual staff members. Some genuinely do not like to be singled out in front of the group; try to gauge teachers’ feelings about this. Others are proud to be publically acknowledged, and your task is to know when and how to do this so that the staff shares your pride, rather than resents it. Ultimately, and perhaps most importantly, your message to staff should be that the “excellence club” is not an exclusive one, and that all teachers are urged to become part of it.



Better together.

Some things just work better together. FACTS + RenWeb, leaders in payment processing and school management, have come together to redefine how private and faith-based schools manage academic and financial information. Now, for the first time, you can manage the entire student life cycle – from application, to enrollment, payments, and re-enrollment easily and efficiently.

Experience the FACTS + RenWeb difference. Learn more at FACTSmgt.com/RenWeb.



GOOD & WELFARE

The Jewish Primary Day School in Washington, DC, has received two gifts totaling \$20 million, enabling the school to open a middle school.

Bruchim haba'im to the newest RAVSAK members: **Hillel Academy** in Dayton, Ohio, and **Hebrew Day School of Ann Arbor**, Michigan.

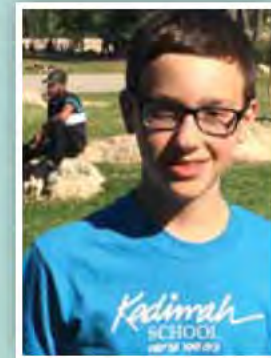


Tfiloh Dahan Community Day School in Baltimore is now a Maryland Green School, certified by the Maryland Association of Environmental and Outdoor Education.

Mazel tov to incoming heads of school: Dan Finkel, **Gesher Jewish Day School**, Fairfax, Virginia; Beth Cohen, **Freidel Academy**, Omaha, Nebraska; Sarah White, **Alpert Family Aleph Bet Day School**, Annapolis, Maryland; Amy Gold, **Cohen Hillel Academy**, Marblehead, Massachusetts; Dan Ceasar, **Temple Beth Shalom Schools**, Sarasota, Florida; Michal Morris-Kamil, **Heritage Academy**, Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

Rinat Levy-Cohen, middle school teacher at **The Abraham Joshua Heschel School** in New York City, is one of the 2015 recipients of The Jewish Education Project Young Pioneers Award.

Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland, announces the appointment of Dr. Marc Lindner as high school principal and associate head of school.



Eighth-grader Jordan Richheimer of the **Kadimah School of Buffalo** won first place nationwide among middle-school students in the 2015 Better 2 Write competition, for his essay "Mr. Cohen" about befriending an elderly neighbor with dementia. The contest is part of the Better Together intergenerational grant program, designed to advance educational experiences by encouraging student interactions with seniors in the community.

Rabbi Noam Silverman has been named the new head of the **Abraham Joshua Heschel High School** in New York City.

Thirteen students from the **Milken Community School** in Los Angeles recently performed at Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center. They traveled to New York City with the Los Angeles chapter of HaZamir, the international Jewish high school choir. They joined students from HaZamir chapters from all over the United States and Israel for the annual HaZamir Gala Festival. Kelly Shepard, department chair of the performing arts, had the honor of conducting the 350-member choir in L'Dor Vador by Cantor Gerald Cohen. It was the world premiere of the new work that was commissioned by the Cantors Assembly for HaZamir.



Dr. Marc N. Kramer, co-executive director of RAVSAK, will be awarded the Benjamin Shevach Award for distinguished achievement in Jewish educational leadership by Hebrew College at their 90th commencement exercises.

BARBARA
GEREBOFF

TAKING CONTROL

DEFINING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

When I began my work at my school, I was charged with assuring academic excellence. My first reaction was, “Sure, that’s what I’m all about.” My next thought was, “What exactly is academic excellence? Is it about ‘best practices,’ or is it code for grades and test scores?” Is my definition the same as that of the teachers, the staff and the families who make up my school? The term “academic excellence” is ubiquitous, yet it is used in so many different ways that it can be meaningless. It can also be dangerous if used to evaluate a school or an educator when the meaning is confused. As we started to define the term for our school, we understood that academic excellence is a term that needs to be defined and implemented locally. Any school can replicate the process we used, and the outcomes will likely vary.



Google “academic excellence” and a long list of universities with “centers for academic excellence” pop up. If you dig deeper, academic excellence centers are places for underperforming students, or they are particular academic disciplinary centers like a writing center, or they are leadership development programs. If you refine your search and add academic excellence in Jewish education, you’ll find day schools, like mine, claiming to support academic excellence. But here too, there are many different understandings of what academic excellence is and how to achieve it.

The literature about organizational excellence in general, and academic excellence in particular, is equally daunting with conflicting visions. But here one can find a sense that excellence is far more than a particular program or center. A seminal work in the business world, Peters and Waterman’s *In Search of Excellence*, looks at every aspect of an organization and posits eight core principles of excellent organizations. They claim that organizations with high productivity and a vibrant, loyal workforce are differentiated along these eight principles. Ron Berger’s *An Ethic of Excellence* similarly thinks about excellence in terms of the school culture—teaching of excellence and work of excellence.

When we began the work of defining academic excellence for our setting, our leadership group began by reading about and discussing different meanings of the term. At that point, we had decided that academic excellence had to be systemic. Next we convened focus groups of parents, teachers and community supporters to establish clarity around the concept of academic excellence. Defining the term academic excellence became a central piece in our strategic planning retreat before the school year commenced.

Our definition was that an academically excellent learning environment is one signified by engaged learning and deep reflection.

It is driven by 21st century skills and honors student agency. Once we had established what we understood academic excellence to mean, we created teacher in-service components so that everyone would have shared language around this concept. The clarity of the concept meant that staffing decisions too were based on potential and current staff members’ understanding of the established definition. As the years have progressed, we frequently communicate to our different stakeholders about various outcomes that we consider exemplars of excellence.

We ultimately based our understanding on current and compelling education research that made sense for our community. Our curriculum decisions have remained rooted in current research. Among the thought leaders who have inspired us are Tony Wagner (*The Global Achievement Gap*), Carol Dweck (*Mindset*), Ron Berger (*An Ethic of Excellence*), David Kelley (IDEO) and Alan November (*Who Owns the Learning?*). Our entire staff and some board members and parents have read the work of these thinkers, and some of us follow them online to consider their latest insights.

When we convened the focus groups, our intent was both to understand how different constituencies thought about the education at our school and to hear their definitions of academic excellence. We held only three focus groups, and they were critical to the success of our work. We gave the groups the chance to talk about what they thought was already “excellent” at the school and what they thought wasn’t. We asked them for examples of what they thought academic excellence should look like at our school. While all voices were heard, not all perspectives found their way into our final understanding of academic excellence. But the information that we gleaned even from those who may have held outlier positions became valuable in thinking about how to “message” what we ultimately understood excellence to look like to our stakeholders.

VISIONS OF EXCELLENCE

Sarah Lefton, Founder and Director, G-dcast:

Rabbi Tarfon would say, It is not upon you to finish the work, but you are not free to abandon it. (Pirkei Avot 2:16)

When I was 17, I had a personal teaching highlight. I helped my little sister prepare to try out as a songleader for our Temple Youth Group. I thought a rocking singalong version of this text from Pirkei Avot would be great. The funny thing? I didn't know the song myself...nor did I play guitar! But I tracked down the sheet music—so that I could teach her—so that she could teach a roomful of kids and judges. Of course she dazzled everyone and went on to an amazing run as a celebrated NFTY songleader. And I have never forgotten the song—it literally keeps me going on hard days when it feels like nothing's getting done.

I share this little story because it encapsulates my thinking about excellence. As Rabbi Tarfon taught, we must engage with the work and we must do so as best we can without stopping.

I read this as an urgent reminder that we must not relax into our existing competencies. That's coasting. Don't coast. Keep working even if you know you'll never finish—it is our obligation as teachers. Excellence means that we stand with Rabbi Tarfon and keep at the project of education every day.

During the strategic planning retreat that included our entire board of trustees, some administrators and a couple of teachers, we explored “academic excellence” in terms of potential costs and timelines for achievable goals. We made sure we were all in agreement about the standards of excellence that we were establishing.

Here are the standards of excellence we committed to in 2011:

- explicit standards in all work (exemplars of excellence)
- recognition that excellent work requires continuous improvement
- knowledge that continuous improvement requires frequent feedback (formative assessment)
- understanding that feedback must be specific and supportive
- use of tools for self-critiquing and for peer critiquing
- exploration of and the solving of authentic problems
- summative authentic assessments that include performance assessment

When we established these standards, our staff developed clear rubrics to assess student work. We know that learners need frequent feedback and that they should have the opportunity to rework their products until they achieve excellence. We've agreed that all feedback needs to be specific. For example, in place of weak terms like “well-written,” the child will hear feedback that specifically explains what is well written and what specifically could improve the work.

We've agreed to separate executive function from the attainment of academic standards; thus, turning in late work will not affect the assessment of the quality of a child's work. If indeed the work is of superior quality, it will be so noted, and if it is late, that will be noted in a separate grade. In 2012, we introduced new standards-based progress reports, which represented this thinking about specific feedback. Similarly, we made sure that all of our staff are on board about how to teach children to critique their own work and that of their peers in kind and helpful ways, and our middle school students lead the conversation with their parents at parent-teacher conferences in the spring. There are similar standards for evaluating our work as educators.

Three years ago we agreed to abandon the classic standardized tests that do not accurately assess the complexity of the education that we promote in our school, and we piloted in the middle school the CWRA standardized tests that measure what we do teach: critical and creative thinking. Whereas traditional standardized tests call for quick factual recall, our new assessments ask students to use facts in the service of higher order thinking. We are in the process of creating an 8th grade capstone performance assessment for the coming academic year.

There were people in the community who were ready to say, and did say, that the school was less than excellent because it “doesn't believe” in standardized testing. We were able to turn that conversation around by saying that because we believed in excellence and because within that definition critical thinking was valued above quick factual recall, the other testing was inappropriate. With CWRA, we were able to say that we had located a standardized test that matched our definition. In the end, our clearly considered response resonated with our population.

As we are working now on our next accreditation report for a 2016 re-accreditation, we've used our own standards of excellence to assess where we are and where we need to go. Once again, we are opening up the process with focus-group work first, strategic planning next, and in-service work to follow.

Defining and living academic excellence is a continuous process. By proactively engaging stakeholders in defining excellence and in implementing standards, school leaders can create a clear and compelling school vision.

LEE BUCKMAN

SIGNIFICANCE, NOT JUST EXCELLENCE

Jewish day schools have a reputation for academic excellence. They attract top teachers who enjoy working in an environment where all students come from homes that value books and academics. Class size is generally small, and teachers can provide students with the type of close personal attention that addresses students' individual learning needs. As a result, the typical Jewish day high school has earned an admirable track record for university acceptances.

Academic excellence is such an essential element of a Jewish day school's identity that if it did not value and tout academic excellence, the school would be empty. Yet our schools should strive even higher. They should not be exclusively schools of academic excellence. They must become schools of significance as well.

Allow me to define significance in three ways, one that focuses on the purpose of schooling, one that focuses on our Jewish mission, and one that focuses on responsibility beyond ourselves.

A school of significance is one that keeps in the forefront of its work the purpose of school, namely, learning. This sounds obvious, and yet a prevalent view among parents and students is that school is more about success and careerism than learning. They believe that the reason for earning good marks, getting involved in the arts, or engaging in community service is to pad a resume in order to impress university admissions officers. Someone once quipped that the prevailing motto among many of our students is, *Ki mi-tziyyun teitzei Torah*. That is, the great motivator is the mark or the grade; and if an assignment won't be graded, it won't get done. Learning for the sake of learning has little value.

In a culture where marks and grades take on supreme importance, we must remind families about the transcendent purposes of education. That is what transforms a school

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.

Aristotle

into a school of significance. A school of significance is one where we convey that education is about sparking students' curiosity, helping them learn the place of hard work, and teaching them the value of risk-taking in the service of learning. School should be about teaching habits of mind like problem-solving, resilience and persistence. Yet, our honor roles and Honor Societies lionize marks and not the internalization of these values. In doing so, we unwittingly contribute to the notion that students' worth and fate are measured by some score or grade.

In schools where students care only about marks and where we administrators give our highest praise to those students with the highest marks, students become so afraid of failing that they avoid courses that challenge them intellectually. When students assess the value of registering for specific courses on the basis of the grade they anticipate receiving, they risk losing their sense of intellectual curiosity. In such an environment, students are at risk for never developing a genuine interest in what they are learning. Schools, even ones with high university acceptance rates, can become breeding grounds of anti-intellectualism. That is why I caution that Jewish day schools should strive not just for excellence but significance, and becoming a school of significance begins by recapturing the purpose of education: expanding one's intellect.

A second path to becoming a school of significance is by unapologetically embracing our Jewish mandate. We have the opportunity to do something public schools and secular private schools cannot do: nurture the soul. Jewish day schools can help students develop a personal connection to a sacred tradition not as an extracurricular activity but as something that is part and parcel of what one does every single day. Our schools teach children that Jewish values are not only timeless but they can be timely too. Jewish day schools can teach students how the ancient resources and texts of our tradition can help them navigate life's challenges, address real problems, and find meaning. Our schools teach students how to relate to the State of Israel in all its complexity and the Jewish people in all its diversity.

Some Jewish day schools emphasize academic excellence to such a degree that there's hardly mention that the school was founded and exists primarily because it is a Jewish school with a Jewish mission. At one school with which I am familiar, I was told that a third of the parents send their children because it is a Jewish school, a third send them despite the fact that it's a Jewish school, and a third are not sure where they stand on the Jewish character of the school. In an environment where two-thirds of the families are not sure why a Jewish education matters, we have an obligation to educate parents about our schools' Jewish mandate and an opportunity to make the case for why being Jewish matters. What greater significance could there be than building a strong, vibrant future for the Jewish people? Proudly embracing our Jewish mission is the second way we become a school of significance.

A third way in which Jewish day schools lend significance to their existence is by teaching students that life itself becomes more meaningful when we go beyond ourselves. Again, academic excellence is the centerpiece of our schools, but, even in the best of circumstances, it is mostly inner-directed. Academics are about my marks and my grades and my resume and my path to university. A school of significance encourages students to develop concerns beyond themselves and find a cause that gives life greater purpose. A school of significance helps students realize that the world is in need of repair and others need us. Significance is about having an impact on others. It is about helping others achieve their goals. It emerges when we respond to the call of others.

David Brooks said it this way in his April 12, 2015 *New York Times* op-ed piece entitled "The Moral Bucket List":

We live in the culture of the Big Me. The meritocracy wants you to promote yourself. Social media wants you to broadcast a highlight reel of your life. Your parents and teachers were always telling you how wonderful you were.....But people on the road to inner light do not find their vocations by asking, what do I want from life? They ask, what is life asking of me? How can I match my intrinsic talent with one of the world's deep needs?

A school of significance does not simply have an excellent record of university placement. A school of significance sees beyond itself and tries to address "one of the world's deep needs." It is a place where everyone—parents, students, and staff—feel a duty to service. It is a place where everyone aspires to build a school that serves some indispensable benefit for the community.

The Hebrew word for education is *chinuch*, which means dedication. *Chinuch* is about dedication to a higher purpose. In English *educate* comes from the Latin root *educare* which means "to bring forth." The latter implies self-expression, whereas *chinuch* implies self-attachment to certain ideals and values beyond oneself. Jewish day schools are centers of academic excellence. However, if we attach ourselves to the transcendent purpose of school which is learning, not resume building, unapologetically embrace our Jewish mandate, and develop a responsibility that goes beyond ourselves, our schools will become schools of significance, not just schools of academic excellence.

WHEN WE STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE, WHAT DO WE LOSE?

RONA NOVICK

“We Strive for Excellence.” This wonderful motto would seem to inspire teachers, students and families to do their utmost, try their best, and aim for superlative performance. Clearly, there is much to be gained by creating a motivational tone in our schools, and setting high standards. Are there, also, however, some critical components of education we stand to lose? Before we adopt this seemingly motivating paradigm, perhaps we should explore the beliefs behind it. What are the unintended messages that such a focus on striving for excellence conveys, and how might they have a negative impact on some students, teachers and families?

When we embark on the journey towards excellence we assume, in subtle ways, a democratic, egalitarian distribution of talents. We assume that not only are all of us equally capable of striving for excellence, but with the correct amount of effort, practice and perseverance, excellence is within reach for each of us. However, excellence is, by definition, superior and out of the ordinary. It is neither commonplace, nor is it accessible to all in all situations.

Educators know that students may demonstrate the potential for excellence in one area, and yet struggle to achieve even moderate success in another. Who among us is, or strives to be, excellent in everything we attempt? As adults, we generally choose those areas in which we will strive to do our best, and those we have determined are either not sufficiently important to us, or in which excellence would require too much effort, or even with extensive effort be impossible to achieve. In those realms, we settle for acceptable albeit mediocre outcomes.

In schools that “strive for excellence,” wise educators likely understand that unlike adults, students have little choice, and are expected to expend effort and strive for excellence across the board. Although teachers and parents may appreciate the diversity of capabilities in students, will youngsters living and learning in a “we strive for excellence” environment internalize an awareness and acceptance of the differences among us, and of their own diversity of talents?

The impact of striving for success as a schoolwide mantra may have particularly potent impact on those students with significant challenges. At a time when the benefits of inclusive practices in education are well documented, and in Jewish schools where the middot of caring for our fellow are taught and hopefully embodied, do we want an educational slogan that hints at elitism? Can we provide moral education in a setting where those who strive and excel are somehow seen as preferable, better, more desirable, than those who do not? How can we balance the drive towards excellence with the need to create truly welcoming and supportive environments for all students?

Striving for excellence impacts teachers as well as students. Jewish day schools generally have been exempt from the national movement towards performance based teacher pay, which Education Secretary Arne Duncan labeled his department’s “highest priority.” Regardless of whether driven by “official” policy and payment, or simply the result of teachers perceiving that striving for and achieving excellence is valued in their setting, such a belief will inevitably influence how they define their goals and expend their efforts. This may decrease teacher receptivity to inclusive classes and teaching challenged students.

The merit pay issue raises another caution in embracing the strive for excellence movement. How do we define excellence? In the above-mentioned move towards merit pay for teachers, the evaluation of student excellence has been limited to the easiest type of student outcome to measure: scores on standardized achievement tests. As the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development argues, “If we want students to develop as well-rounded human beings who are empathetic, thoughtful, and creative, we will have to include these characteristics among our goals for schools and seek ways to gauge our success.”

Will students, teachers and parents read “We Strive for Excellence” banners and mottos to mean we value citizenship, *mentschlichkeit*, sportsmanship or creativity? Or, in schools where what is most often measured is academic knowledge, will a focus on striving for excellence contribute to a limited view of valued outcomes?

The final issue I would like to consider is the place and prominence of failure in an educational setting that focuses on striving for success. It is intriguing that a Google search on “strive for success in schools” links to numerous articles on preventing perfectionism in children, and helping those students who already struggle with it. We know that when our focus is on winning the gold, getting the A, etc., rather than on the process of training, learning and striving, there are important lessons we miss. Adults may understand that

the emphasis in the “strive for success” needs to be on the *striving*, not on the *success*.

Adults may recognize the critical role of mistakes and failures in the learning process. Adults may be familiar with the extensive and growing positive psychology literature on the benefit of grit and perseverance in supporting healthy, resilient development. Last summer, I attended a multiday positive psychology training for Jewish educators, including a segment on grit and perseverance. We watched an advertisement which included a female racer taking a serious fall during a track event. The woman not only stood up, but went on to win the race, accompanied by swelling music and a cheery sentiment about the power of persistence. The sophisticated educators in the room were highly disturbed by this commercial message, voicing complaints such as “perseverance doesn’t always result in a win” and “a better lesson would be learned if she finished the race in fifth place, and survived not getting a medal.” These educators understood the value and importance of failures for genuine learning and building resilience.

The challenge for schools that tout “We Strive for Excellence” is to both make failure acceptable, and to teach students how to fail and how to keep going when they do. The challenge is to ensure that striving for excellence resonates with students as a journey, with bumps and detours that are as important as the destination.

One might argue that the concerns I am voicing are all a matter of semantics. I am reading into the pursuit of excellence, the strive for excellence, elements and intentions that are not meant to be there. In Jewish tradition, we understand the power of words to hurt, to motivate, to comfort. We have the paradigms of *leshon hara*, evil speech, and *ona'at devarim*, harmful words, to teach us that words matter. We have the prescriptive statements we offer to the mourner, and the format and formula of our prayers to demonstrate the power of a phrase. It may be semantics that communicates more than we intend, or less, when we announce “we strive for excellence,” but those are semantics we need to consider carefully. In fact, we should apply the same semantic microscope to all elements of our mission and vision statements, meticulously exploring how they are heard and understood by our constituents, and how they impact the teaching and learning in our schools.

I have suggested that we do a disservice when we focus exclusively on excellence, on outcomes alone, without considering efforts expended and obstacles overcome. I have argued that we risk fostering in our teachers, families and students, a one-dimensional view of learning and success, that may leave some feeling they are failures, or excluded from our community of strivers and successes. I am not suggesting that we turn off our efforts to strive; rather, that our goals be broadened. We strive for excellence, *and* for goodness, *and* for citizenship, *and* for an array of other valued characteristics and skills. Most importantly, we strive for positive growth. Rabbi Nahman of Breslov wisely asked, “If you are not a better person tomorrow than you are today, what need have you for a tomorrow?” Our schools will truly be excellent places when we all strive to contribute, in myriad ways, to the growth of every student and the promise of his or her personal tomorrow.



THE DAVIDSON SCHOOL

Strengthening the Quality of Jewish Life through the Power of Education

MASTER'S DEGREES, JEWISH EDUCATION

In-Residence and Online

- Day School Teaching
- Educational Leadership in Synagogues and Communal Settings
- Experiential Education Training for All + Study in Israel

FULL-TIME AND EXECUTIVE DOCTORAL DEGREES, JEWISH EDUCATION

Scholar-Practitioners: Only two Sunday/Monday, in-residence seminars per semester

LEARN MORE:

edschool@jtsa.edu or (212) 678-8022

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For Those in the Field

- DSLTI: Day School Leadership
- Ivriyon: Summer Hebrew Immersion for Day School Teachers
- Standards-Based Approach to TaNaKH

CURRICULA + TEACHER TRAINING

- MaToK: Bible for Day Schools
- Etgar: Experiential, Cooperative, Family Learning

LEARN MORE:

davidsoninfo@jtsa.edu or (212) 280-6007

Fellowships to exceptional learners offered, including up to FULL TUITION FOR FULL-TIME MA AND EdD STUDENTS.

ENHANCE YOUR SKILLS, ADVANCE YOUR CAREER

at North America's largest pluralistic school of Jewish education

www.jtsa.edu/davidson



William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education
3080 Broadway • New York City

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Interview with Gidi Grinstein



Tell us what you mean by “flexigidity.”

Flexigidity is a portmanteau word combining “flexibility” and “rigidity” to capture the secret of Jewish survival, resilience, recurring prosperity and leadership throughout the generations, which stems from the unique manner in which Jewish society blends new and old, innovation and tradition, flexibilities and rigidities, hence flexigidity.

Does “flexigidity” define the particular excellence of the Jewish people?

Flexigidity describes a set of societal mechanisms that are unique to Jews. While I would not say that it describes Jewish “excellence,” it does capture in my view the uniqueness of Judaism and the Jewish people, which has structurally led to its outstanding performance, i.e., to its remarkable resilience, prosperity and leadership.

The characteristic of flexigidity—a combination of what is untouchable and what is negotiable—is not unique and exists in every human being and every organization. In the USA, the Constitution represents rigidity, but the work of Congress, States and districts, as well as the market system and democracy, ensure flexibility. But Jewish Flexigidity that is the unique manner in which Jews do so, is indeed Jewishly idiosyncratic.

You discuss Jewish variety in numerous areas: mission, law, place, language, etc. This variety is often a source of confusion and conflict among Jews today. How in your view has this variety provided a source of strength for Jews in the past?

The Jewish people evolves through tensions that are structural and institutional, never to be resolved, rooted in the notion of *Elu ve-elu divrei Elohim chaim* (both are the words of God). This is a crucially significant survival mechanism that ensures a brutally honest debate about the condition and direction of our communities.

Why do you think this signature Jewish characteristic has been breaking down in recent times?

In Flexigidity I express the concern that these societal mechanisms that have ensured our collective survival and success are being eroded both in Israel and in the Diaspora, primarily in the USA. This is a reason for deep concern.

How can Jews regain our flexigidity today?

My book calls for more leaders to frame their leadership in the context of the “big picture” of Jewish history and society, and thereby to become “flexigid leaders.” This would require, among other things, dealing with the fundamental challenges facing our people, investing in capacities and institutions and building lasting coalitions across Jewish society.

Explain how flexigidity can help Jews confront the main challenges we are facing as a people.

