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הידיעון

HAYIDION

RAVSAK



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ATHLETICS

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MISSION

MORE THAN A GAME:  
JCC MACCABI AND ATHLETIC  
ENDEAVOR

10

The Maccabi games leverage the power of sports and the excitement of a worldwide gathering of young Jewish athletes to strengthen Jewish identity, values and knowledge.



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SPORTS LESHEM SHAMAYIM:  
THE SACRED MISSION OF HIGH  
SCHOOL ATHLETICS

14

Sports can play a critical role in putting a day school's values into practice. The authors focus on character development, community and spirituality.



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CREATING AN ATHLETICS  
HANDBOOK THAT REFLECTS  
SCHOOL VALUES

17

How does a school ensure that its mission is not forgotten on sports fields and courts? A handbook can help translate a school's values for its athletics teams, both home and away.



**Corrie Mizusawa** is the athletics director, middle school girls' PE teacher, basketball coach and cross country coach at The Brandeis School of San Francisco. [cmizusawa@sbrandeis.org](mailto:cmizusawa@sbrandeis.org)

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY  
FOR STUDENTS WITH  
SPECIAL NEEDS

20

By engaging students with a variety of strategies, including movement and activity, teachers can keep learners with diverse needs focused and on task.



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CREATING AN LGBT INCLUSIVE  
SCHOOL ATHLETIC PROGRAM:  
FROM INTENTION TO ACTION

22

Physical education is often perceived as the least safe activity for LGBT students. Through an inclusive vision and proactive leadership, sports can be successful for all students.



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LEADING A SCHOOL-BASED  
SPORTS PROGRAM: MISSION  
AND COACHES

24

Hiring the right coaches and training them in your school's mission and vision are critical steps for ensuring that they communicate the right messages and are on your school's "team."



**David Jacobson** is senior marketing communications and content manager at Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA), a national nonprofit developing "Better Athletes, Better People" through resources for youth and high school sports coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes. [david\\_jacobson@positivecoach.org](mailto:david_jacobson@positivecoach.org)

RAVSAK  
NEWS & PROGRAMS

RAVSAK ENROLLMENT  
STUDY

21

PHYSICAL EDUCATION  
IN RAVSAK  
MIDDLE SCHOOLS

25

SMALL SCHOOL  
CONFERENCE

29

RAVSAK WELCOMES  
AMY SHROYER

33

RAVSAK REPORT  
PROVIDES  
COMPREHENSIVE PORTRAIT  
OF HEADS OF SCHOOL

49

STUDENT PROGRAM  
UPDATES

54

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION  
IN JEWISH COMMUNITY  
DAY SCHOOLS:  
A RAVSAK REPORT

61

KNESSET MEMBER  
RACHEL AZARIA GIVES  
EMERGENCY BRIEFING TO  
RAVSAK SCHOOLS

65

RAVSAK BOARD RETREAT

71

RESHET ROUNDUP

75

HEAD OF SCHOOL  
PROFESSIONAL  
EXCELLENCE PROJECT

77

## COLUMNS

### FROM THE EDITOR

6

#### Jewish Schools and Sports: Win-Win



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### FROM THE BOARD

7

#### The Day School Home Field Advantage



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### DEAR COOK!

8

#### Recognizing Teacher Excellence



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### GOOD & WELFARE: NEWS FROM RAVSAK SCHOOLS

9

### COLUMN

41

#### Having Faith In Sports



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### FROM THE CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

78

#### Day Schools Lead During Changing Times



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## ISRAEL

### INCLUDING SPORTS IN THE ISRAEL TRIP

28

The extraordinary power that sports have to rouse emotions and elicit feelings of identity and connection can be harnessed effectively on a school's trip to Israel.



**Josh Halickman** is a sports loving Zionist living in Jerusalem and runs the English Israel sports website [www.sportsrabbi.com](http://www.sportsrabbi.com), along with managing Maccabi Tel Aviv's English website [@TheSportsRabbi](http://www.maccabi-tlv.co.il/en)

### ISRAEL EDUCATION PLAYBOOK

30

No need to wait until the Israel trip—there are ample opportunities to enhance students' knowledge of and love for Israel through sports in their school and community.