Flexigidity is not a tool we use, but a description of how we evolve and adapt as a people. Therefore the flexigidity of the Jewish people will help it adapt. It is what allows us to gravitate out of Europe and to grow our Far East communities. It also helps Judaism contend with technological and scientific advancements. For example, if one day Jews will want to observe Shabbat on Mars, there will be multiple rabbinic views on how to do so.

What implications does your book have for Jewish education today, both in the Diaspora and in Israel?

My book offers a big-picture, birds’-eye view of Jewish history and society, which is often lacking. It helps frame present challenges in the context of the legacy and destiny of the Jewish people. And, through its web platform (flexigidity.com), it allows for a global conversation about the condition and direction of our people.

If you were designing a Jewish school to instill flexigidity, what would it look like?

It would be a school where students and teachers are always discussing what is essential and cannot be compromised as opposed to what is negotiable and can be adapted, and why. It would be a school where every issue is taught within a broad context that connects past, present and future. It would be a school where students are brought up to understand that both conservatives and reformers are essential for Jewish adaptability, they are intertwined, interconnected and interdependent, and therefore, disagreements notwithstanding, they must accord each other respect.

SAMANTHA
PACK

Y. BORUCH
SUFRIN

SCALING UP EXCELLENCE IN JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

What does it mean for a school to be “excellent”? In order to tackle this sweeping question, we break down the idea of excellence into five key components that have their origins in Robert Sutton and Huggy Rao’s book, *Scaling Up Excellence*. We came across their work in preparation for a 16-hour flight to Israel, in search of reading material both practical and stimulating. As we delved into the book, we realized it could serve as a roadmap, allowing us to chart the next steps in creating an excellent educational institution.

Each of the five components of excellence in education involves the “scaling up”—or the spread, reinforcement, and constant improvement of—the mindsets and methods that make a school effective and enduring. By grounding these components in some of the phrases and teachings of Judaism, we seek to offer a broadly applicable model for excellence in Jewish day schools.

RELENTLESS RESTLESSNESS

In order for a school to exhibit excellence, it must possess what Sutton and Rao call a “relentless restlessness—that often uncomfortable urge for constant innovation, driven by the nagging feeling that things are never quite good enough.” Undoubtedly, this tenacious impulse towards improvement can be recognized in the best educators, who never cease to ask themselves, “What can I do to make this lesson (or meeting, or assessment, or process) *better*?”

In Jewish day schools, we see this same impulse in the concept of *temidiyut*, persistence, an example of which we find in the daily tamid sacrifice. Arguments in the Talmud that cite the tamid sacrifice verse as the most important one in the Torah text mirror this relentless improvement. In performing a ritual every day, twice each day, there is constant opportunity for either monotony or renewal. Excellence requires a commitment to the latter. To achieve this, we

must constantly evaluate, reflect and move forward—rather than stagnate—in order to achieve the renewal of purpose and intention that makes us excellent.

I OWN THIS PLACE, AND IT OWNS ME

Secondly, in order for a school to attain excellence, its stakeholders must feel a sense of ownership over their education. These stakeholders include teachers, support staff, administrators, parents and above all, students. Indeed, educational research shows that students achieve higher levels of academic success if they feel ownership over their learning. Carefully considered opportunities for student choice is one way that schools can foster a sense of ownership. Providing students with structured options for a final assessment—for instance, students may choose to write a play, an essay or a series of diary entries after a novel study—increases the likelihood that students will engage more fully with the unit’s learning, as well as achieve and retain the understandings for which the unit was designed.

Similarly, in the context of the Jewish day school, viewing the Torah as inheritance allows for students’ deep exploration and ownership. Inheritance carries with it notions of both past and future. The Torah as inheritance symbolizes the generations of

predecessors, imbuing a rich sense of history that Jewish day schools strive to share with their students. However, Torah as inheritance also indicates an agency and autonomy in interpretation, a dynamic sense of motion and a world of opportunity open to scholars of the text. Thus, the principle of *kol mah shetalmid vatik atid lechadesh*—“Every innovation that a senior scholar will make was already said to Moshe at Sinai”—exemplifies excellence within Jewish day schools precisely because it engenders the dual sense of rich cultural inheritance *and* active ownership. Students are encouraged to bring new concepts to light in their study of the Torah—rather than viewing it as something to be passively absorbed and regurgitated come assessment time.

ACCELERATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Relatedly, ownership over one’s educational environment engenders a sense of accountability. Sutton and Rao define accountability in corporate culture as the “tug of responsibility,” which is so strong and pervasive that “slackers, energy suckers, and selfish soloists have no place to hide” (20). Excellent schools strive to create similar cultures, in which students internalize the school’s values and take it upon themselves to uphold them. For instance, if students truly feel that their school values respect for oneself and others, they will be more likely to remind their peers about the importance of demonstrating respect and *mentschlichkeit*. Peer-to-peer regulation is often far more effective than teacher management; kids listen to their friends! What’s more, students’ academic performance benefits enormously if they are held—and feel—accountable for their work and behavior. The same is true of faculty and staff: maintenance of a safe and comfortable work environment—everything from cleaning up after themselves in the faculty lounge to reporting misconduct or harassment—depend both upon stakeholders’ investment in their institution—“I own this place”—and their sense of responsibility to and for their workplace.

The Jewish day school context allows for

an additional dimension of self-reflection that contributes to accountability. This is especially true when we remind ourselves annually in the Hebrew month of Ellul to prepare for a new year on Rosh Hashanah through a process of introspection and reflection. As students progress through schools that place emphasis on consistent self-evaluation through *cheshbon hanefesh*, spiritual accounting, they are well situated to evaluate their actions. This, in turn, allows for a level of accountability—that “tug of responsibility”—that gives rise to reflection and growth.

HOT CAUSES TO COOL SOLUTIONS

In the world of education, professional development is often considered crucial. Who could argue with the value of teacher training workshops, seminars and conferences? However, to achieve excellence, schools must make a successful transition from what Sutton and Rao term “hot causes to cool solutions.” Participation in cutting-edge training does not necessarily translate into excellent teachers or excellent schools. Many educators can relate to the feelings of inspiration that follow professional development workshops—the “hot causes”—as well as the muted feelings that come months later, when they vaguely remember learning something interesting, yet have reverted to tired or stale practices since the workshop took place. The more difficult work—the work that defines excellence—comes in setting out specific plans for morphing inspiration and new ideas into tangible, measurable and achievable action—the “cool solutions.” Excellent administrators guide their teachers by asking, What is your plan for implementing the strategies we learned today, and what does your timeline look like? How can you, the teacher, translate inspiration into action, and what concrete forms will that action take—lesson plans, mindsets, practices, collaboration, technology use?

We also see the power of action in the phrase *lo hamidrash ikkar ela hama’aseh*, “learning is not primary, only action.” An excellent Jewish day school takes

this message to heart in the way it views teacher professional development. While it may seem counterintuitive for a school not to consider learning primary, we interpret this phrase more broadly, and with the help of Sutton and Rao’s contention that “every skilled executive, manager and supervisor is both a ‘poet’ and a ‘plumber.’” Both the “poetry”—the beliefs, mindsets, mission statements and inspiration—and the “plumbing”—concrete, nuts-and-bolts actions, behaviors and, often, changes—are necessary for excellence in education. One cannot exist without the other, but what makes action “primary,” in this sense, is that the inspirational learning will soon evaporate without the concrete action to see it to fruition.

Having addressed the principle of *lo hamidrash ikkar ela hama’aseh* as it applies to teacher professional development, it is worth examining whether this phrase also applies to student learning. Let us take the example of experiential service learning, which relates closely to the Jewish principle of *tikkun olam*. Instructing students about poverty and homelessness within the walls of the classroom does not make quite the same impact as, say, working with students to personally pack and deliver bag lunches to homeless shelters. Indeed, research supports the effectiveness of experiential learning in engendering empathy, as well as reinforcing and extending classroom learning. However, without appropriate and meaningful preparation and framing—that is, the important foregrounding work done in school—the experiential learning (the “action”) outside of school may lack significance and context for students. Thus, to achieve excellence in Jewish day schools—indeed, to uphold many of the values that schools hold most dear—both the “poetry” and the “plumbing” are necessary.

DON’T JUST DO SOMETHING—STAND THERE

Finally, the fifth component of educational excellence builds on King Solomon’s wisdom of *et lechal devar*—“there’s a

SMALL SCHOOL LEADERS CONVENE FOR BIG INSIGHTS

By Rabbi Andrew Davids, Head of School, Beit Rabban, New York City

A few days before Pesach, nine heads of school and board leaders of small schools travelled to convene at our school for a day of conversation about shared challenges and opportunities. This was a historic occasion, the first such event, and a testimony to these leaders' commitment to learning from their peers, to contributing their expertise with others, and to helping to build structures for fieldwide benefit. Here are some of the main takeaways from the session.

Sharing: Although the small school reshet and conference calls serve as important points of contact, the opportunity to be in a room together for an extended number of hours to talk about the particular opportunities and challenges of small school leadership was truly priceless. The gathering provided opportunities for sharing, comparing, discussion and debate about a range of issues facing each of school and the field as a whole. These conversations were particularly fruitful, as participants learned of the realities of schools similar in size, in a setting that supported candid conversation.

Issues: The leaders discussed changing demographics, competition from other schools in their communities, scholarship levels, space challenges, educational vision, and the need to balance between long-term planning vs. short-term realities. Ideas were shared regarding social media, scholarship support and its relationship to net tuition and filling empty spaces, the challenges of rising health insurance costs, creative pricing strategies and the role of sharpening the value proposition in recruiting new families.

Learning: The group was blessed to have the opportunity to learn with Rabbi Ethan Tucker of Mechon Hadar, an egalitarian yeshiva program for individuals seeking serious and open study outside of a rabbinical training program, who engaged everyone in the study of concepts of collaboration in our textual tradition and the different motivations for collaboration: safety in numbers, amplification of mission, increase in support, etc. In addition to the rich learning experience, the texts served as an excellent springboard to think about other ways schools might collaborate and anchored the discussions in the Jewish historical tradition.

Data: Collectively, the individuals dug deeper into the five-year enrollment data collected by RAVSAK and saw that the story of small day schools is meaningfully different than the general trends reported. The small school story is more promising for some and even more challenging for others. Participants were able to see that for schools of this size, especially outside of major urban areas, smaller schools face a difficult challenge in dealing with the dropping population of Jewish children. Moreover, the battle to convince parents to choose Jewish day over country day has shifted to Jewish day over public school, a much more expensive proposition.

Nonetheless, a third of the field's smaller schools are growing at a meaningful rate and heading toward sustainability, while others have achieved continued sustainability at a particular enrollment size, indicating the promise of ongoing success. What was also clear was that there are a number of smaller schools that are experiencing a high rate of enrollment change, with most of that reflecting a downward trend.

It is hoped that this get-together will serve as the first of an ongoing program, with the next gathering already being planned for the fall. Convenings like these are critical for lay leaders and heads as individual leaders seeking partners to share dreams and tribulations, and essential for the support of the field of day school. By working together to consider collaborations around grant writing, program sharing, PD insights, financial models, shared expertise and the like, the field can help build a system where the whole is truly greater than the sum of the parts.

right time for everything.” One of Sutton and Rao’s mantras—“slow down to scale faster—and better—down the road”—takes conventional wisdom about the speed of progress and turns it on its head with their phrase, “Don’t just do something, stand there.” This notion of slowing down now to ensure positive growth later acts as a counterpoint to the relentless restlessness. Just as excellence requires both the “poetry” (inspirational ideas) and the “plumbing” (concrete actions), so too does excellence demand both the constant drive to do better and the ability to stand back, reflect and assess before moving forward. For example, in the context of a school, excellence will more likely come from implementing mentoring programs or protocols for less experienced faculty members, rather than loading new teachers with more responsibilities than they are ready for. Sutton and Rao cite the metaphor of racecar driving, used by Nissan CEO Carlos Ghosn: “You need to know when to accelerate, when to brake, and when to change gears.” Excellent educators and administrators “shun shortcuts,” resisting the urge to scale up too quickly, while also recognizing that improvement will never come if *all* they do is “stand there.”

In outlining these five key components of educational excellence, we hope to offer a multi-dimensional picture of what excellent Jewish day school education includes, as well as what it looks and feels like. Our hope is that this picture helps to provide for other Jewish day schools the same roadmap we found on that long flight to Israel.

Excellence is to do a
common thing in an
uncommon way.

Booker T. Washington

THE QUALITIES OF EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

OR MARS

JAY HENRY
MOSES

Cultivating excellence in the next generation of Jewish leaders can be compared to the work of a casting director in Hollywood. Through the course of her day the casting director sees countless talented actors many of whom, given the right break, could emerge as stars. But the job of the casting director is not to find the next *star* but to place the actor in the right situation that will create the perfect ensemble for a hit movie.

Similar to casting a movie, pinpointing excellence in Jewish leadership is an art form. There is no objective, scientific quality of “excellence” embodied by some people and not others. The art of cultivating excellence involves identifying people who exhibit certain qualities and then helping them to hone those qualities so that they can exercise leadership to impact our organizations, communities and the Jewish world. The way an individual wields and deploys these universal qualities is what adds up to excellence. Before we discuss some of those qualities, though, it is important to define this wily term “leadership.”

You don’t need to dig too deep to find a myriad of definitions of leadership. For the purposes of this essay, we will define leadership as *the skillful intervention in a group situation to effect positive change*. It doesn’t need to be a revolutionary move (though it could be). Exercising leadership skillfully can mean simply asking the right question at the right moment in the right way. Alternatively, it can mean remaining silent at the right moment. Or it can mean giving your version of the “I Have a Dream” speech in front of thousands. Regardless of the scope, leadership entails inserting yourself in a way that can move a group in a new direction toward good. Usually such interventions require being an agent of change. And change inevitably means loss for some people. So those who exercise leadership will often encounter resistance. And to do that work skillfully, effectively, and with excellence, one must bring several qualities to bear.

The first five of these qualities are framed as a calibration between extremes. Skillful leadership is a balancing act of how and when to exhibit just the right amount of a particular quality. As Maimonides wrote, “The upright path is the middle path of all of the qualities known to people” (Laws of Understanding 1:4).

HUMILITY VS. CONFIDENCE

This calibration is famously illustrated in Rabbi Simcha Bunam of Pzhysha's teaching that "Everyone must have two pockets that they can reach into the one or the other, according to their needs. In the right pocket are the words: 'For my sake the world was created,' and in the left: 'I am but dust and ashes.'" Exercising leadership is an act of courage requiring faith that you are just the right person to be intervening in that particular moment. It also requires humility to know that you will not succeed unless you genuinely create space for others to lead as well, and especially to know when you are not the right person to intervene. Just as in life, finding the sweet spot between overconfidence and utter lack of self-esteem is essential.

PATIENCE VS. URGENCY

Hillel the Elder's question of "If not now, when?" often is taken as rhetorical, but it can also be seen as an actual question and a way to do a reality check. We might think that our leadership intervention is the right way to go, but we need to be reflective and ask ourselves if this is indeed the right time. Do I need to do it now? Will I be more successful if I wait until a more opportune time? Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky (*Leadership on the Line*) note that leadership means disappointing people at the rate they can absorb. Waiting for the right situation and moment will be crucial to doing just that. Moving too quickly might mean that you are suggesting changes to people who are not ready to hear that news. Waiting too long might mean that you miss the opportunity altogether. Skillful leadership can balance taking the long view with the "fierce urgency of now" exhorted by Martin Luther King Jr.

HUMOR VS. SERIOUSNESS OF MISSION

Excellence cannot emerge if we don't see benefiting the Jewish People as being of utmost importance. But being serious about your work does not mean that laughter and levity cannot pervade all that you do. Humor means that there is room for joy in our work—and there is no excellence without joy. The right dosage of humor also leads to an equanimity that is required in the tumult of our daily professional lives. If we fill our work with humor there will be very little room left for anger. Even in our holy work as Jewish professionals or volunteers we are barraged with egos, politics and daily disappointment. A healthy sense of humor can foster a calm perspective to see the blessings of our special work through the fog of the many frustrations.

GRIT VS. QUIT

Grit refers to the "passion and perseverance for very long-term goals. ... It is living life like a marathon, not a sprint" (Duckworth et al., "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals"). Grit requires all of the calibrations noted above and a commitment to the long game. This is definitely true for cultivating future Jewish

leaders. Our personal projects may be years in the making, and the grand Jewish project is millennia long. It may take an entire career to realize the impact that we had—and we may have to take it on faith that we have actually had an impact. Rabbi Tarfon in Pirkei Avot (2:15) reminds us that "the day is short and the task is great." Grit means that we will stick it out specifically *because* the task is great, that we will work hard every day and nourish ourselves on the small successes along the way. We also have to know when our projects are going nowhere and when it is wise cut bait. Mindfulness teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn writes that sometimes just stopping is an act of sanity and love. Excellence in leadership requires us to know when and where is the right time for grit.

OPTIMISM VS. REALISM

As we noted above, leadership is the skillful use of one's self to intervene in a group situation to affect positive change. If we don't think that the Jewish world has the possibility of continued positive change then we are in the wrong business. The Jewish world needs optimists. Exercising leadership means having a robust imagination of what the future can be and then doing something to work towards it. Optimism is contagious, so don't keep it to yourself. Inspired leadership requires us to share our optimism with others. It could, in fact, result in a self-fulfilling prophecy of an amazing Jewish future. Of course, unbridled optimism can veer into naiveté. While remaining optimistic, skillful leadership necessitates a keen sense of seeing things as they really are. If we are able to have a clear view of reality then we can intervene more skillfully to bring about a better future.

The next four qualities do not need to be framed as part of a balance. They are important to have in abundance, and excellent, skillful leaders can benefit from exhibiting more of these.

CURIOSITY

Leadership excellence requires curiosity. There are two types of curiosity. The first is being curious about the world. Excellent leaders have an expansive definition of what is relevant to their work and aim to learn more and more about the world to enhance their skills. Harry Truman said, "All leaders are readers." Being a skilled Jewish leader requires continued learning, secular and Jewish, even when it is not obviously relevant to your day-to-day tasks. The second type of curiosity is a genuine interest in other people. If leadership is about impacting people, then it makes sense that honing a curiosity about their motivations, interests, passions, feelings, opinions and sensitivities is important. Of course, most of us make it through our days *not* asking people about these things. Instead, we operate from assumptions that are essentially made-up stories, because we are not in the habit of asking people profound questions. Genuine curiosity helps us to get real information on which we can base our leadership interventions. Curious leaders ask real questions about the world and about the people they work with.

COMPASSION

Compassion means that we are aware of other people's suffering, connecting with them, and responding to them with help (Roger Schwarz, "What Stops Leaders from Showing Compassion"). The people we work with need our compassion, especially when we are intervening to suggest change. We must understand that the status quo exists for a reason, even if it serves to hold back the group, and many people are comfortable with it. Our intervention can upset the balance of that status quo and create anxiety. People will be more open to change if they know that we are aware of their uncertainties and that we can hold their interests and the group's interest in mind at the same time. It does not mean that we agree with them on an issue or that they will get their way. It does mean that we will respond to their resistance with curiosity and help.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is a term coined by Wayne Payne and popularized by Daniel Goleman. It refers to our ability to be aware of our emotions and the emotions of others, name them, and respond appropriately. Whether or not it is actually "intelligence" (researchers disagree on this point), we nonetheless want our Jewish leaders to be self-aware and sensitive to others in the moment. Some view

emotional intelligence as a leadership skill of "reading the room" and responding appropriately (rather than a quality). Regardless, emotional intelligence needs to be combined with the qualities noted above in order to truly exercise leadership by intervening to bring about positive change in a group, an organization, or a Jewish community.

These are just some of the qualities that we look for when seeking to nurture excellence in emerging talent. Having a deeper insight into these qualities is the first step in identifying those who can exercise transformative leadership courageously and skillfully. The subsequent steps require doing the hard work of honing those qualities in ourselves and in those we work with—a lifelong effort and a subject for another article.

Our future Jewish leaders not only need to be talented at the technical skills of their professional or volunteer roles, but they also need to root their work in Jewish values and be virtuosos of the qualities of leadership. And just like the Hollywood casting director, we must remember that while it is nice to discover the next star, the real success is having a great ensemble that contributes to the hit movie. Excellence means finding people who are skilled practitioners who embody these qualities of leadership so they can be part of a community of leaders who can help Jewish life bring goodness to the world. And no movie is more exciting than that.



THE LAURA & ALVIN SIEGAL
LIFELONG LEARNING
PROGRAM

2015 SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH TEACHING AND LEARNING

JULY 20–23 ■ CLEVELAND, OHIO

If you are a Jewish educator or administrator, join us for four days this summer on Case Western Reserve University's beautiful campus to:

- Study with renowned scholars and educators
- Network and converse with fellow participants
- Learn cutting-edge methodologies
- Experience Cleveland's music and arts scene

Enroll in one of our three award-winning seminars:

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY
WITH TANACH

EXPERIENTIAL JEWISH
EDUCATION

RE-IMAGINING JEWISH
EDUCATION THROUGH ART

EARLY REGISTRATION
Save \$50 before May 15!

FOR MORE INFORMATION
OR TO REGISTER NOW

www.case.edu/lifelonglearning
or contact Alanna Cooper at 216.368.5686
or Alanna.Cooper@case.edu.

CONFERENCE RECAP



Over 1,000 school leaders representing the spectrum of Jewish day schools attended this year's North American Jewish Day School Conference, held in Philadelphia March 8-10. This year's conference, a joint production among RAVSAK, Schechter, Pardes, YU University-School Partnership, and PEJE, was entitled "Uncommon Connections: Schools, Systems & Success." A record number of presenters explored the gamut of school operations and activities under the lens of "systems thinking," discussing how the range of stakeholders and resources can better collaborate to serve the needs and goals of day schools.

This year's affair offered many features that were new to the annual conference. There were excursions, opportunities to travel offsite for first-hand, immersive learning. At the conference hotel, a room was dedicated to a Playground, where participants could try out various kinds of materials and technologies, attend presentations about aspects of ed tech, and converse with representatives of schools engaging in new forms of experimentation in blended learning. Each of the four "constellations" (time blocks) included sessions of different lengths, as well as Beit Midrash

sessions discussing Jewish text learning around themes related to day schools. Uncommon Conversations featured fresh conversations on big issues not often confronted, and a special track for small school leaders offered guidance for the challenges and opportunities that are unique to the many small Jewish day schools. And of course, all this plus visionary keynote speakers and presentations from field leaders and experts.

As always, the conference provided an invaluable platform to meet leaders from throughout the world, make new friends and colleagues, kibitz and learn from the wealth of experience and knowledge that exists in the day school field. RAVSAK hosted several opportunities for members to forge collegial relationships. At the RAVSAK breakfast, the new shared leadership arrangement between Dr. Marc Kramer and Dr. Idana Goldberg was announced (see "From the Board" this issue). Evening receptions afforded opportunities for peers in like-roles, members of Reshet HoS, Board and JD, to meet in person and form personal connections that will infuse their collaborative enterprise. Another reception enabled leaders from RAVSAK and PARDES to deepen bonds among our member schools.

ELI KANNAI

THE NEW EXCELLENCE THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING

I clearly recall one day, in elementary school, when the rabbi came to our classroom and announced that the average class grade on a recently taken standardized test was better this year than it had been the year before. That was the way teachers and students were measured: as a whole, how did a class perform? The educational system focused on aggregate; if more students performed better, the average would be higher.

This reliance on test scores to measure educational progress has been the norm in the educational world for decades. Standardized testing measures school achievements by averages and statistical methods. This results in a focus on improving the test scores of those students in the middle of the class, creating small improvements that move the school above the necessary threshold. While this tactic may help elevate schools' average test scores overall, it results in less educational energy being expended towards the many students who fall outside the focus group. But excellence is not defined by high test scores; excellence is achieved when each student is able to fully develop his or her own potential. As we have come to understand that there are different kinds of learners, and different ways to support them, the conflict between "teaching toward the middle" and excellence becomes very apparent. The magnitude of the differences in how students learn, and the quantity of teaching

options available to address these differences, open up better ways to address student achievement than raising test scores by raising average scores. Time is often also a significant hindrance to differentiation: schools often do not allot sufficient time and resources to enable teachers to individualize their teaching.

One option for personalized learning is the use of online and blended learning modalities. Online learning makes it possible for any given school to offer an incredible catalog of courses, with unprecedented opportunities for students to excel in subjects not offered by the local school. Taking an online course seriously is a commitment, and many times these courses are rigorously graded, just like face to face courses.

Enabling schools to offer a more flexible and larger program of courses provides an opportunity to meet diverse students' needs, and therefore for more students in a school to excel. Once online learning becomes mainstream, schools can offer online courses for scheduling conflicts and catch-up courses as well as advanced courses for those students that need more.