**David Lasday** serves as the director of youth development for the Israel Lacrosse Association; a social entrepreneur, Lasday also helps direct the growth of Global Game Changers, Sticks For Kids and Hoops For Kids.  
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### "IN THE LEAGUE TOGETHER"— RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR CHILDREN, SOCCER AND A MEETING OF IDENTITIES

34

A soccer program, including educational components, capitalizes on sports' capacity to bring people together in order to bridge the gulf between religious and secular Israelis.



**Yochai Sharon** is a project director at Tzav Pius, an organization that promotes dialogue and coexistence across the religious-secular divide among Israeli Jews.  
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## ATHLETICS IN OUR SCHOOLS

### Building Peace through Pyramids: Partnering with Ferguson to Create Circus Show

42

**Cheryl Maayan**, Head of School, Saul Mirowitz, Jewish Community School, St. Louis

### How Competition on the Field Led to Understanding Around the Table

43

**Rabbi Harry Pell**, Associate Head of School for Jewish Life and Learning, Solomon Schechter School of Westchester, Hartsdale, New York

### Learning Perseverance Through Perspiration

44

**Rabbi Azaryah Cohen**, Head of School, Frankel Jewish Academy, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

### Student Leadership in School Athletics

45

**Micah Grubert Van Iderstine**, Senior, Gray Academy of Jewish Education, Winnipeg

### Community-Building Exercise

46

**Zachary Coffin**, Athletic Director, Emery/Weiner School, Houston

### Golf: A Jewish High School's Journey in Discovering a Sport for a Lifetime

47

**Cindy Dolgin EDD**, Head of School, and **Kerry Dalton**, Athletic Director, Schechter School of Long Island, Williston Park, New York

## SPORTS

### MORE THAN JUST A GAME

48

A basketball game that drew national attention to a small Jewish day school gave the students a platform to demonstrate the strength of their Jewish commitments.



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### COLOR WAR ISN'T JUST FOR CAMPERS

50

Learn how a school takes this quintessential camp experience and transforms it into a prime vehicle for Jewish day school education.



**Ayelet Margolin Lehtman** is the director of marketing and communications at Denver Jewish Day School.  
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### A LEAGUE NOT OF ONE'S OWN: COMPETING WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

52

Participating in a sports league outside of the Jewish world can enable students to compete at a higher level while preparing them for life in the larger society.



**Rob Cohen** is an upper school physical education and health instructor and girls varsity soccer coach at Golda Och Academy. **Janet Herman** is the athletic director and chair of the health and physical education department at Golda Och Academy in West Orange, New Jersey. **Josh Breitman** is the lower school physical education instructor and girls varsity basketball coach at Golda Och Academy.

## ULTIMATE FRISBEE: ULTIMATELY FUN, ULTIMATELY JEWISH 56

A student leader and his team coach, the Jewish studies director, reflect upon the Jewish connections and learning forged outside the classroom.



**Benjamin Joffe** is a senior at Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. **Rabbi Judd Kruger Levingston PhD**, the director of Jewish studies at Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy, is the author of *Sowing the Seeds of Character: The Moral Education of Adolescents in Public and Private Schools*. He has served as the first ultimate Frisbee team coach at Barrack since 2013 and became a USA ultimate certified coach in 2015.

## SPORTS CREATES COMMUNITY 58

A sports league created among Jewish day schools has strengthened the sense of community within schools as well as in the larger Jewish population.



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## FIELD OF DREAMS 62

The construction of a home field can amplify a school's Jewish identity, catalyzing and providing a venue for a host of Jewish programs.



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## WHY FOOTBALL? WHY NOT? 66

Jewish high schools often wrestle with the question of whether the sport of football is a good fit. This article reviews the arguments, pro and con.



**Dr. Bruce Powell** is the head of school at de Toledo High School in West Hills, California

# JEWISH ATHLETES



<b>Tamar Katz</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Danny Schayes</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>Estee Ackerman</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Aly Raisman</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>Yuri Foreman</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>Art Shamsky</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Tamir Goodman</b>	<b>38</b>				

Thanks to Rabbi Jeremy Fine, rabbi of Temple of Aaron in St. Paul, former RAVSAK intern and manager of The Great Rabbino: Jewish Sports Speakers Bureau, for his help in connecting us with several of these athletes.