Blended learning takes a different approach in enhancing personalized learning. Each child receives instruction appropriate for their own needs, within the framework of an in-person class. Students come to school every morning and step into class; however, what happens inside the room is very different from how your typical class is structured. Many times the room is larger, there may be computers stationed in certain places around the room and tables are not organized in rows the way they were when I went to school. Instead, students rotate between stations: the computer station, independent work, group work, small group instruction and personal meetings, as needed or based on a set protocol. Data gathered by the computer program enriches the educators' understanding of individual student needs and helps to tailor the learning path of each student.

A classroom organized for blended learning is really about each and every student succeeding, working in different spots within the class on different elements designed by the teacher specifically for each particular student. At times, the learning experience may look more like a workspace, with individual, group and personal meetings taking place. In fact, this model may better prepare our student for the future, as it resembles the "real world out there."

While the online and blended learning modalities are very different, both allow education to better fit individual needs. They also allow flexibility, which changes the way teachers use their time at school, in class and outside of the classroom. This flexibility is in contrast

UPSTATE NEW YORK DAY SCHOOL LEADERS CONVENE AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

with the common structure in many schools, where teachers and students have a schedule set for weeks ahead, as well as a static set of goals that cannot be changed, even if students can achieve more. While these structural changes may seem threatening (not to mention the noise level, which may be louder than what I remember from my days at school), they offer the chance to meet individual needs. In general, where there is less structure, there is a place for personal focus.

Tracking each student and ensuring every child gets a chance to learn—not only the ones “in the middle”—supports achieving excellence for everyone. Extraordinary gifted students are able to do more, above and beyond their grade level, and learn subjects not available to them at their local school. Special needs students benefit from blended learning opportunities while not being pulled out of class. The more we learn about education, the more we understand that there are no “typical” students. There is no “middle”: everyone is special and deserves his or her own treatment.

So where do we go from here? One can go visit or read about schools that have started working with online and blended learning modalities. One can also research available online courses. While content is currently more readily available in general studies than in Judaic studies, AVI CHAI and other foundations have been involved in efforts to increase available Judaic studies offerings. DJLN (Digital Jewish Learning Network) has developed a resource portal which lists many of the available programs both in general and in Jewish studies (<http://digitaljlearning.org/resource-portal>). Other parts of the DJLN site address professional development opportunities. One example of an online learning opportunity in Judaic studies that middle and high school students can take advantage of is the Lookstein Virtual Jewish Academy (<http://www.virtualjewishacademy.org/>).

Once a school decides that excellence is defined by giving each student the opportunity to get the most out of their educational experience, many structural discussions need to take place. Is the schedule flexible enough to allow teachers the time they need to meet, collaborate and prepare? Is there time for them to investigate and learn online content? Analyze data? Meet students?

One size fits all is no longer an option. It is only when educators use their time as efficiently as possible that personalized learning benefits can be realized and excellence can be achieved. The school house may look the same, but what’s inside is very different and enables all of us to achieve excellence.



The Upstate NY Jewish Day School Consortium (Upstate NYJDC) recently gathered while attending the North American Jewish Day School Conference in Philadelphia from March 8-10.

Heads of school and lay leaders from Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo and Albany met during the conference to discuss matters facing our regional Jewish community day schools.

Among the issues addressed was how best to utilize our collective consortium status to obtain funding and greater purchasing power. School leaders discussed how a Jewish secondary school could be of benefit to all of our schools. The consortium members also talked about our shared grant for multiage professional development, awarded by the Covenant Foundation. Plans were made for schools to visit Bet Shraga Academy in Albany to observe how a multiage paradigm can work effectively within a dual curriculum. In addition, a date was scheduled for our next monthly conference call, allowing us to continue the crucial conversations ignited at the conference.

In attendance were:

Marci Galinkin and Julie Pollack from Bet Shraga Academy in Albany

Shira Brown, Marc Brown and Einav Symons from Kadimah Jewish Day School in Buffalo

Jenna Hiller, Sharon Polatof and Tracie Glazer from Hillel Community Day School in Rochester

Barbara Davis, Ruth Stein, Melissa Fellman, Melissa Neri and Lori Tenenbaum from Syracuse Hebrew Day School in Syracuse

CREATING CULTURES OF EXCELLENCE

QUESTIONS FOR SETH COHEN

How do you determine excellence?

Charles Schusterman once said, “Trying to do something that has not been done before takes time, risk, energy and skill if you want it done well.” To me, that quote helps boil excellence down to its very essence. It is the manifestation of time, commitment, mastery and an understanding that to achieve excellence, one must have the intention to do so. It is also something that, by its nature, is hard to measure in objective or quantitative terms. Each of us understands excellence within our own context and culture, so to say one “determines excellence” is perhaps misleading. We experience excellence, and in turn, we help create the excellence that is experienced by others. In this sense, excellence is truly a partnership of the creator and the observer, and it is in that partnership that one can really understand the idea and its impact.

Why is excellence important? Or is it?

There is no question that the idea and expression of excellence is important—it serves as a form of both motivation and satisfaction. Individuals of all ages and experiences, once they are exposed to excellence, are then inspired and challenged to accept nothing less. In this sense, a culture of excellence begins to become permeating and self-perpetuating in a vital way, helping improve experiences, individuals and organizations. So, not to overstate it, but a culture of excellence is important because it impacts everything. At the same time, excellence is not the same as perfection, and we should recognize that to be excellent is to understand that imperfection is an opportunity for improvement.

Tell us how a vision of excellence factors in the work of the team at Schusterman.

First and foremost, the vision of excellence within our organization starts at the very top. As a visionary leader of our organization and in the broader philanthropic world, Lynn Schusterman holds herself and all of us to the most exacting standards of excellence. In the rigor with which we explore new ideas to the finest detail of the programs we create, Lynn sets the standard of excellence for all of us. Second, within our professional team, we emphasize continued professional self-assessment and self-improvement, challenging each other to think harder and more creatively to deliver the excellence that the constituencies we support demand from us. We focus on engaging excellent talent, but even more so, we focus on making sure that talent has the tools and training they need to grow personally and professionally. Third, we make sure that we seek out and emulate those leaders and organizations that are creating excellence in other fields. As a team, we know that there are visions of excellence that we can learn from, and in doing so, we can not only improve ourselves but the impact of our work as well.

How do you help ensure that the notions of excellence of your organization and your grantees and partners are in alignment?

This is perhaps the most important part of our work: striving to ensure that those we partner with, whether as our grantees, program partners and even our program participants, are aligned both with our values and also our vision of excellence. And the truth is, that work is also the most time intensive. It is one thing to say you hold

HEAD OF SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE PROJECT: A LOOK BACK, A PEEK AHEAD

By Cooki Levy, Project Director

Three years ago, with the generous support of the AVI CHAI Foundation and other donor partners, RAVSAK developed and launched the Head of School Professional Excellence Project (HoS PEP). Designed to inspire, guide and support recently installed heads of Jewish day schools (“fellows”), this program paired these school leaders with experienced and successful day school heads (“deans”) who were trained through the program in the skill sets of excellent coaching. Each pair—dean and fellow—spoke in depth every week for the entire school year, exploring the vicissitudes and dilemmas of day school leadership, experiencing reflective practice, solving problems together, and developing visions of strong leadership and excellent schools. Deans were also able to visit their fellows’ schools, deepening their understanding of the uniqueness of each school community.

We have had the privilege of including 21 committed and capable heads of school in the first two cohorts of HoS PEP. Of varied ages, backgrounds and experiences, in communities spread out across North America, each has attested to the huge benefits they received as part of the HoS PEP program. In the words of one participant, “I never would have made it through the year without this support—knowing there was someone at the other end of the phone line to help me focus on what was important and make difficult choices.” Another said, “Every time I hung up the phone I felt that I was ready to tackle whatever lay before me.” And a third: “Connecting with other heads who are in the same situation as I am offered a world of resources I would otherwise not have had. I don’t feel isolated any longer.”

We at RAVSAK are looking ahead to our third cohort, and we are proud to be able to offer this unique opportunity to another generation of day school leaders. Strong, confident, long-term leaders will strengthen our schools, and, by extension, our Jewish communities, perpetuating the very holy work that Jewish day schools do. We thank the able and committed deans, the talented and enthusiastic fellows, and our generous donors for allowing us to continue to inspire and support the heads of Jewish day schools.

a high standard of excellence, and it is another thing to demonstrate it. So for us, knowing the individuals—whether as leaders of organizations or as initiators of communities—is one of the most vital aspects of our work. We make a habit of both listening to them and also engaging in ongoing dialogue with them about what they are trying to achieve and how they are achieving it. As we often say in our organization, “When it’s all said and done, what’s more important is what is done than what is said.” With that in mind, we are jointly assessing our collective efforts and asking our partners and ourselves: are we achieving the level of excellence we said we would? If not, how can we work together to do so?

Does requiring excellence run counter to entrepreneurial notions around the freedom to “fail and fail fast”?

Not at all; in fact, they are symbiotic. We can only understand success if we also understand failure. In a way, this question is driving at the very nature of experimentation; while some efforts take time and effort to reasonably assess whether they are working, excellence can be grounded not only in endurance but also constant reassessment and revision. In fact, the ability to rapidly prototype new ideas and initiatives, make assessments as to their quality and then pivot and adapt are integral elements to the achievement of excellence. When we look at failure through that prism, it is more a question of our process than our product. And the key question is not always about whether the specific output is excellent, but is the process you are using excellent enough to drive you toward the desired outcome.

Regarding your work with networks, what makes a network excellent, and how does it get there?

There is substantial body of literature on this question, and the growing field of social network analysis is helping us all understand what makes a network successful in achieving its intended purpose. But in short, I think that for a network to achieve a recognizable level of excellence, three things need to be clear. First, there needs to be an understanding of the purpose and goals of the network; without it, there is no way to really assess its inherent excellence. Second, there is the nature of the constituent nodes in the network, whether they are individuals, organizations or both. A network is only the sum of its parts, so the stronger the nodes, the stronger the network. Third, the ties that bind the network together must also be strong enough to enable the network to be high-performing. Accordingly, investing in the tactics and tools that nurture those connections is essential. A network is the product of the clarity of its purpose, the potential of its people and the processes that help bond them together; if those elements are excellent, you are on your way.

How does networking help participants achieve their own excellence?

Regrettably, I think that sometimes the very use of the word “networking” belies the value it creates, in that we often think of it in terms of “schmoozing” or “leveraging relationships.” The truth is, in the right context and with the right intention, networking is a powerful process of self-challenge and improvement. When we meet people who help us understand different ideas or opportunities, we find ourselves questioning our own observations or opinions. This process of education and self-reflection drives us to think harder or differently. Through that process of intentional growth, we can achieve new levels of excellence. It can also give us a sense that we are part of something larger than ourselves and have a responsibility to contribute to the greater collective endeavor. When that is the case, not only does the individual become more excellent, the world does too.

VISIONS OF EXCELLENCE

Michael Horn, Co-founder and Executive Director, Christensen Institute:

My vision of excellence in education is of a learning environment with teachers that is constantly improving and changing with the times, as it models the capacity for lifelong learning we want to see in our students. Excellence in education means personalizing learning for all students' distinct needs so that all deeply master each concept before moving forward to the next.

This mastery should encompass not just knowledge, but also the skills and dispositions students need to successfully fulfill their potential. And excellence in education means making the learning intrinsically motivating for all students, so that they engage deeply in the learning and build student agency and ownership over their learning and life pathways.

Ron Berger, Chief Program Officer, Expeditionary Learning:

The key to excellence is this. It is born from a culture. When children enter a family culture, a community culture or a school culture that demands and supports excellence, they work to fit into that culture. A culture of excellence transcends race, class and geography; it doesn't matter what color, income or background the children come from. Once those children enter a culture with a powerful ethic, that ethic becomes their norm. It's what they know.

PURSUING THAT MAT

I recently had the opportunity to spend a week in Israel for the annual conference of the Jewish Funders Network, an international gathering of Jewish philanthropists who give to a wide range of causes, both Jewish and general. One of the highlights of the visit was being exposed to the work of some of the activists who comprise Israel's growing social entrepreneurial sector—individuals and organizations who are tapping into Israel's "startup nation" spirit and skills to better the lives of Israel's citizens and residents.

One of the most impressive things I experienced was actually an event taking place a few hundred yards from the hotel where the conference was headquartered, in a large tent in Tel Aviv's port area. It was called TOM Tel Aviv—TOM standing for Tikkun Olam Makers—a project initiated by the Reut Institute with a bevy of partners, and part of an initiative called XLN (for Cross-Lab Network) to create "Maker Spaces" and "Maker Communities" throughout Israel and, eventually, globally that connect technological innovation (e.g., 3D printing) and social purpose. The TOM event was similar to a hackathon—a dozen teams coming together for 72 hours, with access to high tech fabricating equipment, each seeking to design and prototype a device to solve a specific problem faced by individuals with various disabilities. At the end of the event, judges awarded prizes to the most promising designs, and the hope is that some will become the bases for commercial products.

I had heard about TOM even before I traveled to Israel from the Reut Institute's founder and head, Gidi Grinstein, who has decided to spend two years in the US to try to enlist Jewish organizations—including day schools—and others



JONATHAN WOOCHEER

THE EXCELLENCE TERS MOST

behind similar efforts here. Hearing his vision and seeing it enacted in Israel got me thinking again about a fundamental question for the day school movement at this time in its history: how can day schools broaden their appeal to become the preferred educational choice for a larger number of families?

This question, I would suggest, provides an important point of entry into the discussion about “excellence” in day school education. It is becoming increasingly clear, I believe, that “excellence,” in academics, in administration, in student, parent, and community engagement, and in the other areas that are part of the life of any school, will be just the “ticket of admission” to the competition for students and support. We know that many schools are still striving for excellence in these areas and that, happily, there are growing opportunities for them to receive help in doing so. Yet even assuming that we are successful over the next few years in seeing more and more schools reach levels of performance that approach “best in class” standards in these areas, it is by no means clear that this will be enough to make them stand out in the educational marketplace as the first choice for any but the most Jewishly committed families.

What could give day schools a solid competitive advantage for more parents and students, I believe, is not just being able to offer first-rate academics or a warm, caring environment—these are important, but not unique among excellent schools. Nor is it their ability to claim that they are unmatched in strengthening Jewish identity and cultivating literacy—true, but not necessarily compelling for those for whom these are not self-evidently transcendentally valuable ends in

themselves. *Rather, day schools can make the strongest case for their distinctiveness by being educational communities in which Jewish values are embodied and enacted in learning that simultaneously enriches the lives of the learners and improves the world.*

TOM is one example of what such learning could look like: teams of individuals coming together to solve real problems for real people, inspired by deep value commitments and using (and developing) skills and tools that cultivate curiosity, creativity and collaboration. This combination of 21st century learning skills and enacted Jewish values is a powerful one—and it is a type of “excellence” that Jewish day schools can offer. We already have notable examples of this kind of education being built in the day school world through initiatives like Tikvah Weiner’s I.D.E.A. Schools Network, the Schechter Network’s edJEWcon, and RAVSAK’s Moot Beit Din. Although STEM has much to contribute in this area, this type of learning is not essentially about the technology or even the design thinking that enables one to imagine and develop new approaches to solving a problem. What is central to the education that day schools are uniquely suited to provide is precisely the Jewish vision that can and should animate the use of these tools: a belief that human dignity is absolute and must be preserved and enhanced, a commitment to fairness and justice as built into the order of nature, a conviction that the world can be better than it is and that we are commanded to do our part in making it so.

Enabling students from the very earliest age to feel that they have the ability and responsibility to make a difference in the world, and that in

pursuing this they can simultaneously achieve their own highest potential, is a powerful and very Jewish educational vision. It’s one in which both 3D printing and Jewish text study have vital roles to play—not simply as subject matter to be mastered or tools for gaining new skills, not just as steps to the next rung on the educational ladder, but as building blocks of learning that matters, learning that improves lives.

This means that the pursuit of “excellence” must be married to the exercise of “imagination”—imagining and creating new ways to bring values-driven learning into the daily lives of students, families and community and into the world. “The word is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you should do it” (Deut. 30:14). When R. Akiva and R. Tarfon debated the primacy of study or doing, the rabbis resolved the debate by postulating that study is primary, because it leads to doing. That must be our solution as well. Whether by building Maker Spaces, planting gardens, creating “just communities” inside school walls and working for greater justice beyond them, fostering relationships across social, ethnic, religious and national boundaries, or encouraging daily acts of kindness, our day schools can take this fundamental Jewish teaching and make it their banner: Our education makes a difference that matters.

This is the “excellence” that I believe our day schools should strive for. It’s one that can, I am convinced, help them to stand out among the many other educational choices families have today. And it will help create the kind of world we all want our children to live in tomorrow.

EXCELLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS

HOW TO DEFINE AND MEASURE OUTSTANDING TEACHING

Our schools often use the word “excellence” to describe our goals in teaching and learning, but what exactly does excellence in teaching look like, and how do schools foster an environment where excellence in teaching is celebrated and acknowledged?

Like other Jewish day schools, Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School (CESJDS) seeks to engage and retain an exemplary faculty who are well aligned with the school’s mission, culture and values. Our school has recently developed a set of professional “characteristics” of excellence that faculty demonstrate on a regular basis. This document is linked to our supervision and evaluation protocol, and teachers’ performance will be evaluated against these same criteria. We aspire for administrators and supervisors to provide ongoing coaching and feedback in support of these characteristics and skills, and will encourage teachers to reflect on these characteristics when developing their annual professional growth goals.

In developing our characteristics document, we set out on a roughly six-month schedule. We formed a faculty committee chaired by our lower school principal and our upper school academic dean. The committee engaged the entire faculty in discussions around what defines excellent teaching in our school. Using this shared wisdom, together with research in the field and our mission, vision and purpose statements, the committee crafted a Characteristics of Professional Excellence document and then sought feedback from the educational administration and the faculty. After thoughtful revision, the committee presented a completed draft document, which the school officially adopted this January.

MITCHEL
MALKUS

Head of School, Charles E.
Smith Jewish Day School,
Rockville, MD

The document that we developed is succinct. For each of the statements in the characteristics document, our supervision and evaluation protocol spells out specific manifestations of the characteristics.

CESJDS faculty demonstrate the following characteristics of professional excellence:

- We, as educators, know the content we teach and how to teach that content to our students. We are effective, engaging, and passionate.
- We, as educators, are committed to students as learners and as individuals—and form meaningful relationships with them. We are caring, compassionate, and responsive to the diversity of student needs.
- We, as educators, actively partner with families in supporting student growth.
- We, as educators, are engaged with the life of our school community.
- We, as educators, are collegial and actively collaborate with professionals throughout our school community.
- We, as educators, are committed to lifelong learning and actively pursue professional growth.
- We, as educators, fulfill, honor, and embody the mission, core values, and policies of our school.

In addition to being used to define, evaluate and foster excellence in teaching, the characteristics can be shared in communication on job postings, as the basis for interview questions, and as part of hiring decisions. The importance of these characteristics can also be emphasized in the school’s induction program.

The characteristics document is the way the school’s unique mission, culture and values are reflected, supported and re-energized in what we consider to be excellence in teaching.

What does your school look for in great teaching? And, more importantly, how do you define and foster that excellence in your faculty?

Excellence is not a skill. It is an attitude.

Ralph Marston

Writers in this issue of HAYIDION grapple with the fact that excellence is simultaneously highly in demand and extremely nebulous. We feel we recognize excellence when we see it, but to formulate what excellence is in a way that is satisfying and agreeable to many is challenging. We asked schools to share examples of excellence in their schools. Responses here range from structural efforts to accomplish excellence, to particular initiatives that they feel merit the label. The writers share the attitude that day schools are places of excellence, no matter how defined.

WHEN ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE ISN'T ENOUGH

JANE
MARTIN

Director of Marketing and
Communications, Hyman
Brand Hebrew Academy,
Overland Park, Kansas

Nearly two years ago, Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy (HBHA) took the opportunity to embark upon a strategic plan to ensure the school remains financially prudent. After extensive research, the HBHA Strategic Planning Committee developed a plan that takes a deep look into many areas of the school, including academic excellence.

The Importance of Academic Excellence in Suburban Kansas City

HBHA is uniquely situated between two top-rated school districts in the country while also competing with area private schools. As such, it is critical to ensure HBHA is able to differentiate our offerings regarding academic excellence.

To tell our story, the academic excellence subcommittee realized HBHA needed to look beyond the academic knowledge and skills our students gain. What began as a conversation about our whole-child educational philosophy quickly turned into a discussion about HBHA's distinctive ability to lay the groundwork for lifelong success. While HBHA offers excellent general and Jewish studies (our test scores are higher than surrounding public schools), the subcommittee was quickly able to define many additional benefits we offer our students.

In essence, HBHA reaches beyond academic excellence, giving our children a lifetime of discovery and academic inquiry, self-awareness and advocacy skills, and tools which help them become community and Jewish leaders. We achieve this broad-sweeping goal by providing:

- A strong academic foundation in general and Jewish studies, combined with dual-language immersion to give students an outstanding educational foundation. Research indicates bilingual children are cognitively and academically at a greater advantage than monolingual children. Furthermore, HBHA teaches beyond the test, developing students' critical thinking skills to prepare them for a lifetime of success, rather than focusing on rote memorization of facts and figures.
- Individualized attention ensures a customized educational plan for each student. This creates an environment in which all students are encouraged to succeed on their own terms. Low teacher-to-student ratios help teachers focus on each student as an individual, empowering them to achieve their greatest potential and instilling lifelong confidence and leadership skills in the process.
- A pluralistic community based on Jewish values is also critical to the HBHA curriculum. Our dual-track Jewish studies program ensures students learn the same values they are taught in the home, while exposing each child to the diversity of our Jewish community.

"The non-testable things we teach are a big part of who we are at HBHA. These areas of excellence are key factors in helping our students establish a sense of self, and lead meaningful, happy lives," said Todd Clauer, Upper School Principal and Guidance Counselor, HBHA.

As HBHA continues to implement our strategic plan, the development of our students—academically, Jewishly, and as confident, productive leaders in our society—will remain an important part of our ongoing mission, to prepare students for fulfilling lives as Jews and as honorable and contributing citizens.

SEEKING EXCELLENCE: PARTNERING WITH UNIVERSITIES

LYNN
RAVIV

Director of Development,
NE Miles Jewish Day
School, Birmingham, AL



Four years ago our school began a journey toward a learning environment focused on project- and inquiry-based learning, values-based learning, and differentiated instruction across all subjects. This huge shift in pedagogy was embraced by our community, and a capital campaign was launched to redesign existing spaces. Our small school has now been transformed into a hub for our progressive and highly technology-based academic program. The former student commons is now the heart of the school as an Innovative Learning Center (ILC), and connects with the dining hall (our former library) to allow the ILC to expand for special programs. Perimeter areas outside classrooms on the upper floor are now learning pods for students to gather and engage in partnerships for learning.

With our own internal community poised for dramatic and exciting change, we set out to find the best resources available in our larger community to continue our quest for an excellent, innovative program. And we had immediate success with one phone call.

The local McWane Science Center entered into a partnership with us, as well as their partner, The University of Alabama in Birmingham. Our contact, through their common program ALASHAP, is Co-Director Katie Busch. ALASHAP's mission is to *"provide opportunities for teachers and administrators to extend their understanding and practice of inquiry-based teaching and learning as they help students explore, question, and construct scientific understanding of the world around them."* Certainly, these goals were important to us in our quest.

It did not take long in this initial conversation with Busch for both of us to realize that boundless benefits would be realized from being connected. We were a perfect proving ground for ALASHAP to test its new programs: a small school, dedicated faculty, and the great desire for this opportunity for our students, all critical dynamics for a successful combination.

Indeed, we are benefitting in significant ways. Busch, who works in tandem with

our ILC coordinator, Devon Cantwell, began by providing professional development for our faculty through a method known as The Private Eye, a simple technique with powerful educational outcomes, developed by Seattle-based educator Kerry Reuf. This method promotes student thinking by analogy and writing and can be applied in both general and Judaic studies.

How simple is this hands-on learning process that "rivets the eye and rockets the mind?" Students look at an object through a jeweler's loupe, a metaphor for magnifying thought. Using this everyday object and simple questions, students get to discover, rather than being told facts. They become engaged, sometimes mesmerized,

very curious. The students become hooked and begin to ask a million questions as they are learning skills to help them in their journey of learning. Our teachers have said they have extended units because of the curiosity of the students who were hooked, wanting to learn more, engaged in this process that asks them to be critical thinkers, creative, to theorize and produce products in writing, the arts and in a myriad of ways that are generated by this process of discovery.