## FROM FANS TO FANATICS 67

### Interview with Justine Gubar



**Justine Gubar** is a four-time Emmy Award-winning investigative journalist. She has worked as a producer for ESPN for nearly two decades, covering major sporting events and producing stories on issues such as performance-

enhancing drug use, domestic violence and homophobia in sport. This interview is published in partnership with the Jewish Book Council.

[www.Fanaticsthebook.com](http://www.Fanaticsthebook.com)

## FITNESS

## MEETING THE HEALTH AND FITNESS NEEDS OF DAY SCHOOL STUDENTS 68

A shift from an emphasis on sports to a holistic focus on wellness and health education can help address the diseases from inactivity and poor nutrition widespread in the Jewish community and beyond.



**Phil Papier** is the dean of athletics at the American Hebrew Academy, the world's only international Jewish college prep boarding school, where he is a founding faculty member. [ppapier@americanhebrewacademy.org](mailto:ppapier@americanhebrewacademy.org)

## HITTING THE TARGET FOR DEVELOPING HEALTHY ATTITUDES 70

Read about the ways that a school fulfills its Jewish mission of caring for the body, along with the soul, by taking movement outside of the phys. ed. silo into all school activities.



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## SPORTS MEDICINE AND ATHLETIC TRAINING: LIVING OUR VALUES, EXPANDING OUR MISSION 73

A program in sports medicine can expand the educational benefits of athletics, empowering students with a knowledge of medicine and valuable skills to serve the larger community.



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## WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY? 76

The demands of a dual curriculum can seem to crowd out attention to students' physical needs. Here are suggestions for keeping students on their toes. Get moving!



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FROM  
THE EDITOR

# JEWISH SCHOOLS AND SPORTS: WIN-WIN



BARBARA DAVIS

Mens sana in corpore sano—"A sound mind in a sound body"—is not a Jewish concept. There are even those who waggishly claim that the term "Jewish athlete" is an oxymoron. Historically, Jews were sensitive to the deep connections between Christianity and physical prowess and eschewed the latter to evade the former. The Routledge Handbook of Sports Development includes a fascinating chapter on "Jewish and Christian Movements and Sport" describing the development of the 19th century movement known as "Muscular Judaism," which sought to combat the stereotype of Jewish men as "weak, non-confrontational and studious." Linked to the Zionist movement, Muscular Judaism's champion Max Nordau advocated for Jews "to physically rise out of the ghettos, and challenge the age-old label of low-class, weak citizens of the world, and to take pride in their Jewish heritage and affirm their cultural right to nationhood."

In the United States, where sports and physical culture were pervasive, Jews' relationship to athletics was viewed as threatening because of its very attractiveness. Steven A. Reiss (in *Sports and the American Jew*) writes that sport was considered "a dangerous force that taught inappropriate social values, drew children away from traditional beliefs and behavior, and led to overexertion and accidents." But for many second generation Jewish youths, sports were an entry into American society. Community leaders were compelled to accept that fact and create Jewish athletic institutions which fostered physical prowess within a Jewish environment, so as to avoid sending their children to gyms which were open on Shabbat and which fostered Christian values.

Forbes magazine's youth sports writer Bob Cook, in an article entitled "Why Jewish Schools Are Ramping Up Their Sports Investment," notes that "religious schools explicitly try to mold the soul as well as the brain. But in the school environment, the soul is extracurricular activities. While feeding the soul, religiously speaking, is what Jewish and other religious schools are nominally about, they have come to realize that to attract students and families, spending money on feeding the school-spirit soul might be their best hope for securing their present and future. God is forever, but so are homecoming memories."

This issue of HaYidion presents a fascinating picture of athletics in both the US and Israel as they relate to Jewish day schools. Of particular note is the care that schools take to assure that the ethical values that are the foundation of their educational programs also take priority in their athletic programs. Whereas in the general public, sports hold such sway that moral values are secondary to winning at all costs ("Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing"), it is wonderful to read about schools that practice what they preach in such secular pursuits. Reading about these schools and their athletic practices is inspiring. Whatever your school's level of athletic programming, you are certain to find this issue's articles intriguing and moving.