It all began with a phone call. Seeking excellence by partnering with a university has moved us forward. The Private Eye has created more student-driven learning opportunities, and we have an ongoing strong bond with Busch who will continue to work with our faculty in other related projects. With her we share questions and ideas, and she helps us network with other educators, sharing materials and information. Busch especially appreciates being able to vet her projects with a whole school community across the curriculum, which she can do because of our size and the fact that she values the dedication of our staff. The university has included us as partners in grants, appreciating the connection with the private school community and the opportunity to be important stewards of education in their community, a critical aspect of their mission.

Consider the opportunities that universities provide to support excellence in your school. Reach out to a local institution of higher learning. Do not be afraid of a "no." It just might be that the university may not have a way to connect at that particular time. Universities need community partners. They want to have an impact.

THE SHALOM ROOM

MARY GRACE
LENTZ

Kindergarten Teacher
and Student Support
Specialist, Seattle Jewish
Community School

The kindergarten students enter the classroom and prepare for the morning. One student is accidentally bumped by several of the students as they hang up coats and put away lunches. Shira (not her real name) begins to cry, and her body is shaking. She is about to have a “meltdown.” Shira is escorted into the Shalom Room, a sensory room, and is guided through the “hug machine,” a deep pressure device designed by Temple Grandin, to help individuals calm themselves when feeling overwhelmed. After using the hug machine, Shira hops onto the platform swing and covers herself with a weighted blanket.

A few moments pass, and she is no longer crying. Her body is calm, and she is almost ready to reenter the classroom. She ends her time in the Shalom Room by sitting on a ball and immersing her hands in the sand table before calmly reentering the classroom and beginning her day. Through practice and guidance, Shira knew exactly what she needed to do to come to calm, and she was able to join in the morning activities successfully.

At SJCS, through the generosity of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, we are learning how sensory processing differences can impact learning. We designed a sensory room through the expertise and guidance of our OT consultant, Bek Wiltbank. We are learning how to support students with sensory needs both in the classroom and through the use of our Shalom Room.

The Shalom Room is used as a place to teach our students calming techniques in order to be functional in the school environment. The goal in using the Shalom Room is to develop practical skills that can be transferred into the school environment as well as help students reenter the learning environment successfully.

“I need to use the Shalom Room, I’m feeling overwhelmed.” Abe (not his real name) begins to use the climbing ladder. He goes up and down three times, and then curls up in the hammock swing, covering up with a blanket. Relaxing music is playing in the background. Abe is humming. “Can I sit on the ball with the

headphones?” He switches to the ball, moving his body back and forth. He soon transitions to the sand table. “I am feeling ready to go back into the classroom.” In the past, this student would cry, hide out under the table, and/or yell at his classmates. Now, he is able to integrate appropriately in the classroom.

Increasingly, educators are coming to realize that people naturally experience and respond differently to different stimuli. For most of us, this process occurs automatically and without effort. Our environment changes—we move from an empty room to a crowded room, we change clothing, loud music comes on—and we don’t think much of it. But for some, this process does not develop as effectively as it should. And as the Rambam said, “a healthy mind and soul is supported by a healthy body,” נפש בריאה בגוף בריא.



BROADCASTING EXCELLENCE

ALAN
RUSONIK

Head of School, Jewish
Academy of Orlando

It's 7:59 a.m. A familiar template appears on SmartTV screens in every classroom in the school. Parents gather in the library to watch, an impromptu ritual before they leave for the office or the gym. A recognizable song, a cha-cha-cha-type melody with the words "boker tov," repeats itself over and over again. WJAO, the television news broadcast of the Jewish Academy of Orlando, is about to go on the air.

It's 8:00 am. "One, two, three...you're on the air!"

For over 10 years, our school day has begun with a live news broadcast. What is unique about the news broadcast is that it is written by our students, produced by our students, directed by our students and performed by our students. The teachers act as guides and facilitators to ensure the program's success. The news broadcast is just one of the features of our highly touted technology program.

these parts of the broadcast. The broadcast includes news, weather and sports, as well as a feature of the day, including such topics as "Rega Shel Ivrit" (a Hebrew minute) and "Yisrael Sheli" (My Israel). When asked about the news broadcast, 8th grader Aaron Soll said, "It gives me a chance to utilize my knowledge of technology in a real world application."

Technology at the Jewish Academy of Orlando does not begin and end with our news broadcast. Our school is among 87 schools nationally recognized by Apple as an Apple Distinguished School. Apple recognized us for our use of iPads, Apple Smartboards, and MacBooks as a framework for curriculum. We were designated by Apple as one of a group of schools with exemplary learning environments and centers of innovation, leadership and educational excellence.



The Jewish Academy of Orlando has long been on the forefront of integrating technology into the classroom. Our teachers are digital educators actively engaged in a modern learning environment in order to nurture literacy, critical thinking, communication and collaboration.

This is exemplified in the daily news broadcast. The students in 5th through 8th grade work in front of and behind the camera. They work the audio, video and the mixer-board. They research the news and write the copy. They are actively involved in the entire process. The broadcast begins with our national anthem, the pledge of allegiance, Hatikvah and the brachah la'asok be-divrei Torah. Our youngest students are assigned on a rotational basis to sing

Technology is not something that drives learning but rather is the vehicle that helps transport our students' knowledge. Our vision is to prepare students for the 21st century, and our investment in our technology program has been a significant and tangible step toward this goal.

The best part of my day is at the end of the broadcast, the student representatives from the younger grades signoff the broadcast by saying, "Have a nice day at the Jewish Academy! Shalom!" I can go back to my office and begin my day with a smile and a renewed sense of purpose. Today is going to be another great day at the Jewish Academy!

LAURENCE
KUTLER

Head of School, Herzliah,
Montreal

STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY FOR ISRAEL

The Herzliah Student Leadership Israel Advocacy Program is designed to give students an in-depth understanding of Israel, her strengths, her role in innovation and technology and her place in the global community. Our goal is to empower and inspire our students to become engaged in the process of advocacy through information and education.

Presently offered to our Secondary V students, the program will be expanding to include Secondary III and Secondary IV. This will enable us to offer a broader program and devote more time to strengthening our students' skills.

The objective is to arm our students with the information needed to confidently and intelligently speak in defense of Israel, and to teach them how to counter and educate those presenting negative and erroneous propaganda about Israel.

Our comprehensive curriculum includes a historical review of Zionism. Students learn about different perspectives of Zionism. Through multimedia and guest lecturers, they are shown how Zionism is understood by different segments of society, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

The Middle East conflict is presented in context of Israel today. Students study the ethics behind decisions and actions taken by the Israelis and look at the morality of both sides of the conflict. They learn that culture dictates morality and that sometimes what is moral for one side may be repugnant to the other.

Students are empowered to become politically engaged in the process of advocacy. As part of the curriculum, we give our students the tools to effectively navigate the political system by teaching them about political parties and by exposing them to guest lecturers, which brings perspective and context.

As part of the expansion of the program, we are setting up a new school group called Club Z.

Once a week students will be treated to a free lunch and be taken on a virtual trip to Israel. These "tours" will be led by our Israeli teachers and will include dynamic and knowledgeable guest speakers from our community and beyond.

We plan to offer off-site retreats where the group will engage in discussions and will cover all aspects of Israel including her people, geography, history, industry and political and religious landscape.

With the impending construction of our new school, which will include a state-of-the-art multimedia lab, Club Z students, in conjunction with our sister school in Beer Sheva, will be taught how to produce in-house radio programs and will use these skills to research, write and produce a series of programs that highlight many facets of Israeli life.

In order to physically connect our students to Israel, we plan to organize a weeklong mission to Israel for some of our most passionate and invested students, who would be accompanied by two school professionals and a delegation of Canadian parliamentarians.

We are committed to the importance of complementing formal education with dynamic, experiential opportunities. We believe that it is through these programs that the knowledge acquired is internalized, synthesized and applied to the student's reality.



MOOT BEIT DIN 2015

More than one hundred students from twenty-five Jewish high schools across North America met in Los Angeles, April 16-19, to consider the ethics of social media within a Jewish framework as part of the annual Moot Beit Din competition.

Moot Beit Din challenges Jewish high school students to examine the ethical dimensions of Jewish law through creative engagement with contemporary situations. Each team of students prepares a written decision and presents an oral argument before a panel of rabbis, scholars and lawyers, in response to a case. This year's case focused on social media, Internet privacy and communication ethics. Examining Jewish legal perspectives on privacy and derogatory speech, participants responded to the question, Does a school administrator have the right to suspend a student based on information acquired from the app SnapChat?

Leading up to the competition, participants and their school advisors spent Shabbat together as a pluralistic community, participating in text-study sessions, prayer services and team-building activities. Through sharing in these experiences and the competition, students formed a vibrant network of committed and intellectually curious Jewish teenagers that will likely extend for years to come.

For more information about Moot Beit Din, reach out to Yael Steiner at yael@ravsak.org.



Mazal tov to the winners of the 2015 Moot Beit Din Competition!

Brandeis Division

1st place
Herzliah High School

2nd place
Donna Klein
Jewish Academy

Kagan Division

1st place
Milken Community
High School

2nd place
Scheck Hillel
Community School

Ruach Award

Tarbut V'Torah

Cardozo Division

1st place
The Weber School

2nd place
Tanenbaum CHAT
Kimel Centre

Bader Ginsburg Division

1st place
American Hebrew Academy

2nd place
Gann Academy



“

“Moot Beit Din cases vividly show the students how classical Jewish law helps us make sense of important new challenges.”

Rabbi Neal Scheidlin
Milken Community High School, advisor

”

“Moot Beit Din has given me the chance as a pluralistic, relatively un-observant Jew to connect with my Judaism in an academic and spiritual sense unlike anything else.”

Lily Greenberg Call
San Diego Jewish Academy, participant

Herzliah High School

When Max sent the Snapchat to Jonathan, it is as if he had thrown the Snapchat into the garbage. Jonathan taking the screenshot was like retrieving it from the garbage. Max made the message accessible to everyone and proved that he did not care in whose hands it ended up by sending it via Snapchat, an app that allows its users to easily save and share messages. According to Perush Be'er HaGolah, one is allowed to read a letter in the garbage since it is there due to the fact that it is of minor importance.

We can conclude that a SnapChat in general is halachically equivalent to a letter thrown in the garbage showing us that it does generally fall under the takana of cherem d'Rabeinu Gershom.

American Hebrew Academy

Appeals to the cherem of Rabeinu Gershom are moot, however, since Max gave up any expectation of privacy by broadcasting his message to four people. When the sender does not guard the privacy of his verbal or written communication such as by speaking loudly in a public place or by sending a postcard, there is no restriction on others hearing it or reading it.

The Case

A high school student (Max) sends a Snapchat with a derogatory message about another student (Elizabeth). The recipient (Jonathan) saves the image and shares it with the school principal. Examining Jewish legal perspectives on privacy and lashon hara, each Moot Beit Din team responded to the question: Was Jonathan allowed to share the Snapchat with the principal? Does the principal have the right to suspend a student based on information acquired from SnapChat? At the root of the case is the question of whether the takana (edict) of cherem de'Rabeinu Gershom, which prohibits one from reading someone else's mail, applies to Snapchat: an app that allows user to send messages which automatically delete.

Read excerpts from the decisions of the first place teams in this year's Moot Beit Din competition, responding to this last question.

The Weber School

The takana does not apply in this case. Max willingly sent Jonathan the SnapChat. Thus, at the very least, the SnapChat was Jonathan's personal mail, and he was not a prying third party. The SnapChat is like an ephemeral, oral statement. Once expressed, the damage is done. Additionally, the takana should not apply as the information was sent to more than three people (i.e., at least four), hence making the information public.

Milken Community High School

On Snapchat, once a picture is sent, the sender does not have access to it anymore, and the image will disappear from the receiver's phone after a maximum of ten seconds. However,

the receiver has the ability to "screenshot" his screen before the image disappears, which will allow the receiver to keep possession of the image for as long as he desires. Every Snapchat user consents to this when they agree to Snapchat's Terms and Conditions. When one sends a message through the application, one is immediately releasing ownership of it. Therefore, the Snapchat that Max sent does not fall under the takana, and Jonathan was right in showing the Snapchat to the principal.

“

“Moot Beit Din is a unique opportunity for students to compete nationally on an intellectual Jewish level. The national network of students that forms through Moot Beit Din is invaluable for our community and the Jewish future.”

Dr. Bruce Powell
New Community Jewish High School,
head of school

”

“I was able to socialize with like-minded teens, learn new things about my heritage, culture and religion, and expand my knowledge and abilities. I am extremely grateful for such a life-changing experience.”

Hani Abramson
David Posnack Jewish Day School, participant



BUILDING SCHOOLWIDE INNOVATION: TWO CRITICAL PLANES

GRANT
LICHTMAN

For at least a decade K-12 educators have recognized that schools must change in order to prepare our students for the challenges of a rapidly changing world. The word “innovation” has become a catch-all for those changes. Unfortunately, for many schools, innovation remains a phrase or vague commitment, and substantive change that builds value for the school in a time of expanding choice and dynamic markets remains elusive. When the external environment is changing, both in terms of the school’s customer base and in what our students need for their future success, there is a direct tie between being innovative and providing the best quality of service to your customers. Recognizing that innovation is now a key ingredient of excellence in education, some schools have begun to take a much more systematic, intentional approach to shifting away from an industrial age model of learning. It is through the progress of these schools—private, public, charter, and faith-based—that we can start to see a model of effective school innovation evolve.

I have had the unique privilege of visiting more than 100 K-12 schools in the last two years, and in virtually every one I found a spark of what the school leaders called “innovation.” A principal or head of school says, “You just have to see what Ms. Jones is doing in her classroom; it is SO exciting. This is what we want learning at our school to look like in the future!” Off I go to see Ms. Jones and her passionately engaged students, working deeply on an interdisciplinary project, noisily collaborating on idea walls, or building something remarkable in the school garden or maker space. The teacher, site leader, and students all know they are engaged in something special; this is the class they love to teach, to come to each day, and to show off to visitors. This class paints a vivid picture of what is powerful about the learning experience at the school, why families send their children here as opposed to all of the other options available to them.

But on my way to and from this class I glance sideways into the rooms we are passing, through closed doors at rooms with neat, rigid rows of desks, students sitting quietly listening to a teacher lecture at the white board or click through a PowerPoint that has not changed in years. Students at the back of the class stare out the window or draw pictures on notepaper. One hand rises at a time to answer the question that the teacher asks, a question she knows the answer to, and about which the students don’t really care. The differences between these classrooms and the one exemplar shown to the inquisitive visitor are stark, particularly in terms of pedagogy and student engagement.

In these schools, there are brushfires of innovation burning, but will they ever coalesce into a conflagration? If so, how? Is innovation systematic at this school, or episodic, isolated, and ephemeral? Does the school have a powerful vision of learning under which innovations can unite? Do the teachers and students at the end of one hall even know what is going on in Ms. Jones’ class that is radically different from what is going on in their own? Are schools and school leaders merely “checking off the box” of innovation, or are they truly on a pathway that will change learning in a world where the rate of change threatens to make the current learning system irrelevant? As Beth Holland questioned recently in an Edutopia blog, is innovation that does not have a significant impact on student learning innovative at all?

Many schools can point to a class, program or new practice and say, “We have teachers who are flipping the classroom or who ‘do’ PBL or use a new iPad cart this year.” Many schools are piloting a makerspace, an idea laboratory, or a robotics course. These are the brushfires, and in my work I find that this approach to innovation *may* be successful depending on a wide range of factors, but that lacking a truly systematic approach, real change at the school will likely take 12-15 years.

Schools that are serious about changing the learning model for the current generation decide to take a different approach. They understand that these pilot projects reflect a fundamentally different set of learning goals than what is taking place in the traditional classroom. They understand that we cannot attain “21st century” learning outcomes from a teacher-centric pedagogy. School communities

that are serious about substantive change are much more intentional about shifting their practices, and in these cases we see remarkable transformation across the school in as little as 3-4 years.

PLANE ONE: PEDAGOGY

I have been working for the last several years to synthesize the key elements of this more systematic approach. Much of my thinking is indelibly informed by Bo Adams, chief learning and innovation officer at Mt. Vernon Presbyterian School in Atlanta. Bo has focused his team’s cutting-edge work on re-imagining and systematizing a different learning process. Two years ago Bo shared with us his layers of a successful “pedagogical master plan,” or PMP (Figure 1). He imagines each of the nodes in this figure as a layer of a set of blueprints, just as an architectural team would draft for a building project. If a school builds this set of blueprints, Bo argues, they will build a systemically strong and sustainable ecosystem based on what we know are the *keys to great learning*, which are represented by the nodes on the figure.

These are very different than how many schools organize their operational thinking around nodes of grade level, subject, division, budget line item, and building space; or around vague strategic goals like “hiring and retaining excellent faculty,” “increasing diversity” or “using the latest technology.” These elements are the core of what I call “zero-based” strategic thinking, in which schools align

Figure 1: Key Elements of a Pedagogical Master Plan



their thinking, planning and resource allocation to the key elements of the core value of schools: *learning*. Schools that adopt this plane of innovation understand that great learning *must* drive our vision, our resources and our community.

This approach focuses on breaking, rather than continuously re-enforcing, the silos that separate school stakeholders. They build teams comprised of teachers, administrators, trustees, and often students that have a responsibility and allegiance to promoting the schools vision through the lens of learning, not through the lens of subject, grade level, or department. These teams use simple design thinking-based routines to ask expansive questions and prototype options that integrate with the overall vision. As these teams move forward over time, their work forms a systematic set of programs and practices that mutually enforce the vision.

Some senior administrators and trustees feel uncomfortable, even threatened, that decisions about program and pedagogy, for example, are discussed and forwarded by diverse teams that include a much greater voice of classroom teachers, and even students. They feel that these “strategic” decisions belong to “leaders”—and this is exactly the point. In a time of rapid change, effective organizations promote strategic discussions and even decision-making across a much wider group. We need and want more stakeholders to help imagine, design, and implement potentially innovative solutions. We need all of our stakeholders, not just senior administrators and trustees, to be empowered as “educator-leaders” in their respective jobs.

PLANE TWO: GETTING THERE

While a systematic pedagogical master plan is our set of blueprints for *what* great learning is going to look like at the school, the second plane of innovation must articulate “how we get there,” the steps of building a culture of successful school innovation. My current thinking expands on a graphic used by Timothy Knoster and others adapted from the Managing Complex Change Model first published in 1987. I took the Knoster version and expanded it based on my work with schools and districts around the country, and for now I think it represents a complete stairway (though likely not a linear sequence) of steps that are necessary for a school to evolve into an organization capable of implementing a forward-thinking pedagogical master plan (Figure 2).

What this graphic makes clear is that each step on the stairway is critical; if one step is missing the school does not achieve success. Many schools I visit have real strength in some of these areas, but they might have a weakness in one or more other steps of the stairway. That is fine; that is where we can focus our attention and resources. And while the process is nonlinear, there are two of the steps that absolutely have to be in place before the rest: leadership and vision. Without strong leadership that wants innovation to occur, nothing else will follow. And without the community-wide development of, and support for, a shared vision of great learning, we do not have a North Star towards which everything else will align.

I spent roughly a third of my recent book, *#EdJourney: A Roadmap to the Future of Education*, sharing narrative examples and a more full articulation of many of these steps. Here are just a few elements of each step on the stairway.

Figure 2: Stairway of Successful Innovation

Leadership	Vision	Inclusiveness	Timeline	Skills	Resources	Commitment	Communication	=	Success
Leadership	Vision	Inclusiveness	Timeline	Skills	Resources	Commitment	Missing	=	Disconnected
Leadership	Vision	Inclusiveness	Timeline	Skills	Resources	Missing	Communication	=	On and off
Leadership	Vision	Inclusiveness	Timeline	Skills	Missing	Commitment	Communication	=	Not serious
Leadership	Vision	Inclusiveness	Timeline	Missing	Resources	Commitment	Communication	=	Ineffective
Leadership	Vision	Inclusiveness	Missing	Skills	Resources	Commitment	Communication	=	Wanderin
Leadership	Vision	Missing	Timeline	Skills	Resources	Commitment	Communication	=	Silos
Leadership	Missing	Inclusiveness	Timeline	Skills	Resources	Commitment	Communication	=	Confusion
Missing	Vision	Inclusiveness	Timeline	Skills	Resources	Commitment	Communication	=	Failure to Launch

Leadership

- Modeling what it means to take a risk and learn from failure.
- Encouraging the community to take risks that promote innovation.
- Developing a model of effective distributed leadership.
- Willingness to launch pilots (and retire old programs) without long-term studies that prove a new direction is right.
- Willingness to embrace discomfort, and encourage others to move outside of comfort zones.

Vision

- Creating and articulating a learning-focused vision that differentiates the school from competitors.
- Collaboratively establishing the “North Star” towards which the entire school community aligns its work.
- Looking realistically at the future of the school, its market, and strategic options that may be very different from those of current conditions.

Inclusiveness

- Building strategic discussions into many job descriptions.
- Breaking silos for strategic and tactical thinking and implementation.
- Empathetically understanding the needs and desires of user groups before settling on new directions.
- Listening for what is most important at the school across stakeholder groups.

Timeline

- Developing and holding to an innovation timeline.
- Shortening the time from “talk” to “do.”
- Trying and testing pilots on a more frequent basis.
- Building processes for ongoing change on the basis of small, frequent iterations as opposed to large, infrequent strategic plans.

Skills

- Increasing innovation DNA in the faculty and staff.
- Training and use of design thinking-based skills.
- Hiring based on past evidence of creativity, team-based collaboration, and growth mindset.

Resources

- Aligning resources in support of the all-school vision.

Commitment

- Working at a pace that is sustainable given the many responsibilities of community members.
- Enshrining a commitment to innovation in the school principles; ensuring the ethos is not fragile when leadership changes.

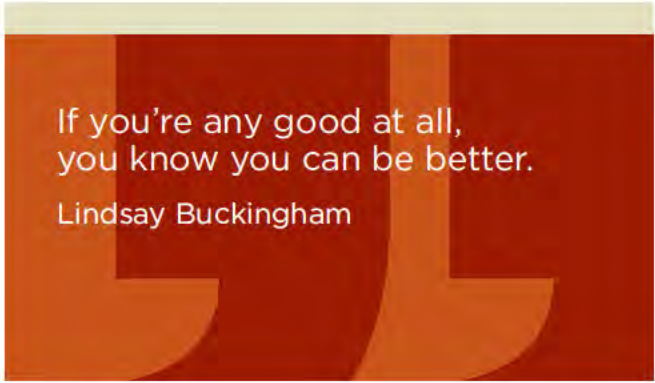
Communication

- Systematic, ongoing communication that support the vision to both internal and external audiences.
- Participation by many stakeholders (most importantly teachers) in frequent, supportive communication about the school vision, and how it is implemented every day.

True innovation in schools, the conflagration of those disparate brushfires, occurs as the *systematic* intersection of these two planes, an intersection at many points both in time and space. (I wish I knew how to draw that, but I don't, so use your imagination!) Schools and districts are systems, which is why Bo's metaphor of an architect's blueprints is so essential. No architect designs a building without coordinating the good work of engineers, designers, users, and builders. Foundations, roof designs, plumbing, walls, and electrical layers all work together as a system, or the building fails. So if we are going to re-imagine a learning system that better prepares our students for their futures in a rapidly changing, increasingly ambiguous world, why would we not design our learning organization system with the same degree of thought, detail, and care?

The two planes are equally important. They represent the next level of commitment for those schools and school leaders who are serious about transforming school from what it has been in the past to what it might, or indeed must, be in the future. There is a tremendous amount of work and detail involved in implementing both of these planes, and in that detail lies the exciting, albeit sometimes uncomfortable, tactical work to make it happen.

But rather than prescribing a cookbook answer for all schools, I prefer to ask questions that provoke thinking: Where is your school in this process? What are you willing to tackle? Are your school leadership discussions mindful of both the PMP plane and the Stairway plane? Which elements represent your strengths and which your weaknesses? Do you see this as a linear pathway or roiling stew? Most importantly, does your school have the collective courage to start the work of imagining and designing a great learning ecosystem that will best prepare our students for their future?



If you're any good at all,
you know you can be better.

Lindsay Buckingham

EXCELLENT QUESTIONS FOR EXCELLENT SCHOOLS

AMY L.
SALES

Excellent schools are high on inquiry, exhibiting the same curiosity that they try to inculcate in their students. Unfortunately, many schools lack a culture of inquiry and fail to see the value of regularly surveying members of their school community. In part, this failure may be attributed to a misunderstanding of what such research is and what it can accomplish for the school.

THE ARGUMENT FOR SCHOOL RESEARCH

Studies involving your stakeholders are interventions that benefit the school both through the process of the study (how it involves people in developing questions and getting and using answers) and through the results (what you learn from the data). Such studies need not be limited to a survey format but can gather qualitative data through interviews and focus groups. These methods provide a precious opportunity to sit with your stakeholders and listen to their stories, thoughts, feelings and ideas. Indeed, there is no better way to learn what is on their minds and how they perceive the school.

School research should not be a onetime event but rather an ongoing activity. You need to conduct periodic studies because your key question can change, the people you need to hear from can change, and certainly the situation of your school can change.

These studies release you from your own mindset and expose you to different ways of thinking about school matters. They help you see your school through the eyes of others: current and prospective parents, board members, funders, members of the community, and the like. Moreover, if you ask your question of different stakeholder groups, you will be able to seek interconnections among viewpoints—where they converge, diverge, or suggest potential synergies. Does your school have the same reputation with current parents as it does with potential parents? Are lapsed donors' ideas for the school's growth and improvement different from those of current donors? Do teachers and parents hold the same views of academic competition and workload? You need multiple viewpoints to answer these questions.

Moreover, research is an extraordinary engagement tool. Regardless of whether people participate in the research process by creating and asking the questions or by offering their views and opinions, they are playing a role in assessing and improving the school. Being involved in the process leads to a sense of ownership and a sense of mattering to the school community and its future.

GETTING STARTED

To begin to build a research practice, you need to answer three questions for your first study: What is your key question; that is, what do you want to know? Who has answers? Why are you asking?

What do you want to know?

In conducting any study, the answers you get will be only as relevant, useful and interesting as the questions you ask. You want to ask questions that are of import to your school. If you already have the answer to a question and are asking only to be polite, it is not a great question. If your question can be answered in a single word (“yes” or “no”) it is also not a great question. Excellent questions should yield data that make a difference—by educating and inspiring stakeholders, and animating action.

The following questions were proffered in a recent workshop for professional and volunteer leaders interested in developing studies for their day schools:

- How do we develop our board?
- How do we structure and fund professional development?
- Why are families leaving the school?
- How do we get our message out to the community and increase enrollment?
- How do we market to constituencies we are not yet reaching?
- How do we retain students?
- What is the students' perspective on academic pressure and competition?
- How can the school offer services to students who need extra help but who want to remain in mainstream classrooms?
- How many day schools can our community sustain?
- How can we keep a small school feeling now that our school has grown fivefold?

- How do we balance our curriculum given all of the demands on the school day? What is the best mix for parents, teachers and students?
- How do we engage parents to create a better sense of community?

Questions like these can be a starting point to developing your study. Implied in these questions are the desire to know about the school's current performance in these areas and to gather ideas for growth or improvement. Start with your key question and then develop the other questions that will help generate a full understanding of the topic.

Whom are you asking?

Once you have your question, you need to determine who has answers. Think expansively and seek diverse perspectives. If you want information from or about the board, include current, past and potential members. Of past members, include those who dropped out and those who left at the end of their term. For example, what is your board's reputation in the local community? Consider what you can learn from past, current and potential trustees as well as donors, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, students, community members. Solicit input from all the possible perspectives that could help you understand your school and its opportunities.

Why are you asking?

Utility is the key criterion for data. The answers you get from your study should be judged by how useful they are and how well they are used. Data can inform planning. They can help you in priority setting, evaluation, resource allocation, decision making and policy formation. They can provide material for advocating for your school. They can help you make the case for your school to potential donors, parents and students. Data can help educate your stakeholders about the school and its drive to achieve excellence.

Do not ask your question if you do not want to know the answer, if you do not intend to use the results of your inquiry, or if you are unwilling to provide participants with feedback. When people participate in a study, they give of their time and they share their thoughts and feelings because they want to be helpful. The research enterprise is undermined (as is your school's goodwill) when the question is asked but answers are ignored or hidden.

GET ON THE WHEEL OF ACTION RESEARCH

The Wheel of Action Research portrays school research as a continuous activity. Once you have decided what you want to know, from whom and why, you can *design* a study to get the answers. The design includes the methods you will use (survey, interviews, focus groups, etc.), the specific questions to be asked, as well as a work plan with time, tasks and dollars. The second step on the wheel, *administration*, is gathering the data which will then be *analyzed, interpreted* and *fed back* to participants and users. Once the data are understood, put them on the *planning* table so that they can inform *action*. Action should create a new reality in your school,

an opportunity to move to a higher level of excellence in a particular area. With the new reality, you begin again, to design a new round of inquiry to assess impact and to uncover what more might be possible and desirable.

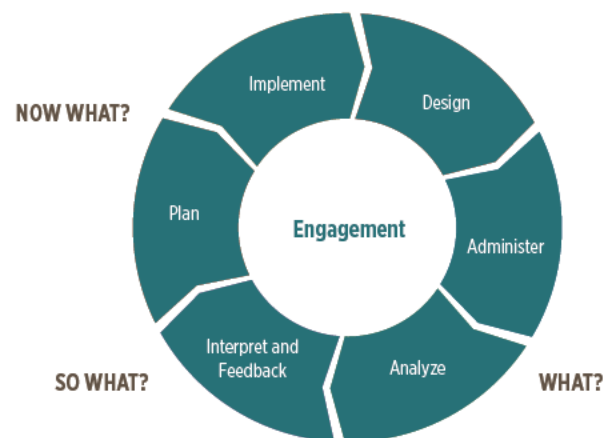
Around the outside of the wheel are three key questions: *What? So what? Now what?* First understand your current situation or performance as seen by your stakeholders. Then consider the implications of that information. And then plan to take action. This is not research *lishma*, but research for the sake of doing.

Engagement is in the center of the circle because studies are one of the best engagement tools you will find for your school. Involve others at every step of the way—in the decision to undertake a study, in establishing and clarifying the question, in designing the study and gathering the data, in working through the results and considering their meaning and application, and in planning action that will positively affect your school. Participants in the study are engaged by being asked the question and having the opportunity to express their ideas and feelings. They are further engaged by hearing the results, having the opportunity to discuss them, and seeing the changes that emerge from them.

CLOSING ARGUMENT

Get on the wheel and stay on the wheel. Ask important, relevant and interesting questions, and listen to and use the answers they stimulate. The answers tell you if you have achieved excellence in the eyes of your stakeholders and what more you might do to grow and improve. The process of the study engages your stakeholders in generating much needed information for the school's future. Excellent questions with an ongoing research process can make for an excellent school.

Wheel of Action Research



TRISCHOOL SHABBATON

This spring, more than 170 students and 20 staff members from Chicagoland Jewish High School, Frankel Jewish Academy near Detroit and Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy near Kansas City came together for a trischool shabbaton in Palatine, Illinois. Organized by Rabbi Zach Silver of Chicagoland, Aron Wolgel of Frankel, and Todd Clauer of Hyman Brand, the shabbaton was envisioned as an opportunity to bring together students from across the Midwest to spend Shabbat together, and to develop a stronger bond between these three schools.

Over the course of the shabbaton, students participated in team-building activities, tefillah, singing and sports. On Shabbat afternoon, students experienced a model Knesset and coalition-building program. Each group became responsible for learning the central tenets of a political party in Israel and then building a coalition around core issues in Israeli society, including whether there should be mandatory service in the IDF, the debate over civil marriage in Israel, and the status of the territories.

Frankel freshman Sophie Gawel reflected on the opportunity to spend Shabbat with students from other Jewish high schools. "During services, as my new and old friends and I welcomed in Shabbat, I felt a real connection: a connection to those around me, and to the Jewish community as a whole. A group of Jewish teens praying together had never felt more powerful to me." Rabbi Zach Silver shared, "Students at CJHS remarked how special it was to meet new friends from throughout the Midwest."

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ENRICHMENT

The Midrash states that Hashem chose Betzalel by pointing to his name in a book that listed every person who ever was or ever will be born. What is the meaning of this? The message is that just as Betzalel had a specific purpose for which he was chosen, so too every person has a distinct calling. How can we as educators help enkindle in our students the greatness for which they were created? Personal excellence happens when we tap into our own and others' talents and strengths. Excellence is not reserved for the few. It is inside all of us. It is possible to elicit excellence from each of our students.

It is Wednesday, 12:30 pm, during the winter semester of Enrichment Clusters. Three hundred children are bustling to attend their Cluster, one of forty learning opportunities located throughout the SAR Academy building in Riverdale, New York, and forty-plus faculty members, parents, and grandparents are about to share an area of strength, interest or passion with children who possess those strengths, interests or passions. It is not an after-school program lodged in the middle of the day, nor is it a version of indoor recess. Schoolwide enrichment is a celebration of excellence, in ourselves and in children.

SHARON
MARSON

TUNITY EXCELLENCE: DUPLICATION FOR ALL

A number of years back as the second grade enrichment teacher, working with small groups of high performing reading and math students, I was repeatedly approached by other second graders asking, “When is my turn for enrichment?” It haunted me. When was their turn? Sam, a precocious child reading a bit below grade level, was the child to ask how to navigate an app. Allie was not in my math group, but every day she noticed a scarf I was wearing or that my shirt went well with my shoes. I knew we could get creative about answering the children’s earnest question.

Having been inspired by the work of my teacher Joseph Renzulli, a seminal thinker and researcher in gifted education, who said, “Every child should have the chance to be exceptional without exception,” I suggested a plan for our school modeled on a broader conception of giftedness and human potential, a model that explores a discipline in depth and enables each student to discover and take pride in the gifts and talents with which she or he is endowed. With the support and guidance of SAR Academy’s principal, Rabbi Binyamin Krauss, enrichment clusters, a core component in

Renzulli’s work, is the delivery vehicle we established for this mission.

The clusters are organized around major disciplines, interdisciplinary themes, or cross-disciplinary topics. They are built on inquiry, advanced content, and authentic methodology, which allow students to secure and then apply new skills to real-world issues that are personally meaningful. Enrichment clusters are a means for disseminating enrichment pedagogy to all students, founded on the belief that everyone has the potential to demonstrate gifted behavior and express excellence. It does not assume everyone has an IQ in the gifted range; rather it suggests that when children are given opportunities that help gifts emerge, they can exhibit gifted behavior. Research shows that interest is more predictive for achievement than standardized measurements of intelligence. Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset*, writes, “Our society tends to think geniuses are born, not made, but it is clear from the history of so many geniuses that motivation is a huge component.”

Our program at SAR Academy offers two semesters of nine to twelve week duration for third through fifth graders, one nine week semester for second graders, and an

introductory six week program for first graders. In total over the year, the school provides over a hundred different offerings. The challenging learning pursued reflects the project-based learning approach, and as such each enrichment cluster has a question that drives the exploration. The exploration incorporates elements of gifted-education pedagogy by pursuing advanced and rigorous content aimed at escalating students’ performance, integrating historical content, using advanced vocabulary, investigative activities and inductive learning, encouraging creative production, higher-level thinking and open-ended questioning, and making use of advanced resources and reference materials. Authentic methodology, which is part of the rigorous exploration, introduces tools of the trade needed to accomplish tasks within the cluster along with following investigative methodology of practicing professionals in the real world. Many of our enrichment clusters welcome a visiting speaker, a practitioner in a related field of study to act as both a resource for the students’ inquiry as well as to model what is possible as a 21st century real world problem-solver.

Additionally, our program aligns with Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence

theory, which provides a framework beyond IQ for looking at students' diverse abilities and individual strengths in a variety of areas. Our wide array of enrichment clusters address the diversity of ability and strength children possess. Offerings include Aquarium Builders Society, Game Design Studio, Four Star Dining Review Forum, iBook Publishing, Building Bridges Institute, CodeKids, The Baseball Project, Monkey Business, Graphic Design Studio, Kilometer Kids, Invention Convention, EcoDetectives, World Drumming Culture, Lego and the Mishkan, Dog Lovers Society, Start a Business, and many, many more.

As schoolwide enrichment coordinator, I build this program each semester considering overall what is appropriate to offer each grade(s) and the particular children within those grades. I then work with each of our talented faculty members individually, as well as select parents and grandparents, to elicit and consider an area of interest, strength, or passion. Together we develop a way to package their interest area and channel it in developmentally challenging ways for our students. One period a week during the school day teachers, tech educators, maintenance staff, guidance department, principals, secretaries, business office workers, parents, and grandparents guide our children's explorations. Faculty members often find gratification in sharing their passions, and some rediscover an aspect of themselves for which they previously had no time. The monetary cost of this program is primarily the nominal amount needed for each cluster's materials. This program is replicable, and can reflect each school's needs, as I see when consulting at other schools in helping them establish an enrichment cluster program or to elevate their work in this vein.

Our school days are full, more than full. Is there time for a program like this? Our adherence to the "more time is better" argument fails to take into account research indicating just the opposite. For example, international comparison studies report that schools in eight of the

eleven nations that surpass the US in an assessment of math instruction spent less time on math instruction than do American schools. In the corporate world, at Google and other innovative companies, 20% of time is set aside for employees to work on their passion and interest. Gmail was a result of 20% time.

Since our ultimate goal is to help children develop their interests and talents and understand how they can share their gifts with the world, each cluster's exploration applies their knowledge and is grounded by creating a product, service, or performance for an authentic audience. This deepens ownership of the learning and drives students to achieve greater excellence. These products, services and performances are infused into the broader community. For instance, we donate original handmade hats designed in Mad Hatters Studio to the Bronx Jewish Community Council; Sports Science Institute children visit the Hebrew Home to help seniors exercise; students in Science Is THE Story have their photographic and scientific work, "Shadow and Light," exhibited at a local café; and third and fourth graders in PC Builders Academy sell PCs they built from scratch as a fundraiser.

Educational researchers have long questioned whether standardized IQ is the entire story of giftedness. Dr. Scott Kaufman writes that Herbert Simon and K. Anders Ericsson, and others, have demonstrated in research findings, acquired expertise can trump preexisting ability, thereby allowing us to compensate for weaknesses and build strengths. Excellence can be developed. Our students intuited this, as seen in the reflection form they fill out. A second grader wrote, "Being in enrichment clusters helped me realize you can do anything when you try." Other children recorded the following: "School is to learn different things." "Sometimes things sound hard but you can do it." "I am really artistic." "I'm good at building computers." "I can put on a play without having stage fright." "It's important to put in effort." "Enrichment clusters are really exciting!" "I can do things that I thought I could

not." "Drumming isn't something you do, it's a passion." "When you try new things sometimes you love them." A first grader poetically penned, "The world is an open door and feel free to open it."

Imagine what can happen when we ask ourselves at what are we excellent. Imagine what happens when we share that excellence—our passions and talents and strengths—with small groups of children with similar strengths and talents during dedicated blocks of time. After all, we do not know what people are capable of until they tap into their strengths, interests, and passions. We didn't know what Einstein (who was considered by family members as almost backwards) was capable of or what possibility lay within him. Children are works in progress.

It is Wednesday, 12:30 pm. Three hundred children are bustling to attend their enrichment cluster where they encounter their unique excellence. No longer are only a select few of high performing reading or math students given the opportunity to participate in enrichment programming. A parent whose child struggles with traditional academic subjects said to me with great emotion, "Now my child feels really successful. Thank you for what you are doing." Another shared that Wednesday is a day her child refuses to be absent. "I'm not allowed to pull him out of school for a doctor's appointment on Wednesdays, and he has even pretended he is well when he has fever in order to not miss out," she relays. The children themselves ask, "How many days until next Wednesday?" and, "Do we get an extra week of enrichment clusters since we missed a session because of the snow day?"

What is excellence? Just ask the students; you will find there isn't a child who can't tell you when he or she is achieving. That is what our program is doing for children. We are giving students equal opportunities to have success and express their distinct excellence. They feel accomplished. They are happy. They are defining themselves as gifted in multitudinous ways. That is why they can't miss a moment of it.

SULAM 2.0: THE JEWISH LENS ON BOARD LEADERSHIP

By Orlee Turitz, Project Director

The final activities for RAVSAK's Sulam 2.0 program took place in Philadelphia at the North American Jewish Day School Conference in March. Participants and mentors joined together for sessions reflecting on the importance of day schools in the continuum of Jewish continuity. A field trip to Liberty Park fostered understanding about the meaning of symbols and institutions and how their underlying values transcend time and assume new interpretations in keeping with the times. One participant noted that "the community day school model is at a place where it must evolve to provide values-based education that comes from our tradition."

At the concluding dinner and final session participants and mentors shared their journeys through this program and the influence it has



had. Many spoke of how the program experience engrained in them the importance of embedding Jewish values and Jewish ethos in their schools and their responsibility to model these values in their own leadership. Throughout the year participants learned cutting-edge leadership techniques and tools, sharpening their skill and confidence to take on further leadership roles.

Six of the participants will step into board chair positions. Four schools went through head

transitions over the course of the year and greatly valued the support of the Sulam 2.0 program and particularly the mentors, who helped them through these turbulent times. Participants from the 10 pilot schools truly appreciated the cohort of peers from around the country and are seeking to find further opportunities to collaborate and learn from each other. "We need to bring community day schools together so that we can all figure out our big vision."



Learn it. Live it. Breathe it.

ROTHBERG INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

Study Abroad in English:

Undergraduate Programs
 Graduate Programs
 Summer Courses
 Tailor-Made & Faculty-Led
 Special Programs

Arts Programs
 Gap Year Programs
 Modern Hebrew Language
 Programs



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
 האוניברסיטה העברית
 בירושלים



Rothberg International School

✉ hebrewu@hebrewu.com
 ☎ 1.212.607.8520 / 1.800.404.8622
 🌐 <https://overseas.huji.ac.il>

SEVEN LESSONS IN PURSUIT OF BOARD EXCELLENCE

Through my work over the past ten years in board governance and as the architect of RAVSAK's Sulam 2.0 program in board development, I have seen firsthand the incredible progress that has been made in day school governance. Working with my colleagues who have led the charge toward best practices, I've seen many schools paying increased attention to the role of the board vis-à-vis the administration. Although it hasn't been easy, boards are pulling back from micromanaging school functions. More and more schools are engaged in conversations about performing self-evaluations, running tighter and more relevant board meetings, and thinking more strategically. School boards are keeping a closer eye on monetary matters like budgeting, faculty salaries, tuition and endowment.

But are these best practices to help us achieve board excellence? Excellence isn't meeting the standard, it is setting the standard. Excellence is the quality of being outstanding. To get to excellence you must first achieve the usual standards, and then you must break through them to the next level.

In their book *Scaling Up Excellence*, Robert Sutton and Huggy Rao uncover what it takes to build and identify pockets of excellence and to spread them to others. They offer seven lessons which, when paired with the governance principles Cathy Trower lays out in her groundbreaking *Practitioner's Guide to Governance as Leadership*, provide guidance for the pursuit of excellence in Jewish day school boards.

SPREAD A MINDSET

While Carol Dweck was not the first person to notice the effect of someone's mindset on his or her behaviors, her book *Mindset* made a big splash among behavioral professionals and educators alike. Dweck identifies a "growth mindset" that is essential for a love of learning, resilience and accomplishment. In a growth mindset people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work, and that brains and talent are just the starting point. Her conception of a growth mindset is perfectly suited for schools, as it is predicated on the belief that one can and should constantly desire to learn. This love of learning has always been a desired character trait for day school graduates.

But have we emphasized a learning mindset for the people who steer the institution? An excellent board will see itself as an incubator of ideas, not just a decision-making mechanism. Board members who embrace the growth mindset shift from an emphasis on making the best decisions to asking the best questions.

Traditionally, school boards see themselves as decision makers. The main function of the board is the vote, recording for posterity changes in the organization's culture or policy.

But while votes are important, what would it look like if the focus of every board were on learning, not deciding? Shifting the focus from the decision, an end, to learning, a process, creates a culture of experimentation, reflection and accountability. Pursuing excellence means perpetual inquiry in a quest to be better. Here are the kinds of questions that can stimulate excellence: In reviewing data, are our outcomes being met? How do we need to adapt to be more effective? Growth mindset environments are not afraid to take risks. That's where the real learning occurs. The excellent board supports experimentation, combined with healthy reflection and measurement to support attaining results. Together, this dynamic creates a creative and accountable learning atmosphere.

BANISH BOREDOM

As boards give more management decisions to the head of school, they often wonder what is left to talk about. The most consistent advice I received when I entered the upper echelons of board service was to line up votes before the board meeting begins, eliminating surprises. But here's the thing: meetings get very boring when committee reports and head of school reports occupy more and more of the board's agenda, and vote outcomes are predetermined. Board members begin to question their value. Bored board members become unhappy ambassadors. And boredom often morphs into micromanaging.

Boards need engaged and lively conversations. As Patrick Lencioni points out in his book *Death by Meeting*, boring meetings are the most painful problem in business, and certainly they can be more painful as a volunteer. To capture the attention of those around the table, discussions should be dynamic and vigorous around vital, complex issues. Too many executive committees handle all the controversial questions themselves, choosing to bring solutions to the board for voting. Board excellence is reflected in seeking critical conversations that stakeholders should be a part of, and encouraging spirited debate. Many times, board meetings are the most significant touchpoint board members have with the school. Imagine the difference in sending out invigorated ambassadors after lively debates that produce excitement about the thinking and learning going on throughout school!

You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Don't make money your goal. Instead, pursue the things you love doing, and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off you.

Maya Angelou

FOX OR HEDGEHOG?

The Greek poet Archilochus said, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins picks up on this analogy. In the hunt for excellence, organizations seek to attain "piercing clarity about how to produce long-term results, exercising relentless discipline to say 'No thank you' to opportunities that fail the hedgehog test." Boards are the hedgehog leaders of the school; they shoulder the responsibility for attaining this clarity and ensuring discipline to push aside all other distractions. Sutton and Rao assert that scaling excellence requires both addition and subtraction, peeling away the extraneous pieces that don't lead directly to the hedgehog idea. Too many schools, though, leave their mission or vision statement too generic to provide the clear guidance schools need.

A hedgehog is at the intersection of what you are passionate about, what you are best at and what drives your resources (in this case enrollment and donors). Getting to your hedgehog is a torturous task, forcing boards to dig deeper until identifying what makes your school unique. If you find it, you will give your school a gift that pays dividends for years to come. With this clarity of purpose, boards can devote targeted resources and administrators can work toward focused change getting the right people on the bus, piloting programs and evaluations, eliminating stale programs and unsuccessful curriculum pieces that get in the way.

TRAIN, TRY, TRACK, REPEAT

Even when we clarify our vision, we can rush to implement too many shiny new advances. When we commit to excellence, we want it today. We aren't always the most patient people. Students have only a few short years in a school, and this puts enormous pressure on leaders to attempt to make sweeping changes very quickly. Sutton and Rao warn of slipping into the illusion that achieving excellence is easy. It's not, and all parties need to be prepared for the hard road ahead of them, along with the timeframe that is usually much longer than desired. A combination of illusion and impatience can quickly lead to incompetence when changes are implemented quickly without training and trial periods. When asking teachers about failed initiatives, many have told me they were doing their best without formal training on the materials or felt incompetent in working within the new system. Administrators might point to the lack of resources available to them for professional development, or that the cost of the program was so high they couldn't afford to send teachers to training sessions. Fully competent professionals can be left to flounder through new waters without the proper skills and environment.

An excellent board will encourage and provide resources to train, try, track and repeat. Every new initiative should have the proper training, a pilot rollout, an evaluation and a new iteration, and a repetition of this cycle until the initiative is ready for full implementation.

MOVE MORE PEOPLE

In the journey to excellence, Claudia Kotchka, former VP at Procter & Gamble, advocates “moving a thousand people forward a foot at a time rather than moving one person forward by a thousand feet.” This advice flies in the face of accepted best practices for day schools. The head of school is the board’s only employee, and thus boards attempt to push the head of school a thousand feet: they hire a superstar, get him or her coaching, and emphasize head of school support and evaluation committees. Although the board only directly interacts with the head, the board’s focus should not be limited to the progress of the head. Part of evaluating the head of school’s job performance is measuring if the rest of the staff is moving forward as well. Heads are accountable to the board for professional development for their staff, consistent and meaningful evaluations and nurturing their progress. The board isn’t stepping into *how* these activity are implemented, simply *that* they are implemented and are achieving desired results of forward movement.

Studies have shown that the more staff are involved in the growth of the organization, the more they engage in the push toward excellence. Charles Duhigg, author of *Habit*, insists that instead of fighting changes, involved staff begin to suggest additional changes and implement them better. This responsibility and accountability engenders ownership, where all involved begin to feel “I own the place and the place owns me” (Sutton and Rao). Excellence is not a lonely sport.

LIVE YOUR VALUES

Scaling Up talks about linking short term realities to long term dreams. Does this resonate with day schools! Our dreams are nothing short of keeping our students attached to the Jewish community with a sense of love for our people and culture and deeply rooted Jewish values. The most effective way to pass on values is to be authentic role models of those values. That means that boards, along with all parts of the school, need to live the values they espouse.

Clarity around the interpretation of each value is essential to being able to make reliable decisions based upon them. Dig down to understand the implications of your values, especially if those values sometimes conflict.