FROM  
THE BOARD



SHIRA BROWN

# THE DAY SCHOOL HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

Jewish day schools partner with parents in many ways. When our family recently welcomed our third child, I got to see exactly how unique, special and multifaceted the partnership is between family and Jewish day school. As our family changed, our children's day school, Kadimah Academy, responded in meaningful ways, by being flexible, offering afterschool care to my children and providing them with the extra attention in class that this change in circumstances required. This sensitivity to family circumstances is a unique hallmark of Jewish day school education and is an aspect of the value proposition that we don't talk about enough.

In my childhood, the idea of a global community was an emerging notion. There was no internet; most of us had at least one stay-at-home parent; we learned how to be part of a community by playing outside in our neighborhood. Our reality was largely defined by the worldview of one city block. Today, our children face a far different reality: there are 7 billion people on the planet, we live in a global economy, two-thirds of families are dual income, parents have trouble spending more than one hour a day with their children, and we are all awash in an ocean of noise from social media.

How do we create new paradigms in the here and now for the new realities our children face? How do we inoculate our children against the more adverse challenges this global community pushes our children to confront: the human isolation, the stress of intense and nearly anarchistic free-market competition, social frameworks where deeply meaningful relationships are practically nonexistent? How do kids anchor themselves in terms of values, ethical framing, and the fundamentals of building a community? The answer can be found within Jewish community day schools. The day school environment educates our children to intersect with safe harbors in an ocean of global challenges by providing a depth of enriching and authentic communal relationships. Jewish day schools teach the fundamentals of building a community as a natural paradigm. What it takes to keep a day school together is community building and preservation. Children, teachers and parents are deeply involved in the process, particularly in small schools which offer a multiage environment.

Within a Jewish day school, relationships are deeply intentional; day school teachers are parent extensions in ways not possible in public schools. Day schools teach children at an early age the notion of communal responsibility, that human beings are not disposable and that there are consequences to action; that relationships are important and must be repaired when damaged. The Jewish day school worldview is indeed global, but in a way that emphasizes connectedness not competition: *Kol yisrael arevim ze la ze*—All Jews are responsible for one another. All humans are responsible for one another. Our world, and our precious children, need this grounding now more than ever.

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



# HOW AM I DOING?

Given the complexity of our jobs, and the large number of people (board members, parents, staff and students) who hold us accountable, how can a head of school, especially one who is relatively new, know if s/he is doing a good job?

Sometimes the simplest-sounding question is, in actuality, the most difficult to answer. Let me try, knowing that success looks and feels different to different people in different places at different times.

An important place to start is by looking at objective measures. Has enrollment increased or fallen? Are fundraising goals being met? Is the budget balanced? Do I have all the parent volunteers that I require? And, where relevant, what do test scores look like? While you can argue that one or many of these do not reflect the work of the head of school, you cannot dismiss this data.

If you have distributed a parent survey, the results of that will certainly tell you how the parents perceive your performance. If you have not done so, this might be an excellent way to gain feedback, not only about you, but about the perception of the school, the teachers and the board.

Other markers of your success are far less tangible, but are clear-cut nonetheless. Take a look at the goals you set for yourself (ideally in conjunction with your board chair or head of school support committee). Have you taken specific actions to lead you to the achievement of your goals? Can you list them? Have you set a timeline, and are you on track? Doing a good job does not mean that you have accomplished everything you set out to do, but it does mean that you make decisions and take actions with your short- and long-term goals in mind.

A major part of your role is enforcing school policies. Do you sense that the vast majority of your parent and teaching bodies adhere to the guidelines the school has set? In a similar vein, do you sense that all stakeholders have the same vision for the school? Do you, your staff, your board (and often your students) understand and actualize the school's mission and core values?

Have you built a team? Do you collaborate with others on staff, include them in decision-making, and delegate important responsibilities to them? Do you feel there are some out there who support and defend you? If you always feel that you are working in isolation, unsupported and alone, you may be sending a message to your colleagues, professional and lay, that you do not need them. Of course you do need them, and should explore ways to create the kind of team that successful leadership requires.

Similarly, do your teachers speak to you? Do they share successes or frustrations with you; do they come to say good morning and chat? When you walk into the staff room, do you feel as if you are Daniel entering the lions' den, or do you feel comfortable opening that door?