Jewish schools love Jewish values; most have three to seven core values. So what do you do when you need to decide between two courses of action, each one embodying a different core value? One of the Disney Institute’s key learnings is the importance of establishing prioritized values. At Disney they call them the 4 Keys and they are powerful tools to be used as a litmus test for excellence. Having values isn’t enough if people can’t act upon those values. In order to facilitate empowered decision making, whether strategic or on the front line, all stakeholders need to be aware of the priority given to each value.

TEFILLA EDUCATION DOESN'T STOP DURING THE SUMMER

All Tefillot & Torah readings for the summer
Multi tiered Ani Tefilla commentary
Eicha & Kinot with translation

NEW! KOREN CAMP

ANI TEFILLA SIDDUR
(High School and Adults)

YOUTH SIDDUR
(Grades 3-5)

CHILDREN'S SIDDUR
(Grades K-2)

KOREN PUBLISHERS JERUSALEM
www.korenpub.com

Special discounts for schools and camps.
For bulk purchases, contact sales@korenpub.com

COLLABORATE IN TRUE PARTNERSHIP

A division of labor and responsibilities is necessary to guide governance decisions, but sometimes it can be an obstacle to excellence. As Trower puts it, “The requisite culture for governance as leadership rests more squarely with a meeting of the minds rather than a division of duties. ... Like partners in doubles tennis, neither party can afford to be particularly territorial or both will lose.” Boards and administrators need to see themselves as true partners. Partners collaborate.

Boards and administrators have differing jobs, and a good school will be clear on the alignment of duties for each side. But more importantly, administrators and boards have differing points of view. Capitalizing on these differences in crucial conversations about the school is the hallmark of pushing through to excellence. “The conversation is less about who calls the shots—jurisdiction, authority, distribution of power—and more about whether the board and management, together, have taken aim at the right target and discussed the implications of doing so. Clearly distinguishing the board’s ‘job’ from that of management may mean more clarity and comfort, but they come at the cost of governance and impact” (Trower).

Working slowly but intentionally, boards can take their strong foundation of best practices and push toward excellence. To quote Pat Riley, “Excellence is the gradual result of always striving to do better.”

To Learn More

Jim Collins, *Good to Great*

Disneyinstitute.com

Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*

Carol Dweck, *Mindset*

Patrick Lencioni, *Death by Meeting:*

*A Leadership Fable About Solving
the Most Painful Problem in Business*

Robert I. Sutton and Huggy Rao,
*Scaling Up Excellence: Getting to
More Without Settling for Less*

Cathy A. Trower, *The Practitioner’s
Guide to Governance as Leadership*

Pesikta Rabbati 25:2

“Honor the Lord with whatever excellence He has bestowed upon you” (Proverbs 3:9)—with whatever He has bestowed upon you. If you are a person with good looks, honor Him with the good looks He has given you. If your voice is pleasing and you are seated in a synagogue, rise up and honor the Lord with your voice.

PARDES CENTER FOR JEWISH EDUCATORS

A STATISTIC YOU WANT TO BE PART OF.

6000+

Students taught
and inspired by
PCJE alumni

150

Alumni working
in Jewish education

14

Years of training and
empowering Jewish
educators

1:1

Professional coaching
and alumni support

100%

Job placement
for graduates

28

US states and Canadian
provinces where our
graduates work

PCJE trains and empowers Jewish Studies teachers to serve as knowledgeable, skilled, reflective and passionate professionals in day school communities across North America.



Pardes | פַּרְדֵּס
Institute of Jewish Studies

For more information about PCJE and our programs in Israel and North America visit
WWW.PARDES.ORG.IL/PCJE

WHY FIX WHAT AIN'T BR

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE IN HEBREW EDUCATION

What does it take to achieve excellence in Hebrew education? A willingness on behalf of the leaders and community to engage in a critical examination of an already successful program. At the Epstein School in Atlanta, we had developed a reputation as a school with a highly successful Hebrew immersion program. And yet, internally, we knew we could do better; there were gaps in achievement that we struggled to address, and we needed the perspective of an outside expert to help give us a bigger picture on the program's goals and implementation. Many schools would question why we spent time and resources to fix what isn't broken when there are so many demands on our plates. This article chronicles how we embarked on the journey to ensure our students receive the best immersion services we can provide. We came away with a profound sense of renewed commitment to our values, identity and mission statement.

Over many years, we developed a sophisticated approach to Hebrew language pedagogy based on intensive immersion. The approach, with its many ingredients, succeeded in raising students' proficiency, as observed in the level attained by our graduates and by their comfort and fluency during school trips to Israel.

KEY INGREDIENTS FOR EXCELLENCE

Structural ingredients are not sufficient to provide excellence, but they are vital to an immersion program's success. The pillars of our program ensure consistency and quality while maintaining common language among constituents, and today we can no longer envision a program lacking any of these key ingredients.

Messaging

The commitment to Hebrew should be found in the mission statement, in marketing materials, in new staff training materials, and in daily conversations. Hebrew is a cornerstone of the program and attracts families because of the academic rigor it provides and how it informs students' Judaism. This messaging requires training of prospective parents about the benefits of bilingualism from the latest brain-based research.

TAL
GRINFAS-DAVID

IDIT
BENDAVID

LIAT
KADOSH

OKE?

Time

Hebrew is a part of every student's day, regardless of the amount of support or enrichment he or she needs. Hebrew is introduced in the early childhood program, and duration lengthens until in grades 1-5 students spend half their day immersed in Hebrew. In middle school, students participate in Hebrew lessons differentiated by levels of performance, and may learn Tanakh and rabbinics in Hebrew based on their proficiency level.

Recruitment

Hiring native-level-certified teachers is essential for educating students toward language proficiency. Israeli teachers usually bring both a high skill level in language acquisition, and just as importantly for day schools, a cultural and spiritual connection to modern Israel. Through them, students experience how the language is used to describe a situation, express an opinion, sing, pray, celebrate, display emotion, struggle with strife and create new cultural artifacts to add to one's heritage. Each year, countless hours and resources are devoted to arranging work visas and recruiting the best educators from Israel.

Training

Professional development with experts in the field is costly and necessary to maintain high quality instructional practices. Many teachers go on to attain degrees in language acquisition to hone their skills. Directors who are experts can provide ongoing coaching, which is essential to teacher growth and success as they reflect on their practice. The school regularly holds in-service days with a sole focus on Hebrew, including guest speakers on how to differentiate for students with diagnosed language disorders.

Resources

While no one curriculum can meet all of the students' needs, without a curriculum, a program becomes haphazard and piecemeal. Without a clear spiral in content, vocabulary or language goals, the program lacks a strong trajectory of learning and student growth. One has to acquire a repository of Hebrew books, magazines and other authentic online materials, and constantly gauge how these can be used to supplement curricula and to achieve linguistic ends. With Israel's history of immigration, a centralized ministry of education, and successful models of integrating *olim chadashim* (new immigrants) from *ulpan* to the Israel Defense Forces through immersion, many materials developed in Israel can be made suitable for Hebrew students around the world.

Technology

Access to electronic devices is critical for young learners. They are able to access subscriptions and materials online, produce multimedia presentations of their work, and most importantly communicate in real time with native speakers. Whether Skyping with peers or listening to guest speakers in Israel, creating a true need for communication in the target language is an essential building block for proficiency. Technology is viewed as the tool for social learning.

Environment

Hebrew is seen and not just heard. Each room and avenue in the building is given a Hebrew name, all English signage is translated into Hebrew, and bulletin boards

that serve as displays of student work show off both languages. The commitment to bilingualism should be felt the moment one steps foot in the school.

Programming

Each year in each grade, student milestone celebrations and performances are conducted in Hebrew, validating how much they learned throughout the year and how parent investment in an immersion program has benefited their child. These public displays cement the community value of the centrality of the Hebrew to our identity.

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF IMPLEMENTATION

With the above eight structural ingredients firmly in place, the immersion program appeared to be thriving, with professionals from outside our school visiting specifically to study the program. Nonetheless, the staff and administration knew that the program could still be improved. We were concerned about the growing gap between students' level of understanding (reading and listening) and their ability to produce language (writing and speaking). Being in a school culture devoted to change and ongoing improvement demanded we continuously evolve to find ways to raise the level of Hebrew in each division. The gap in student output led us to decide to invest additional time and resources into rethinking our goals for Hebrew, along with our curriculum and pedagogy. We hired outside experts to assess our program in terms of its vision, curriculum, instruction and student outcomes. Greg Duncan, founder and president of *InterPrep, Inc.* together with Tova Cohen, *Emory University (ret.)* and Marcia A. Spielberger, *Santillana USA Publishing Company* were selected for their background in language evaluation of schools and Hebrew expertise.

The first step was to initiate a comprehensive Hebrew audit with the team assembled by the school as third party consultants, looking at the full scope of the school, including over 530 students, three divisions (early childhood to middle school), over 50 teachers, school leaders and parents. Experts observed

classes, interviewed students and school constituents, and presented data with recommendations for the school.

Beyond receiving validation for the high level our students reach, the audit prompted us to engage in collaborative conversations about the essence of our program: to what end do our students learn Hebrew, and how should we maximize the learning of the language? We uncovered that for some time our divisions had been operating with differing assumptions.



The elementary division has been teaching a blend of modern and biblical Hebrew, with a strong emphasis on using language as the vehicle through which students could access all content (modern and biblical Jewish texts, holidays, Israeli history, etc.) while using a very structured whole language spiral curriculum. The middle school division has been teaching Hebrew language periods with modern content (Israeli modern culture through authentic texts, movies, articles, poems and songs) as the vehicle for learning the modern spoken language, while using the proficiency approach. Ancient Jewish texts are taught in the middle school as separate periods from Hebrew language, in Tanakh and rabbinics, depending on the level of Hebrew of the student. Both divisions passionately believe each was fostering our students' Jewish identity and connection to Israel.

The more we talked about it, the clearer it became: our division leadership needed to meet in the middle and establish common expectations and goals for a balanced Hebrew program in all divisions, meaning a program that has an equal focus on student language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) and on mastery of Jewish content which

will require Hebrew of the modern state, Hebrew of the Torah and Hebrew of rabbinic commentary. Principals, directors of curriculum, learning coordinators and teachers met regularly to talk about the differences between the divisions and the means to bridge student experiences so that the transition from elementary to middle school would become seamless. We do not yet know if we are setting the bar too high, or if our lofty goals are attainable, and we may find in a few years that we need to compromise in one area to bolster another. We do know that we will be making an informed decision using common language of assessment.

Middle School has been training teachers in proficiency assessment benchmarks for a number of years, through Hebrew at the Center. Trained and certified staff administered the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and video recorded students in 5th through 8th grade to keep a running log of each individual's progress. In Elementary School, students kept and added to a portfolio of select samples of their creative writing and projects in "Tikiyat HaZikaron" (their memory file), together with VoiceThread recordings, which follow them from year to year and determine their learning experience. So while both divisions were using longitudinal data to monitor and assess student progress, we were not using the same terminology to objectively qualify each student's level of proficiency. Hence, using common language around assessment to drive the elementary and middle school work became the focus of the current initiative.

This involves the retraining and ongoing coaching of teachers to look at student work with a different lens, to listen to student speech critically, and to provide even more opportunities for students to use the language in a real world setting. A language lab was established to promote and *formatively* assess student performance, and a third party was once again engaged to *summatively* assess students in 3rd, 5th and 8th grade using online standardized assessment tools from Avant with proficiency guidelines. The more data that was collected, the more informed teachers became about immediate next steps in the classrooms to differentiate instruction, address gaps and move each student forward.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the Hebrew audit, we are now in year three of a schoolwide improvement plan, with clearly articulated and measurable goals for proficiency and for Judaic content enhancement. So does the question of Hebrew as the means or the end have an impact on daily practice? Does the emphasis on skills vs. content make a difference? Indeed, the fact that we are having these discussions at a high level, using research and data to help guide our practice, points to the fact that we are pushing the field forward. When the discussion takes place with stakeholders, leaders, budget decision-makers, curriculum writers, teachers, parents and students around the same table, the community reasserts its commitment to the philosophy and mission statement, profile of a graduate, use of time and professional development.

In addition, the community draws the connections among Hebrew, nationhood, shared Jewish experiences, connection to Israel, heritage, text study, current events and so much more. The language shapes student identity in such profound ways. Underlying any initiative must be a burning sense that excellence isn't something attained, but rather something for which you continuously strive.

We found the process of opening our school doors to outside evaluators extremely beneficial, and strongly recommend that other schools committed to Hebrew excellence engage in a similar process to pinpoint how to best impact the next generation of learners. Although the prospect can be intimidating and admittedly place the school in a state of vulnerability, the message to the community of transparency, commitment to Hebrew, and engagement in continual improvement far outweighs the fear or what might be revealed in an audit. The battle for Hebrew language is alive and well in Jewish education, whether it be committing to key ingredients, exploring assessment techniques or restating the philosophical underpinnings of Hebrew education.

CULTIVATING PEDAGOGIC EXCELLENCE IN TEACHERS

Cultivating pedagogic excellence in teachers clearly impacts students, schools and the field of Jewish day school education. While no two Jewish day schools share the exact same goals and approaches for educational content outcomes, all schools do share the same goals of reaching and teaching all of their students. Helping teachers grow from good to great to excellent can be achieved when a number of conditions are in place to support teacher growth. At the core is a school culture of learning, innovation and collaboration, along with school leaders who invest in and support teacher growth. Standards-based peer coaching or mentoring is an essential component as well.

At the Jewish New Teacher Project (JNTP), we have spent over a decade helping beginning teachers in Jewish day schools increase their effectiveness, confidence and commitment to teaching through intensive standards-based mentoring. Our New Teacher Induction program is based on the proven, validated work of our parent organization, New Teacher Center (NTC), an award-winning national organization leading the field in new teacher and new principal support in public schools across the country.

We define excellence in teaching not as an endpoint, but rather as a process. Beginning teachers strive to master techniques such as classroom management, effective lesson planning, and differentiation. Veteran teachers, even after mastering these basic elements of teaching, continue to learn and grow, to innovate, and always strive to be better. In a recent blog entitled “Highly Effective Teachers are Never Done Learning,” Liam Goldrick, director of policy at New Teacher Center, writes, “The truth is that great teachers aren’t born and are never completely ‘made’—but continuously develop over the course of their careers. There is no such thing as a finished product when it comes to highly effective teachers. Talented, experienced teachers are reflective, curious and persistent. Like their students, they are learners, too.”

AMY GOLUBTCHIK
AMENT

Yael Adler Bailey

NINA BRUDER

FAYGE SAFRAN

Excellence in teaching doesn’t happen in a vacuum. We have learned in our work partnering with more than 100 Jewish day schools across the country over the past decade, and through research in the field, that the following elements foster the cultivation of excellent teachers—teachers who are committed, innovative and constantly growing.

SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Teachers thrive in an environment where the message from the school’s leadership is, “We want you to succeed, and we will do everything we can to help support your success.” Principals can contribute to a teacher’s success in many ways, from establishing and consistently implementing a vision, to setting policies, providing resources, developing curriculum, etc. Paramount to communicating this message is the creation of a positive culture of support, with formative as well as summative assessment and opportunities for professional development. That includes being present in teachers’ classrooms via formal and informal observations, providing feedback, and setting aside time for teachers to create goals and reflect on practice. As Paul Bambrick-Santoyo writes (“Teacher Evaluation: What’s Fair? What’s Effective?”), “The key driver of teacher development isn’t accurate measurement of teachers’ performance. It’s guidance on exactly how to improve.”

CULTURE, CLIMATE AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Positive school culture, climate and working conditions are fundamental to fostering the achievement of excellence. All members of a school community respond to an environment which is supportive, optimistic, productive, and in which there are positive presuppositions about student and staff potential to learn and grow. A culture in which there is open communication, positive relationships and high expectations creates an ongoing learning community. The following are some aspects of a positive culture.

Trust

In *Talk About Teaching*, Charlotte Danielson writes, “The first, and some would argue the most important, characteristic of a school making progress toward improved student learning is that the leader has established an atmosphere of trust: trust among teachers and between teachers and administrators.” Trust, indicated by the

willingness of teachers to be vulnerable and open, is a foundation for growth. In an NTC survey on working conditions in the nation's schools entitled *Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL)*, data indicate that one of the highest predictors of student achievement is the level of trust and mutual respect at a school.

Collaboration

Collaboration and collegiality are also at the core of a learning and growth environment. Teachers don't function best in isolation. Few professionals do. Collaborating around best practices, student work, student interactions and more creates a community of learners and an environment of sharing, expanding vision and perspective. De-privatizing teacher practice is empowering and validating, encourages risk-taking and results in growth. Teachers need permission and a safe framework in which to experiment with ideas, receive feedback, and examine their practice in deep and open ways.

Ongoing Professional Development and Reflective Practice

Teachers cannot advance in their pursuit of excellence unless they are stimulated and challenged by new learning. In *Improving Schools from Within*, Roland Barth writes, "Nothing within a school has more impact upon students in terms of skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behavior than the personal and professional growth of their teachers. When teachers examine, question, reflect on their ideas and develop new practices that lead towards their ideas, students are alive. When teachers stop growing, so do their students." Professional development that is job-embedded, consistent, ongoing and relevant empowers teachers to own their own learning and direct their own growth. As a result, teachers gain self-confidence and perceive themselves as professional educators. Not only do students feel the impact, but the dialogue among faculty is transformed.

STANDARDS AND GOALS

Alice: Which way should I go?

Cat: That depends on where you are going.

Alice: I don't know.

Cat: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

A set of professional teaching standards (such as Danielson, Marzano, or a school's own set) provides both a roadmap and a destination for teachers. Teaching standards are a clear, objective articulation of what excellence in teaching looks like and sounds like in its highest form. Pedagogic standards also provide teachers and supervisors with a shared language and understanding of expectations as well as the basis for performance evaluation.

Professional teaching standards, along with a process for setting professional goals, can help advance teacher practice, which in turn advances student learning. Teachers benefit from knowing what to strive for in order to reach mastery and excellence. Teachers can

self-assess on the standards, identify areas of strength and growth, and set goals. Based on the standards, teachers can target areas they would like to develop and strengthen. They can measure their own growth against their own goals. These goals can serve as a frame for supervisors as well as for colleagues to use during observations to collect data and offer feedback or evaluation. Attainment of early goals contributes to a feeling of success and empowers teachers to set new goals for further growth.

INTENSIVE MENTORING AND PEER COACHING

Colleagues' support of each other's practice is a key component of cultivating excellence in teachers. Peer mentors or coaches can develop and nurture reflective, problem-solving, collaborative habits of practice. A mentor or coach can help teachers—and especially beginning teachers, as we've seen in our work—strive toward excellence by guiding them through the transition from being a reactive instructor to a reflective instructor.

To work optimally, peer mentoring/coaching pairs need dedicated time and space for self-assessing professional practice on a continuum of professional teaching standards, goal-setting, discussing classroom observations, collecting and analyzing observation data, sharing feedback, reflecting, and looking at student work. This, of course, aligns with the need for a positive, growth-oriented school culture and having a set of teaching standards and goals toward which to strive.

These elements of fostering teacher growth apply to teachers at all stages of their careers, from beginning to veteran teachers. In practice, utilizing a standards-based peer mentoring program can play out differently among teachers with different levels of experience.

Beginning teachers, even those with formal teaching degrees, do not yet have the experience necessary to cultivate excellence in their classrooms. Regardless of the preparation and support that many teachers receive before they begin their first job, nothing compares to the actual on-the-job learning that takes place in the first few years of teaching. It is during these critical first years that teachers develop habits of practice that endure throughout their careers. As we have seen in our work, a set of teaching standards against which to self-assess and set goals for growth, coupled with an intensive mentoring program based on weekly classroom observations and data collection, can accelerate a beginning teacher's practice exponentially. Beginning teachers are hungry for support and crave feedback. Providing beginning teachers with a safe space to reflect on their practice accelerates their learning, improves their teaching practice, and gives them a sense of belonging, resulting in higher levels of motivation to stay in their jobs and strive for excellence.

More seasoned teachers often have already set their habits of practice, yet many recognize that there is always room for improvement and growth. Especially with new educational trends such as the use of technology in the classroom and Common Core, even the most seasoned teachers have learning opportunities and growth edges.

SULAM ALUMNI SHABBATON



Braving turbulent winds and airline cancellations, the alumni of Project Sulam gathered for a shabbaton full of warmth, spirituality and Jewish learning. The convening took place in Philadelphia in early March, in advance of the Jewish Day School Conference. This year's scholar-in-residence, Rabbi Dr. Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi, led participants in a discussion of God in Jewish sources, examining different ways that rabbis ancient and modern have apprehended God and related to God. As always, the conversation included thoughts about the ways that the subject features in the Jewish life and learning of day schools.

A Sulam shabbaton is a joyous, participant-led celebration of Jewish learning for school leaders. The Sulamites share responsibility for leading services and saying blessings at meals. They prepare divrei Torah that combine insightful reflection on the parsha with heartfelt discussion of their own personal and professional journeys.

One special feature of this year's shabbaton was a session dedicated to the Sulam Alumni Challenge Grants. Four schools received these matching micro-grants to develop new Jewish programming at their schools. Sulamites heard the grantees discuss their program and then learned

about them in depth, with many participants considering how to bring Jewish programming of this kind to their school. The grantee schools have been keeping a blog to explore issues that arise during their programs-in-progress; follow them at www.ravsak.org/news.

Merrill Hendin, Head of School, Portland Jewish Academy, Portland, OR:

This year, as always, the Sulam Alumni Shabbaton provided time and space to learn, reconnect with others from our own, and other cohorts, daven together, and realize, once again, the great joy in simply being together as Jewish educators. Our scholar in residence Rabbi Sabath Beit-Halachmi was provocative and thoughtful, raising difficult questions about God which gave us cause to grapple with our personal beliefs and to think about and discuss how we bring this part of ourselves into our schools as we work with children, teachers, parents and community members.

Cecily Carel, Board Chair, Jack M. Barrack Jewish Day School, Bryn Mawr, PA:

The 2015 Sulam Alumni Shabbaton yet once again provided outstanding spiritual and interpersonal nourishment—both from our scholar-in-residence, Rabbi Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi PhD, as well

as from our fellow Sulamites and other RAVSAK team members. The invaluable formal and informal learning opportunities were rejuvenating, and the weekend as a whole provided another amazing opportunity to reconnect in person with and learn from our wonderful fellow Sulamites. I am honored, blessed, and deeply appreciative of the opportunity to be a part of this group. Todah rabbah to all who made it possible!

Jennifer Schecter-Balin, Director of Admissions & Communications, Vancouver Talmud Torah, Vancouver, British Columbia:

As school leaders and administrators, our mission is to facilitate the delivery of stimulating, relevant and thoughtful curriculum to the students in our school. Yet the opportunities for us to learn and wrestle with similarly engaging material is rare. With the plethora of competing demands on our time and the depletion of our energy by each day's end, we can ill afford to study text and grapple with the big (Jewish) questions. This is why the Sulam shabbatonim are so meaningfully important. Once a year, professionals with similar experiences gather to learn, to explore and to question. No matter one's level of Jewish knowledge or observance, everyone is invited to participate and to contribute. And everyone leaves the weekend retreat recharged and with a renewed sense of purpose (not to mention greater appreciation for the Jewish studies aspect of our curriculum offerings). Listening to differing points of view—and questioning one's own deeply held beliefs—are further benefits to group facilitated study. Having participated in these gatherings since 2006, I feel honoured and privileged to study alongside colleagues, rabbis and academics with the paramount purpose of encouraging greater self-reflection ultimately benefitting our schools in myriad ways.

With experienced teachers, it is especially important to communicate a message of positive support for learning without criticizing current or past practices. Mentoring may take the form of Instructional Coaching, which is less time-intensive and tied to new content acquisition or the shifting of established pedagogic practices.

Pedagogic excellence in teaching is a process, not endpoint. Both novice and seasoned teachers alike can strive for and achieve excellence by engaging in iterative learning cycles of goal-setting and reflection. Supportive school leadership, an environment that cultivates and rewards inquiry and learning, and standards-based peer mentoring are essential ingredients for fostering teacher growth. When these elements are in place, not only do our teachers benefit, but, most importantly, so do our students.

You want to show solidarity with the South.
Let Shony include it in your itinerary!




Amnon Weigler
CEO

Come experience the Difference!

BADGES OF EXCELLENCE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

SARAH
BLATTNER

SAMUEL
ABRAMOVICH

Teacher professional development is one of the most consistent and reliable tools available for improving schools. Because teachers are increasingly recognized as the single most important factor in making change within a school, professional development programs can lead to increased student learning by providing teachers an opportunity to reflect on their practices and develop new pedagogical skills. However, providing quality teacher professional development remains a significant challenge for all educational organizations. Time and financial constraints often limit professional development opportunities to a one-and-done, one-size-fits-all model, which in turn provides little opportunity for teacher improvement. Research reveals that when asking teachers about their professional development experiences, they will likely reflect that quality learning opportunities are outnumbered by ineffective workshops.