How do you feel when you come to work each day? Do you look forward to the challenges each new day brings, or do you arrive tense and on edge, dreading each phone call and visit to your office? I am reminded of the old joke about the mother who urges her very reluctant child to leave for school each morning, finally admonishing him by saying, “You have to go—you're the principal...” If that is you, reflect on why you feel that way. What can you change? How can you make interactions more pleasant and productive?

Do you always feel that you are behind schedule, with too much to do and no time to do it? Are you working too long and too late, never seeming to catch up? If that is the case, spend some time prioritizing your tasks. Get help with time-management skills; set a to-do list for each day, with time limits, and work on getting through each day's tasks with greater efficiency. Just as important, leave time in your week for your personal life—exercise, spend time with family and friends, take a course, watch a sporting event, or just relax and read a book.

And what should you NOT look at in judging your own efficacy? In general, don't count the *number* of complaints you receive—everyone complains at times, and often about relatively minor concerns (although they may loom large in the moment). Look instead at the type of complaints: are they keyed in to the core mission of the school (“Why can't we send meat lunches?”); do they reflect your own leadership, or instead are they directed toward more operational, day-to-day concerns? Do complaints come from a broad base of your constituency or from a small group?

Don't worry if you sense that some people don't like you. You are not in the “like” business. What you want from your stakeholders are respect and a recognition that you are the school's leader. With time, many will also come to genuinely like you, but having that as your goal can often lead you astray.

One more caveat: do not base your self-assessment on one day's or even one week's performance. Even the greatest of leaders have days they'd just as soon forget. Learn from these, and it will be reflected in your long-term feelings about your own success.

We all like to know that we are doing a good job, and that those for whom we are responsible and to whom we report appreciate the hard work we put in. Consistent and honest self-reflection, a true awareness of what is taking place in and out of the school, and a willingness to hear the feedback we are given will help us not only to feel confident in the work we are doing, but to grow and improve our skills day by day.

## Good & Welfare

The Agnon School of Beachwood, Ohio, has been renamed the **Joseph and Florence Mandel Jewish Day School**, thanks to a \$17 million gift. Aside from improvements to the facilities, the majority of the funds are dedicated to personnel and programs.

Welcome to a new RAVSAK member school, **Beth Yeshurun Day School** in Houston, Texas.

Noah Kalter is the new head of school at the **Rockland Jewish Academy** in Nyack, New York.

Sam Zell has pledged to give \$1 million a year, and an additional \$25 million bequest, to the **Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School** in Chicago, named in memory of his father.

Mazal Tov to Rabbi Devin Villarreal, teacher and Judaic studies chair at **deToledo High School** in West Hills, California, and to Lea Winkler, general studies teacher and STEM committee chair at **Cohen Hillel Academy** in Marblehead, Massachusetts, on receiving the 2015 Pomegranate Prize from the Covenant Foundation.

The **Jewish Community Day School of Rhode Island** has initiated a partnership with the Islamic School of Rhode Island to bring together fifth graders from both schools at a STEAM-based theater program run by the Center for Dynamic Learning.

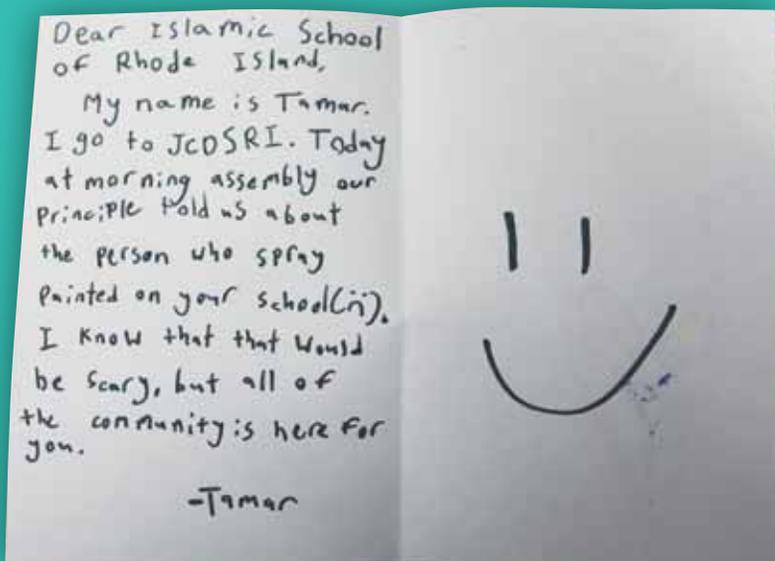


The **Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School** student newspaper, *The Lion's Tale*, was recognized as an All-American Newspaper, the highest honor awarded by the National Scholastic Press Association, with four marks of distinction: Coverage/Content, Writing/Editing, Layout/Design and Leadership.