High-quality teacher professional development is job-embedded, meaning it is “teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers’ content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning.” Job-embedded PD naturally supports sustained, ongoing learning, that may include coaching; mentoring; action research; observing a class and reflecting on those observations; working collaboratively on a team to examine a problem or student work sample; or shadowing a colleague. These kinds of opportunities help teachers make more relevant connections to their actual classroom teaching, integrating with a teacher’s prior knowledge of effective pedagogy. In addition, Internet communication technology has changed the paradigm for teacher professional development, opening up a whole new world of learning. Globally connected communities of practice enhance teacher learning by providing opportunities for sharing collective wisdom and dialogue about real-world examples, which helps in removing the isolation barrier of the classroom that many teachers experience as professionals.

Teachers are no longer limited to the workshop model of teacher professional development, even when financial and time constraints are paramount. Among the new technologies available, open badges,

a novel approach to micro-credentialing, offers the opportunity for personalized professional learning for teachers. A number of Jewish educational organizations, looking to meet the unique needs of their teachers, have been among the first to exploit this technology. In order to better understand the opportunity to reboot Jewish day school teacher professional development with open badges, we must first define *open badges* and examine some examples of how digital badges are being used to strengthen learning opportunities for educators.

OPEN BADGES

More than a graphic icon, a digital badge is a micro-credential that signifies an achievement. Open badges, created by a team led by the Mozilla Foundation, is an Internet protocol for a digital badge that has embedded metadata, detailing information about the achievement (e.g., the issuing institution, a rubric or set of standards for merit, an artifact demonstrating the accomplishment). Consequently, badges can tell the story of a learner, mark achievements, and reflect a learner’s knowledge, skills, habits and learning pathways in more detail than what is possible with traditional assessments, like grades or certificates. Open badges, because they are an Internet protocol, are portable and easily sharable through a variety of social media interfaces. Badges also have the potential to transparently recognize granular levels of learning that traditional forms of assessment may not.



The MacArthur Foundation launched an open badges project in 2001 with the Digital Media and Learning Competition, where a total of 2 million dollars was awarded collectively to winning entries that would ignite the development of an open badges ecosystem, including organizations like the Smithsonian Museums, NASA, Disney-Pixar and the Girl Scouts. Badges are also catching on in other settings such as the corporate world, where Deloitte uses digital badges to level up staff development, and higher education, where the University of California at Davis uses a competency-based badge system for an undergraduate sustainable agricultural and food systems program. Open badges are increasingly employed in K-12 education through projects such as Digital Promise, which seeks to recognize competency-based teacher preparation and professional development for educators throughout their careers.

Serendipitously, Jewish educational organizations have also been using digital badges to strengthen learning opportunities. TAMRITZ, a badge-empowered learning network for Jewish educators and their students, currently offers an annual “Summer of Learning” for

secondary teacher professional development. As online professional development, TAMRITZ focuses on immersing teachers in a community of practice that wrestles with leading edge pedagogy and new media tools through hands-on tinkering and experimentation. Educators move through Levels (macro badges signifying overarching learning outcomes) and Quests (micro badges or distinct skills supporting the Levels) as teachers make choices about how they will demonstrate and apply their skills and understandings. Immersed in a connected community that breaks geographic and time constraints, educators share ideas and lessons from the trenches, post comments and reflections on learners' blogs and digital journals and share their learning artifacts.

Paramount to the success of the TAMRITZ model is the opportunity for educators to be immersed in a safe learning community that encourages tinkering with new media and leading edge pedagogy while sharing generously with colleagues. The centerpiece of TAMRITZ's Summer of Learning, the Digital Age Teaching badge, includes three main learning pathways or levels: Learner 2.0, Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) and Digital Citizenship. Each level is tied to a few essential questions that promote professional development. For example, the PLNs badge asks, "How can a professional learning network support my growth and practice?" and "How can a personal learning network support my students' learning and my own?"

For each level badge, teachers choose two additional micro badges to complete, such as Blogs, RSS, Social Bookmarking and Twitter. As an example, one rabbi in the learning community chose to explore Twitter for the first time and connected with other Jewish educators in the weekly #Jedchat tweetchat. He also chose the Social Bookmarking Quest and created his own social bookmarking group for collecting and sharing resources around Jewish studies and Hebrew instruction. He used his social bookmarking group to invite members of the TAMRITZ learning community to follow him and to suggest additional resources. In another example, a Jewish day school language arts teacher applied her learning experiences from the Blogging Quest to create a blogging campus at her own day school, where she trained her colleagues in utilizing blogs as learning portfolios in the classroom, both in Jewish and secular studies.

OPEN BADGES FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TAMRITZ's Summer of Learning is only one model for implementing a badge system for teacher professional development in Jewish day school education. Building upon the successful elements of the TAMRITZ program and providing even more opportunities to personalize the educator experience will further empower teachers to design their own professional development that is relevant, self-directed and connected, which will ultimately impact student achievement.

Resources and References

All are available online.

Cator, K., Schneider, C., and Vander Ark, T. "Preparing Teachers for Deeper Learning: Competency-Based Teacher Preparation and Professional Development (White Paper)."

Croft, A., Coggshall, J.G., Dolan, M., Powers, E. & Killion, J. "Job-Embedded Professional Development: What It Is, Who Is Responsible, and How to Get It Done Well." National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Digital Promise Educator Micro-Credentials: digitalpromise.org

Gulamhussein, A. "Teaching the Teachers: Effective Professional

Development in an Era of High Stakes Accountability." Center for Public Education

Hart, M. "Badges: A New Measure of Professional Development." Campustechnology.org

Learning Forward. Standards for Professional Learning.

Mozilla Open Badges. openbadges.org

TAMRITZ. tamritz.org

Wardrip, P.S., Abramovich, S., Bathgate, M. & Kim, Y.J. "A School-Based Badging System and Interest-Based Learning: An Exploratory Case Study."

Relevant

Badges transparently and comprehensively document skills, training, specialties, experiences and interests relevant to a teacher's toolkit. By designing badge learning experiences with input from teachers on their goals, interests and needs within their discipline and/or content areas, the learning is immediately applicable, job-embedded and relevant. The badges are valued by the learner and tied to their learner identity.

Self-Directed

Badges amplify the opportunity for learners to make decisions about their own learning processes, pathways, goals, resources and outcomes. Badge learning supports self-directed learning, which research tells us comprises 70% of adult learning.

Connected

The Digital Age affords us with anytime, anywhere opportunities to learn. We can chat with colleagues and experts from around the globe and collaborate synchronously and asynchronously by co-creating dynamic multimedia and artifacts of learning. When designed within a connected learning community, badge learning for teacher professional development integrates interest-driven, academically grounded and peer-supported learning—the foundation of connected learning. The badges' value is augmented by being connected to a learning community dedicated to improved teacher practice and student achievement.

Open badges have the potential to reboot educator professional development in Jewish day schools. It is time to take advantage of the affordances of digital age learning, where we can personalize learning experiences, provide agency and choice and make the entire learning journey relevant.



explore Twitter for the first time and connected with other Jewish educators in the weekly #Jedchat tweetchat. He also chose the Social Bookmarking Quest and created his own social bookmarking group for collecting and

TAKING CREATIVITY SERIOUSLY

The most watched TED Talk ever, with over 32,000,000 views, is Sir Ken Robinson's "How Schools Kill Creativity." Robinson demonstrates how schools often stifle people's natural inclinations to be creative and focus on traditional academic learning. He argues that traditional schooling's hierarchy has math/science at the top, humanities on the level below, the arts underneath the humanities, with music and art at the top of the arts ladder, and dance and drama under them. Sir Ken asks, "Why? Why do we do this?" Many educators are echoing Sir Ken's sentiments and beginning to incorporate creative excellence into their schools' curricula. I think this is a trend that is only going to grow stronger, propelled in part by Robinson's latest book, *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*.

This past school year I spent some time with educators at the High Tech schools in San Diego and got to meet its founder and CEO, Larry Rosenstock. The High Tech schools are public charter schools that employ project-based learning (PBL) and that focus extensively on fostering creativity. Larry has a law degree and put himself through law school as a carpenter; when he began his teaching career, he sought out ways to bring the experience of making into the classroom but was stymied by traditional models of school. He and Rob Riordan, the High Tech schools' "Emperor of Rigor," set out to create a different model, one where they could put making at the heart of learning. And they have succeeded. In the past 15 years, the High Tech schools have grown in number from one to fourteen.

QR code to a video
about creativity
created by the I.D.E.A.
Schools Network



This February, the I.D.E.A. Schools Network hosted a Jewish educators' trip to the High Tech schools. The network's co-founders, myself and Dr. Eliezer Jones, went with colleagues from our schools, Valley Torah High School in Los Angeles and Magen David Yeshivah High School in Brooklyn. Joining us were Jewish educators from schools in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Paramus. Our goal was to see what project-based learning looked like on a day-to-day level, and what we discovered were schools that put creativity at the center of learning.

The main High Tech campus includes elementary, middle and high schools as well as a graduate studies center. Each school is filled with the most extraordinary student artwork.

TWENTIETH CENTURY BOX

At the High Tech campus we met art teacher Jeff Robin, whose website is a rich trove for educators who want to learn about PBL and about how to weave creativity into their projects. Jeff showed us a project he had developed with a humanities teacher: 20th Century Box. Jeff and his colleague decided that after learning about events and figures from each decade of the twentieth century, students would have to choose a "noun" they were interested in from the century. They would then create four written and illustrated works about

their subject and include an artifact about it. Because all the teachers at the High Tech schools first do the projects they assign to students—in order to troubleshoot after encountering any rough spots and to provide a model for students of the kind of work expected from them—my colleagues and I were able to see a project sample even as we watched students in the midst of working on theirs.

For his sample project, Jeff explored the life of twentieth-century artist Man Ray and painted a cigar box to reflect Man Ray's artistic philosophy. Inside the box were the four "deliverables," as Jeff called them, of the project. One, for example, was a primary source on the artist's life that Jeff had annotated and for which he had included multiple visuals. Another was a creative writing piece of historical fiction.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CREATIVITY

Obviously the project fosters students' creativity by developing their artistic skills, but creative learning fosters additional skills needed for the world today: problem solving. Consider all the questions students have to answer as they complete the 20th Century Box assignments: What noun should they choose? Which artifact is most meaningful? Which primary source should the students annotate?

IMPROVING YOUR LIFE BY DEGREES.

AND CERTIFICATES, TOO.

SHOOLMAN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JEWISH EDUCATION, HEBREW COLLEGE

Master of Jewish Education

Master of Jewish Education/
Master of Arts in Jewish Studies (dual degree)

PhD in Educational Studies, with specialization
in Jewish Educational Leadership

Certificate in Early Childhood Jewish Education

Certificate in Jewish Experiential Education

Certificate in Jewish Special Education



hebrewcollege.edu/shoolman

Which visuals will add meaning to it? How will they incorporate the time period into their short story, and build suspense?

What I also particularly enjoy about the High Tech pedagogy is its emphasis on what Einstein called combinatorial thinking. By yoking together subjects and ideas that aren't obviously connected, the school helps students think and act in innovative ways. The school fosters creativity not only in its emphasis on the arts but on how it has students engage with all their subjects. For example, when my colleagues and I were at the school, we heard from Maya, a junior who had completed a fascinating project in her freshman year: her class learned various theories about the rise and fall of civilizations throughout history and studied simple machines in physics. In groups, students then chose one of the theories of civilization and used a laser cutter to create a gear system on a piece of wood; the gear system was a visual representation of the group's theory of civilizations' rises and downfalls, and each group's wood segment connected with another, so the class' work became a wheel that comprehensively represented all the theories working together.

When the wheel is turned on, not only does each individual segment's gears turn, but the whole wheel turns as well. What an incredibly complex way to have the students interact with history, with physics, and with each other. We saw the wheel: it's displayed in a main conference room, a work in which the school takes tremendous pride.

CREATIVITY STANDARDS

It might seem challenging to develop standards for measuring creativity, but the Buck Institute of Education, an educational consulting organization for project-based learning, has developed a creativity and innovation rubric. The standards focus on both aspects of creativity that we've been discussing: creativity in presentation and ingenuity and imagination in idea generation, selection and development. Note that the standards also measure student ability to be creative in locating research sources and in contributing to discussion. Below are three benchmarks from the rubric, as well as the description of student work that is "at standard."

I. Identify Sources of Information

- in addition to typical sources, finds unusual ways or places to get information (adult expert, community member, business or organization, literature)
- promotes divergent and creative perspectives during discussions

II. Generate and Select Ideas

- uses idea-generating techniques to develop several original ideas for product(s)
- carefully evaluates the quality of ideas and selects the best one to shape into a product
- asks new questions, takes different perspectives to elaborate and improve on the selected idea
- uses ingenuity and imagination, going outside conventional boundaries, when shaping ideas into a product

- seeks out and uses feedback and critique to revise product to better meet the needs of the intended audience

III. Present Work to Users/Target Audience

- creates visually exciting presentation media
- includes elements in presentation that are especially fun, lively, engaging, or powerful to the particular audience

THE NEED FOR STANDARDS

Developing ways to measure and assess excellence in creativity, divergent thinking and innovation is going to be crucial as we move forward with incorporating these standards into our schools. In a recent blog post, Larry Goodman, an educator from Andrews Osborne Academy, an independent school in Ohio, states, "Grades are the currency with which we 'pay' our students, even if the real value of the education has nothing to do with the grade. So if the school wants students to behave as if creative thinking matters, the school needs to take the initiative first! Schools need to assess for creative thinking, and incorporate the resulting scores/marks into grades on transcripts."

Goodman also shares tips about how to get started on assessing creativity.

1. Begin by being clear about what skills you are evaluating. When I assess my students' work on a creative thinking assignment, I will often identify three stages of «work»: fluency, or the ability to generate a multitude of possible directions to go in (or ideas); divergent thinking, or how far outward from the center the thinker can take those ideas; and convergent thinking, or the clarity and cogency developed to render the new idea comprehensible and valuable (useful) to others. Being clear on the specific skill being evaluated helps enormously—the teacher will feel like s/he is on much «firmer ground» in giving the student a specific score/grade.

2. Use a grading scale that is less granular than the typical A-F scale. If one uses +s and -s, the A-F scale has 13 different levels of relative achievement. And distinguishing among 13 different levels of proficiency—even in a clearly defined skill—is difficult. At Andrews Osborne, we are beginning with a three-point scale: 1 = «developing» (we can see that the skill is present to some degree and the student can be coached to improve in that area); 2 = «demonstrating» (the student is showing a reasonably proficient grasp of the skill); 3 = «exceeding» (the student is going beyond what we would have expected from someone his/her age/stage).

3. Solicit student feedback on the process. For students, too, the prospect of getting graded on new criteria is anxiety-producing. Asking them about how clear the assignment/assessment was/is, or how taxing it is/was to complete, or whether the grade/score they received seems fair to them, etc. will lower their anxiety—and provide the teacher with very useful information moving forward.

CREATIVITY AT MAGEN DAVID YESHIVAH HIGH SCHOOL

One of the reasons I feel fortunate to work at Magen David is because the school's mission statement reveals a commitment to academic excellence, *creativity*, and intellectual curiosity. So step one in making sure one's school is committed to creative excellence is to embed it in the culture. We did so this year by starting off our professional development days in the summer with activities and workshops that emphasized creativity. We also make sure art supplies and prototyping objects are available to teachers on a daily basis. One helpful discovery we made at the High Tech schools was the Artograph: it lets you project an image onto any surface, so that you can trace it perfectly and create a high-quality artwork. We had been wondering—after seeing the amazing artwork on every conceivable surface in the schools—how so many students could be natural-born Picassos; it turns out there are many tricks, such as the Artograph, that can help teachers, even ones who aren't naturally artistic, help their students become creative.

Students at Magen David are noticing the changes in their instruction. While some need time to transition into more creative-based learning, most take to it easily—and joyfully. Joanne Auman, a history teacher at the school who got creative early on in the year, quickly began to notice the joyful learning taking place in her



classroom, as well as the pride the students were taking in their work, which included maps made of clay and discarded computer boxes students converted into visual representations of the Indus Valley civilization. She nicknamed project-based learning “pride-based learning.”

Educators today are realizing that school needs to be a different place than the ones most of us grew up in, and many schools are transforming the way they do business, incorporating creativity in the classroom as much as they do “reading, writing, and ‘rithmetic.” Jewish education should lead the way in making sure that, soon, creative excellence will be as much a point of pride in a school's mission statement as academic excellence is.



GINSBURG-INGERMAN OVERSEAS STUDENT PROGRAM

BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV, ISRAEL



Ranked Israel's #1 university for student life

All participants live with Israeli roommates

Ideal location to study and use Hebrew

Volunteer & internship opportunities

Gap year available in English

Earn college credit

Variety of academic disciplines offered

Specialized semester tracks

W: <http://www.bgstudyabroad.org>

E: osp@bgstudyabroad.org

T: 800-962-2248 Ext. 2201



RAVSAK
HEBREW POETRY
CONTEST

More than 500 students at 30 day schools across North America participated in the annual RAVSAK Hebrew Poetry Contest. Now in its fifth year, the Hebrew Poetry Contest inspires students to creatively use and expand their knowledge of the Hebrew language by crafting original poetry to be read by esteemed Hebrew writers and shared on a national stage. Enjoy the winning poems from native and nonnative Hebrew speakers in elementary, middle, and high school grades.

As we share these beautiful poems, we remember Janice Rebibo z"l, noted Hebrew poet and dedicated judge and supporter of this program.

2015/5775 HEBREW

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL | NON-NATIVE

First Place Joe Lorenzen	4th Grade, Brandeis Hillel Day School San Francisco, CA
------------------------------------	--

LITTLE TREE

I see a small, green tree
Inside a broken glass ball
Life once encaged, but now free.

עֵץ קָטָן

אֲנִי רוֹאֶה עֵץ קָטָן וְיָרוֹק
בְּכַדּוֹר זְכוּכִית שְׁבוּר
פַּעַם חַיִּים בְּכִלּוּב
וְעַכְשָׁיו חוֹפֵשׁ.

Third Place Laila Maidenberg	Fifth Grade, Tehiyah Day School El Cerrito, CA
--	---

I AM LAILA

Night is black with white dots
But I am not black with white dots
I am Laila

Night is cold and dark
But I am not cold and dark
I am Laila

I am a different night
I am not a regular night
I am a girl night
I am Laila

אֲנִי לַיְלָה

לַיְלָה שְׁחוֹר עִם נִקּוּדוֹת לְבָנוֹת
אָבֵל אֲנִי לֹא שְׁחוֹרָה עִם נִקּוּדוֹת
לְבָנוֹת

אֲנִי לַיְלָה

לַיְלָה קָר וְחָשׁוּךְ

אָבֵל אֲנִי לֹא קָרָה וְחָשׁוּכָה

אֲנִי לַיְלָה

אֲנִי לֹא לַיְלָה רְגִיל

אֲנִי לַיְלָה אַחֵר

אֲנִי יְלִדָה לַיְלָה

אֲנִי לַיְלָה

Honorable Mention

Jonathan Greenspan

5th Grade, Madison Jewish Community Day
School, Madison WI

עֲרֵבָה שְׂמֵחָה

RAVSAK Staff Pick

Isaac Malkin

5th Grade, Carmel Academy, Greenwich, CT

הוֹרִים

Cooper Lynch

3rd Grade, N.E. Miles Jewish Day School,
Birmingham, AL

הַעֵץ

POETRY CONTEST WINNERS

Second Place Zohar Lazimy	2nd Grade, Madison Jewish Community Day School Madison, WI
-------------------------------------	---

IN THE FOREST OF THE IMAGINATION

In the forest of the imagination
When the wind blows
And the moon glows
Everything is calm
A turtle climbs over the rocks

בְּיַעַר הַדְּמִיוֹן

בְּיַעַר הַדְּמִיוֹן
כְּשֶׁהֲרוּחַ נוֹשֶׁבֶת
וְהַיָּרֵחַ זוֹהֵר
הַכֹּל שָׁלוֹם
צָב מְטַפֵּס עַל אֲבָנִים

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL | NATIVE

First Place Inbal Cohen	5th Grade, Brandeis Hillel Day School San Francisco, CA
-----------------------------------	--

MOON

And so it shines
In the sky
With a soft, faint light
A pearl-white ball, flowing with the wind
above my head
In a black sky, smooth as velvet, it sits
Sailing in a cloud like a boat.
It smiled at me,
A small, sad smile, soft and timid
And together with me, it is slow
Small like a trail of royal magic
Slow like the hint of a smile
Slow like a long, empty tunnel
Like a tree that grows with every day
It doesn't stay forever, but never flees
Moon

יָרֵחַ

וְכֵן הוּא זוֹהֵר
בְּשָׁמַיִם,
בְּאוֹר נוֹגֵה וְחַלוּשׁ,
כְּדוֹר לְבָן פְּנִינִי, זוֹרֵם עִם הַרוּחַ מְעַל רֵאשִׁי.
בְּשָׁמַיִם שְׁחוּרִים, חֲלָקִים כְּקַטִּיפָה, הוּא יוֹשֵׁב לוֹ, שֵׁט בְּעֵנָן כְּסִירָה.
הוּא חִיֵּךְ אֵלַי,
חִיֵּךְ קָטָן, עֲצוּב, רַךְ, וּבִיִּישׁוֹ,
בְּיַחַד אִתִּי, הוּא אִיטִי.
אִיטִי כְּמוֹ שׁוֹבֵל שֶׁל קֶסֶם מְלָכוּתִי,
אִיטִי כְּמוֹ נִיצוּץ שֶׁל חִיּוֹךְ.
אִיטִי מִיְנֵהֶרֶה אֲרוּכָה וְשִׁמְמָה,
כְּמוֹ עֵץ שֶׁגוֹדֵל לוֹ עִם יוֹם.
הוּא לֹא נִשְׁאָר לְתָמִיד, אֲךָ אֵף פַּעַם לֹא בּוֹרֵחַ,
יָרֵחַ.

Second Place
Ronnie Vicus

5th Grade, Bialik Hebrew Day School
Toronto, Ontario

SHABBAT SONG

Father sings the prayers
Mother lights the candles.
Grandfather opens the door for the guests.
The smell of Grandma's cooking is the best
Adon Olam and Le Dor Vador
Everyone sings out loud and there's more
Grandfather in his Sabbath suit
Raises a glass for kiddush.
My sister leads the Sabbath songs
You and me let's sing along.
The flames on the candles dance with might
And warm our hearts in the cold of the night.
On the heads of the boys and the men
Kippot in all shapes are seen and then
There is red and yellow and rainbow colours too
But for little Yossi it is hockey pucks and nets too
Shabbat Shalom
In Canada - in Israel - and throughout the world.

שיר של שבת

אבא שר תפילות
אמא מדליקה נרות
סבא פותח לאורחים את הדלת.
מיד מריחים מטעמים שסבא מבשלת.
אדון עולם, לדור ודור
כולם שרים, כולם שרים בקול.
סבא בחליפה שבת לבוש
מרים כוסית לקידוש.
אחותי מובילה זמירות לשבת
שרים ביחד אני ואת.
ריקוד הלהבה של הנרות
מחמם את הלב בקור הלילות
על ראשיהם של הבנים והאבות,
יושבות להן כיפות בכל הצורות.
יש אדום וצהוב וכל צבעי הקשת.
אבל ליוסי הקטן יש הוקי פק ורשת.
שבת שלום לכולם,
בקנדה, בישראל ובכל העולם.

Third Place
Kai Perez

5th Grade, Yavneh Day School
Los Gatos, CA

Today there is almost no nature in the world.
Do you know why? Because everyone...
Cuts down trees
Picks flowers
Throws trash on the ground
We use cars with gas
That destroy every part
Of our world
And that it very sad.
Endangered animals
But there in the world
Beautiful places in the world
Like the trash mountain in Israel
That has turned into a place
Everyone can admire.

הטבע

היום כבד כמעט אין טבע בעולם.
אתם יודעים למה? כי כולם...
כורתים עצים,
קוטפים פרחים,
זורקים אשפה
על הרצפה,
מכונניות עם דלק
הורסות כל חלק
מהעולם,
וזה חבל לכולם.
חיות מוגנות
כל הזמן מתות.
אבל יש גם מקומות טובים בעולם,
כמו מערת הזבל בישראל
שהפכה למשהו מדהים לכולם.

Honorable Mention

Jonathan Ashkenazi

5th Grade, Bialik Hebrew Day School
Toronto, Ontario

עונות השנה

Amitai Smyla

5th Grade, Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School
Palo Alto, CA

הפסנתר שלי

RAVSAC Staff Pick

Adi Netanel

5th Grade, Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School
Foster City, CA

קשה לכתב שיר

<p>First Place Dusty Wright</p>	<p>6th Grade, Shalom School Sacramento, CA</p>	<p>Second Place Jacob Brenner</p>	<p>8th Grade, Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School Pikesville, MD</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">זמן</p> <p>זמן, מי אתה? מה אתה? לאן אתה הולך? מה אתה עושה? חכה..למה אתה לא עוצר? אני רק רוצה שנייה לדבר.... זמן...זמן...זמן.....רגע אחד....</p> <p>TIME</p> <p>Time, who are you? What are you? Where are you going? What are you doing? Wait! Why aren't you stopping? I just want a moment to talk.... Time...time...time...one moment....</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">I SEE FRIENDSHIP</p> <p>I see kindness I ask Hashem: Please make me a beautiful smile</p> <p>I see Love I ask Hashem Please make me a gift</p> <p>I see friendship I ask Hashem Please make me a friend</p> <p style="text-align: center;">אני רואה חברות</p> <p>אני רואה חסד אני אומר אלקים, עשה אותי חיוך יפה אני רואה אהבה ואומר עשה אותי מתנה אני רואה חברות אני אומר: אלקים עשה אותי חבר</p>	
<p>Third Place Aaron Ichel</p>	<p>6th Grade, Shalom School Sacramento, CA</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">חורף</p> <p>חורף, חורף, העונה של השלג, הגשם, הקור, השמים האפורים, חורף, חורף, הטמפרטורות הנמוכות מנמיכות את מצב הרוח, כשמרימים את הראש, אפשר למצוא על ראשי ההרים פודרה רכה לבנה בשעה ששועלים אפורים מיללים מרחוק, העצים הערומים עומדים לבדם והעולם נראה קטן יותר תרגיש לפתע את כוחו העצום של החורף ודע איך השמש נוגעת ברוח מה עושה לך טוב בזמן שהגוף והנשמה רדומים עומדים לבדם צריך לחפש את האור כשיש אפילה מוחלטת בחוץ צריך לדעת למצוא את הדברים הטובים והיפים שהחורף מציע לקחת מהכוחות החזקים של העונה ולחזק את נפשך וגופך שלך</p> <p>WINTER</p> <p>Winter, winter, the season of the snow, the rain, the cold, the grey sky Winter, winter, the low temperatures lowering the mood When you pick up your head you can find on the top of the mountains a soft white powder, At times when you can hear grey fox howling from far away, naked trees are standing lonely and the world looks much smaller Suddenly you feel the might of winter And you discover how the sun is touching the wind, What makes you feel good at the time that your body and soul are standing alone asleep You need to search for light when there is absolute darkness outside You must know how to find the beautiful things that winter may offer To take some of the strong elements of the season and to strengthen your own body and soul.</p>	

<p>First Place Zev Goldhaber-Gordon</p>	<p>7th Grade, Gideon Hausner Day School Palo Alto, CA</p>
<p>We think that our life is a long road And that we have a meaning in life But the truth which is true and sad Is that life is just a rat race</p>	<p>אָנוּ חוֹשְׁבִים שֶׁחַיִּים הֵם דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶבָּה וְשֵׁשׁ לָנוּ מִטְרָה בְּחַיִּים אָבֵל הַמָּסָר שְׁלִי אֲמַתִּי וְעֶצוּב שֶׁהֵם רַק תַּחֲרוּת עֵבְרִים</p>
<p>What we have in our evolution Is a rat race for what we need But what is big, truthful, and bad is That everything is a rat race for what we want Because if we only think about ourselves Nothing will remain for others</p> <p>“Every man for themselves, and me for myself,” We don’t know what other people want We don’t worry for other people Because we think that it is just a rat race</p>	<p>מָה שֵׁשׁ לָנוּ בְּאֵבֹלוּצְיָה שְׁלָנוּ זוֹ תַחֲרוּת עֵבְרִים לְמָה שְׁצָרִיכִים אָבֵל מָה שְׂגָדוּל, אֲמַתִּי, וְנוֹרָא, הוּא שֶׁהֵפֵל תַּחֲרוּת עֵבְרִים לְמָה שְׂרוּצִים כִּי אִם אַתֶּם רַק חוֹשְׁבִים עַל עֲצֻמְכֶם לֹא יִשָּׂאָר כָּלוּם לְאַחֵרִים</p> <p>“כָּל אָדָם לְעֲצָמוֹ, וְאֲנִי לְעֲצָמִי” לֹא חוֹשְׁבִים עַל מָה שְׂאַחֲרִים צָרִיכִים לֹא דוֹאֲגִים אַחַד לְשָׁנִי כִּי חוֹשְׁבִים שָׁזָה רַק תַּחֲרוּת עֵבְרִים</p>
<p>What we have in our evolution Is a rat race for what we need But what is big, truthful, and bad is That everything is a rat race for what we want Because if we only think about ourselves Nothing will remain for others</p> <p>And even if someone thinks he has “won” And that they are “living the life” It is just light in the back of the tunnel Not real, just a rat race</p>	<p>מָה שֵׁשׁ לָנוּ בְּאֵבֹלוּצְיָה שְׁלָנוּ זוֹ תַחֲרוּת עֵבְרִים לְמָה שְׁצָרִיכִים אָבֵל מָה שְׂגָדוּל, אֲמַתִּי, וְנוֹרָא, הוּא שֶׁהֵפֵל תַּחֲרוּת עֵבְרִים לְמָה שְׂרוּצִים כִּי אִם אַתֶּם רַק חוֹשְׁבִים עַל עֲצֻמְכֶם לֹא יִשָּׂאָר כָּלוּם לְאַחֵרִים</p>
<p>But this isn’t how life has to be If we are all just good And if all of us worry for others Then it won’t be a rat race</p>	<p>וְגַם אִם מִשְׁהוּ חוֹשֵׁב שְׂנֻצָּח וְשֶׁהוּא “חַי אֶת הַחַיִּים” זֶה נִרְאֶה כְּמוֹ אוֹר הַיָּרֵחַ לֹא אֲמַתִּי, רַק תַּחֲרוּת עֵבְרִים</p>
<p>What we have in our evolution Is a rat race for what we need But what is big, truthful, and bad is That everything is a rat race for what we want Because if we only think about ourselves Nothing will remain for others</p>	<p>אָבֵל זֶה לֹא אֵיךְ שֶׁחַיִּים צָרִיכִים לִהְיוֹת וְכִדִּי שְׂלֵכְלָנוּ יִהְיֶה טוֹב וְנִעִים וְאִם כְּלָנוּ נִדְאָג לְכֻלָּם... אִז זֶה לֹא יִהְיֶה תַחֲרוּת עֵבְרִים</p>
<p>Watermelon and pizza, Doritos and sprite A nice picnic, other things We have a power of good and peace And it is to break the rat race</p>	<p>אֲבֵטִיחַ וּפִיצָּה, דוֹרִיתוֹס וּסְפְרִיט, פִּיקְנִיק נְחֵמָד, דְּבָרִים אַחֲרִים, יֵשׁ לָנוּ כֹחַ שֶׁל טוֹב וְשְׁלוֹם, וְזֶה יִשְׁבֵּר אֶת תַּחֲרוּת הָעֵבְרִים</p>

Second Place
Danielle Vansover

7th Grade, Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School
Palo Alto, CA

LIFE IS TOO SHORT

Life is too short
So do everything, I request
Every second counts
So please, I suggest

A trip to the beach
Hot chowder for each
Fly in a hot air balloon
In front of the sliver moon

A bike ride in the mountains
With the sun touring by
A chocolate so dreamy
You just want to fly

Life is too short
So do everything, I request
Every second counts
So please, I suggest

A vacation to Paris
Where I am a guest
A dance in the rain
As my heart beats in my chest

Pink clouds in the distance
The sunset coming to existence
The lights of the night show in the sky
Almost like a dream, oh my

Life is too short
So do everything, it's smart
Every second counts
Just know, to follow your heart

חיים קצרים

החיים קצרים מדי,
אז תעשו הכל, זה כדאי.
כל שניה חשובה,
כי החיים קצרים מדי.

טיול על חוף הים,
מרק צדפות חם.
לעוף בכדור פורח,
מול ירח זורח.

רכיבה על אופנים,
עם השמש מטילת בשמים.
בנית איש שלג חייכני,
ואכילת שוקולד חלומי.

החיים קצרים מדי,
אז תעשו הכל, זה כדאי.
כל שניה חשובה,
כי החיים קצרים מדי.

חפשה לפריז,
עם פלבלב זריז.
דחיפה על נדנדה,
ורוח מלוחה.

שקיעת השמש הכתמה,
עם עננים ורודים בסביבה.
אורות הלילה במרום,
כמעט, כמו חלום.

החיים קצרים מדי,
אז תעשו הכל, זה כדאי.
תחיו את חייכם היטב,
רק תדעו, שהכל בלב.

Third Place
Arielle Perrochon

7th Grade, Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School
Palo Alto, CA

CIRCLE OF STORIES

I flip through the pages,
And feel them,
Delicate, thin, and white.

The moment I start to read
I can not stop
The book is a trap,
It pulls me in
And I can not stop.

I thumb through the pages,
And want to see what happens
To the princess and the Dragon
And if the brave prince will come
save her.

And suddenly it's over
I return to the world
"Let's set the table!"
Mom calls
But I do not want
I open another book
And begin again.

מעגל של ספורים

אני מדפדפת דרך הדפים,
ומרגישה אותם,
עדינים, דקים, ולבנים.

כרגע שעיני מתחילות לקרא
איני יכולה להפסיק
הספר הוא מלכדת,
הוא מושך אותי אליו
ואני לא יכולה להפסיק.

אני מדפדפת דרך הדפים,
ורוצה לראות מה יקרה
לנסיכה ולדרקון
ואם הנסיך האמיץ יבוא להציל אותה.

ופתאום הוא נגמר
אני חוזרת לעולם
"בואי לערך את השלחן!"
אמא קוראת
אבל אני לא רוצה
אני פותחת עוד ספר
ומתחלה לדפדף

Honorable Mention

Maya Kolyer

8th Grade, Yavneh Day School, Los Gatos, CA

אריז הפלאות

Raquel Cohen

8th Grade, Chicago Jewish Day School, Chicago, IL

זמן

HIGH SCHOOL NON-NATIVE

First Place
Cali Chussid

11th Grade, David Posnack Jewish Day School
Davie, FL

WHAT IS 6 MILLION?

Big number with lots of zeros
More than the number of unsung heroes
The number of sand granules on the beach
The number of stars out of our reach
The number of fish in the sea
The number of mothers to be
The number of leaves on a tree
The number of locks that can't fit the right key
The number of rain drops on a stormy day
40% of the population in Europe that had no say
The number of strands of hair shaved off a Jew's head
The number of innocent people lying helplessly dead
6 million is a hard number to be forgotten
Its hard to believe people created from the same G-d can be so rotten
The day of remembrance is a day to mourn for 6 million people we've never met
Just to let the helpless souls know that we will never forget
6 million is a number hard to understand
The only thing that will help is to remember the millions of people stolen from this land
Let us never forget our unfortunate past,
And may their souls live inside us to be happy at last

מה זה 6 מיליון?

מספר גדול עם הרבה אפסים,
מספר שקשה לומר במילים!
כמו החוף שבחוף,
כמו הכוכבים שאנחנו רואים.
כמו הדגים שבים,
כמו הילדים בעולם.
כמו טיפות גשם, ביום סערה!
הילדים, שלא יכולים לקבל אהבה.
השיער שגולח, בראש של יהודי.
כל היהודים שמתו,
6 מיליון זה מספר קשה לשכוח!!
עכשיו, היהודים צריכים כוח.
אנחנו צריכים לזכור את הנשמות
שנפטרו,
ולחיות שמחים, כי הם לא יוכלו.

Second Place
Emma Farber

11th Grade, New Community Jewish High School
Los Angeles, CA

ME AND MY HORSE

We soar together like clouds
The breeze blows in my face
The sky is blue and the sun is gold
My horse and I are one
We gallop through the sky and pass every obstacle
My horse and I overcome everything
He is always by my side and helps me a lot
Growing, overcoming, and doing right
We observe from above, the top of the universe
We see beneath us, children playing
May I succeed at this dream,
Forever in my every-day life.

אני והסוס

רחפנו ביחד כמו עננים,
הרוח הנעימה מכה בפנים.
השמים כחולים והשמש זהב,
אני וסוסי זה גוף אחד.
אנחנו דוהרים בשמים ועוברים כל מכשול,
הסוס ואני נתגבר על הכל.
הוא תמיד לצדי ועוזר לי המון,
להתגבר, להתגבר ולעשות נכון.
משקיפים מלמעלה בגבה השחקים,
ורואים מתחתינו ילדים משחקים.
מי יתן ואצליח את זה החלום,
לחיות לתמיד בתיי היום יום!

Third Place
Craig Tarnopol

11th Grade, Frankel Jewish Academy
West Bloomfield, MI

NO EXIT

I woke up again on the frigid floor of the room
Darkness fills the room
Darkness that can conceal all the problems in the world
Still, I do not feel at peace

The emptiness of the room scares me
I can hear everything, but there is no voice for me to listen to
I am alone
Alone with my thoughts

Everyday I look for the exit
But I fail to find the way out
I feel trapped
I don't know who I am anymore

But then I found her
I see her in my dreams
Every night I visit her
Her presence shines like the sun after a storm

She takes my hand
And guides me towards the light
Towards the unknown
Free at last

But I wake up and my dreams collapse
She disappears in the darkness
And again I am left alone in the room
Alone with my thoughts

אין יציאה

התעוררתי עוד פעם על הרצפה הקרה של החדר
חשך מלא את החדר
חשך שיכל להסתיר את כל הבעיות בעולם
ברם, אני לא מרגיש מנוח

הריקנות של החדר מפחידה אותי
אני יכל לשמע את הכל, אבל אין קול שאפשר לשמע אותו
אני בודד
בודד עם המחשבות שלי

כל יום אני מחפש דרך החוצה
אבל אני נכשל למצא המוצא
אני מרגיש כבול
אני לא מכיר את עצמי יותר

אך, מצאתי אותה
אני רואה אותה בחלומות שלי
כל לילה אני מבקר אותה
המצאותה מאירה כמו שמש אחרי סופה

היא לוקחת ידי
ומדריכה אותי כלפי האור
כלפי הנעלם
חפשי סוף סוף

אולם אני מתעורר והחלומות שלי התמוטטו
היא נעלמת בחשך
ושוב אני נשאר בודד בחדר
בודד עם המחשבות שלי

Honorable Mention

Tatiana Weiford

10th Grade, Adelson Educational Campus
Las Vegas, NV

בעלי חיים בחלומי

RAVSAC Staff Pick

Sarah Bonner

12th Grade, Tarbut V'Torah
Irvine, CA,

הארון של האחות שלי

First Place
Aviv Rau

12th Grade, The Weber School
Atlanta, GA

THE PROCESS

My pen is resting on the blank paper—
The paper that yearns to be covered in words
But the words are stuck
They just won't come out

I do have feelings—
That's not the issue
On the tip of my tongue, an entire dictionary exists
But all that's in my head
Suddenly stops short.

Plenty of time has already passed—
Yet the paper remains stark and white
Without words—not even one
And the pen is capped, rests against it

The unborn poem—
That is stuck inside me
Is coming out now, little by little
And it all began with a single word

התהליך

עטי על הניר -
הניר שרוצה במלים להתכסות
אבל המלים תקועות,
הן פשוט לא יוצאות.

יש לי רגשות -
זאת לא הבעיה.
על קצה לשוני, מלון שלם נמצא.
אך כל מה שנמצא בראש
פתאום נתקע.

בכר עבר המון זמן -
אך הדף בלו לבן,
כלי אף מלה אפלו אחת לא.
והעט סגור, נשען מולו.

השיר הלא קיים -
שתקוע בתוכי כמעט
והנה הוא יוצא, לאט, לאט.
כל זה התחיל עם מלה אחת.

Second Place
Noam Gold

11th Grade, New Community Jewish High School
Los Angeles, CA

BETRAYAL

The sun shines high, retracting the arrow that pierced my heart,
Sweeping away the raindrops that poured out of my eyes like dust.
Peacefully, you shattered my soul, like an archer shooting a dart,
And in my stupidity, I thought you were someone I could trust.

Sweet birds chirp amidst such peaceful silence,
Clouds white as cotton turn into a menacing gray.
The storm banishes every trace of hope with such violence,
The rain fills me with a jolt of pain, and every trace of joy melts away.

Rain fills gutters like pain fills my body,
Then a tornado, as if I'm not hurt.
Driving me to the brink of insanity, a storm so naughty,
Tearing from the roots, upturning the dirt.

Over the joy, the sorrow has surpassed,
A storm caused by a single trigger, a photo from the past.

בגידה

קרני שמש חמומות שולפות חץ, עמוק מתוך הלב,
מייבשות טפות גשם שנטפו פעם מעיני, מזמן.
כמו קשת ירית בי, ובכל זאת נשארת שלו,
ואני בטפשותי חשבת שהיית נאמן.
צפור מצייצת לפתע ופוצעת את הדממה,
עננים לבנים כצמר מתחלפים באפור דוקרני.
הסופה מעלימה ממני כל טיפה של אמונה,
הגשם שוטף את האושר ומכניס בי כאב פתאומי.
מי הגשם ממלאים מרזבים ככאב הממלא את גופי,
הרוח מביאה איתה סער זועף ומרעים.
הוא מטריף אותי, ממלא אותי בסבל אינסופי,
תולש שורשים, מוציא החוצה את מה שבפנים.
אף שריד אחד של אושר לא יבצבץ היום, גם לא מחר,
והסופה המשתוללת בתוכי היא בסך הכל בגלל תמונה מן העבר.

Third Place
Stav Harel

11th Grade, New Community Jewish High School
Los Angeles, CA

GILAD

Terrorists are running after me and I no longer see the light
Focusing on my disappearance I begin to feel the fright
Running with all my strength I try to catch my breath
I was kidnapped...

But the sense of hope never left

Within the darkness, I attempt to search for the light
I try to break the silence, gathering all my might
I can't find the light although in vain I try
But the silence is broken, and so am I...

The complete silence quickly bursts into cries
Cries of sadness and longing which suddenly arise
After a while I concluded that no one would ever save me
That there is no way out and to my family I will solely be memory

I sit in solitude far from my home
Suddenly positive that one day I will return

The complete silence quickly bursts into cries
Cries of optimism and hope which suddenly arise
After a long while I am convinced that someone will save me
That there is a way out and I will in fact see my family

Within the darkness, I attempt to search for the light
I try to break the silence, gathering all my might
I finally find the light after in vain I tried
And the silence is broken, no matter how quietly I cried

Terrorists run after me and I can't see the light
I focus on my disappearance and began to feel the fright
I run with all my strength and try to catch my breath
I was kidnapped...

However after years of despair and hope, my home I find

גלעד

מחבלים רצים אחרי ואני לא רואה עוד אור
נלחם בשביל מדינתי וכחות מנסה לצבר
רץ בכל כחי ומנסה להסדיר את נשימתי
נחטפתי...

אך לעולם לא אבדתי את תקותי.

בעלטה מנסה אני למצא את האור
את הדממה המחלטת מנסה אני לשבור
אחרי חפוש רב את האור לא מצאתי
אך את הדממה שברתי ועם הזמן גם אני נשברתי.

הדממה המחלטת לפתע התפרצה לבכי
בכי של עצב, של געגועים של רגע הפה בי
לאחר זמן רב הפנמתי שבחיים לא יצילוני
שחי אבודים ומשפחתי לעולם לא תראני.

יושב אני בדרך רחוק ממשפחתי
אך בטוח שיום אחד אשוב לביתי

הדממה המחלטת לפתע התפרצה לבכי
בכי של אשר, ותקנה של רגע התעוררה בי
לאחר זמן רב השתכנעתי שיום אחד יצילוני
שחי אינם אבודים ומשפחתי עוד תראני.

בעלטה מנסה אני למצא את האור
את הדממה המחלטת מנסה אני לשבור
אחרי חפוש רב את האור סוף סוף מצאתי
ואת הדממה שוב ושוב שברתי.

מחבלים רדפו אחרי ולא ראיתי את האור
נלחמתי בשביל מדינתי וכוחות נסיתי לצבר
רצתי בכל כחי ונסיתי להסדיר את נשימתי
נחטפתי...

אך אחרי שנים בין יאוש לתקנה אל ביתי שבתי.

Honorable Mention

Leemor Aizenberg

9th Grade, Adelson Educational Campus

Las Vegas, NV

את בקלומי

RAVSAK Staff Pick

Noam Marcus

11th Grade, Jewish Community High School of the Bay

San Francisco, CA

עולם שלי

Teacher Award-First Place
Clara Lazimy

Madison Jewish Community Day School
Madison, WI

MY BROTHER

My brother
went away
and is no more
Is no more?
He stands by the wall clock
and teaches me
o'clock
half past
quarter past
Stands in front of the tall mirror
in the master bedroom
combing his hair, straightening
the hem of his jacket
Takes me to the movies
Runs by my side
holding on to the seat of my bike
yelling encouraging words
that scatter on the sidewalk
My brother
My brother! My brother!
My brother is in the poems of sadness and pain
Written in his small, exact script
My brother will never answer the phone
and will never again send me funny emails
But in the most unexpected moments
he winks at me
and smiles
from a thousand photographs
Those kept in albums
and those held in my heart

אָחִי

אָחִי
הָלַךְ
וְאֵינְנוּ
אֵינְנוּ?
הוּא עוֹמֵד לְיַד שְׁעוֹן הַקִּיר
וּמְלַמֵּד אוֹתִי
בְּדִיוֹק
וְחִצֵּי
וְרַבֵּעַ
מִוֵּל הָרֵאֵי
בְּחֶדֶר הַהוֹרִים
מְסַדֵּר אֶת הַשִּׁיעָר וּמְשִׁיב
אֶת שׂוּלֵי הַגִּיקֵט
לוֹקֵחַ אוֹתִי לְסָרְט
רֶץ לְיָדֵי
אוֹחֵז בְּמוֹשֵׁב הָאוֹפְנִים
צוֹעֵק מִלּוֹת עֲדוּד
הַמְתַּפְזָרוֹת עַל הַמְדַרְכָּה
אָחִי
אָחִי! אָחִי!
אָחִי בְּשִׁירֵי עֶצֶב וְכָאֵב
הַפְתּוּבִים בְּכַתֵּב יָדוֹ
קָטָן וּמְדוּיָק
אָחִי לְעוֹלָם לֹא יַעֲנֶה עוֹד לְטֶלְפוֹן
וְשׁוֹב לֹא יִשְׁלַח לִי אֵימִיל מְצַחִיק
אֲךְ בְּרִגְעִים הַכִּי בְּלָתִי צְפוּיִם
הוּא קוֹרֵץ לִי
וּמְחַיֵּךְ אֵלַי
מְאַלֵּף תְּמוּנוֹת
כְּאֵלֶּה שְׂבֵאלֵבוֹמִים
וְכֵאלֶּה שְׂבֵתוֹךְ לְבִי

RAVSAK HEBREW POETRY CONTEST

MEET THE JUDGES



Maya Arad

Maya Arad, born in Israel, grew up in Kibbutz Nahal Oz. She earned her PhD (Linguistics) in London and is currently a

writer-in-residence at Stanford University. Author of nine books in various genres, she is recognized as one of the leading Hebrew novelists of her generation.



Robert Whitehill-Bashan

Robert Whitehill-Bashan was born in North Carolina and was raised in Lubbock, Texas. Beginning at

age 13, he started teaching himself Hebrew from commercial books and records, and he began writing Hebrew poetry in his mid-twenties. He has written four books of Hebrew poems, and is currently completing two more. His Hebrew poetry has appeared in Israeli journals such as *Haaretz*, *Iton 77*, *Shevo* and *Hol*, and in the American journals *Hadoar* and *Hador*. He now lives in Burbank, California, is married and has four children and five grandchildren.

Gratz COLLEGE

Education Grounded in Jewish Values

→
**GROUNDING IN
TRADITION**



**FOCUSED
ON THE
FUTURE**
←



- Advanced degrees and certificates for Jewish professionals
- FULLY ONLINE programs
- Dynamic, interactive curriculum

gratz.edu • 800.475.4635

»» **NEW** ««

**M.S. in Nonprofit
Management for
Faith-based Organizations**

**Contact us today for
more information**

RAVSAK

The Jewish Community Day School Network
254 West 54th Street, 11th floor
New York, NY 10019

NonProfit Org
US Postage
PAID
Mechanicsburg, PA
Permit 63

Have you checked out the new features of RAVSAK's website?

Professionals and lay leaders associated with RAVSAK member schools have access to new tools and resources:

Use the new direct colleague search. Easily find contact information (work) for the professionals at network schools.

Discover the new platform designed for Reshet members. Access archives of past conversations, upload and find resources by topic and connect with other Reshet members all through the RAVSAK website.

Check your email for login information and instructions.

Log on and plug in!

Questions?

Contact Lisa Chandler at lisa@ravsak.org