The **Jewish Academy of Orlando** has adopted MindUP, an innovative program designed to foster classroom learning while improving students' overall state of wellbeing.

**RAVSAK** has been listed as one of only 29 "gold standard" Jewish organizations when it comes to work-life balance by Advancing Women Professionals.

**Ronald C. Wornick Jewish Day School**, in conjunction with Stanford University and the San Mateo County Office of Education, have announced that their collaborative grant, PETALS (Partnership for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in STEM), was selected as one of the 2015 California Math and Science Partnership grants. This three-year, \$950,000 grant includes teacher stipends for training, materials and coaches salaries.







MISSION

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# MORE THAN A GAME:

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## JCC MACCABI AND ATHLETIC ENDEAVOR

Jewish thought has always recognized the body as an integral aspect of human existence. It also has maintained ambivalence about the body's significance. Being created *betzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, obliges us to care for our bodies (Leviticus Rabbah 34:31), or at least not to harm them (Leviticus 19:28). The classical commentators understood the body's role was to house the soul, so caring for the body was an act of *kedushah*, or sanctity (Tosefta Sotah 4:13). Developing the body for its own sake was another matter entirely, though, and the Talmud speaks disparagingly of the Roman custom of games and athletics (Avodah Zara 18b); these are *chukkat hagoyim*, the ways of the gentiles, and not activities fit for nice Jewish boys.

Post-Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) thought broke with this mindset, and individual Jews began to achieve renown as athletes (such as Daniel Mendoza, the English boxer). Still, these were rare cases. But the Zionist movement of the early 1900s promoted a muscular Judaism of physically fit and physically adept Jews who not only could farm, but could run, jump and play all manner of sports. Youth movements such as HaMaccabi HaTzair, founded in Prague in 1929, combined fitness with Jewish nationalism and introduced large numbers of Jewish youth into a culture of physicality. The Maccabiah Games, first held in Palestine in 1932, with 390 Jewish athletes from 14 countries, brought together athletics and Jewish ideology in a massive public event, a complete reversal of the historic ambivalence toward sports.

Jewish day schools in America reflect this history. The earliest day schools were Orthodox and were designed to insulate students from secular culture, including sports. Conservative day schools (beginning in 1951 with the Beth El Day School in Rockaway Park, New York) and the Reform and Community day schools that came after were designed to integrate American and Jewish culture under one roof. This created a new challenge: how to provide a “Jewish lens” through which to view sports and athletic achievement. The JCC Maccabi Games and ArtsFest, coordinated by the Jewish Community Centers of North America, offers one such lens.

The JCC Maccabi Games (or simply, the Games in JCC speak) began in 1982 as an international program of teen engagement. Each summer, approximately 1,000 teens between the ages of 12 to 16 from around the world convene for five days of individual and team athletic competition in one of several host communities. An entourage of coaches, chaperones and visiting parents accompany each delegation. Local families host the teens, and thousands of local volunteers contribute to the program’s success.

In 2006, JCC Maccabi added a parallel program, JCC Maccabi ArtsFest. ArtsFest offers Jewish teens interested in the arts (music, dance, drama, theater and more) five days of “Master Classes” with artists in residence. Athletes and artists join together for all other aspects of the JCC Maccabi experience, including unwinding each evening in high-energy social events.

While athletic endeavor and artistic expression comprise the central activities of the Games and ArtsFest, the larger context is the Jewish expression of pride, peoplehood and values. The opening ceremony (modeled after the Olympic Games) always includes a moving tribute to the Israeli athletes murdered at the 1972 Munich Olympics—something the Olympic Committee has never seen fit to do at its own games. During breaks in the action, athletes and artists socialize at JCC Hangtime, hosted by shlichim from Israel’s Maccabi Movement, where they learn about Israel through interactive programs. Athletes and artists all participate in JCC Cares, a service-learning project bookended by a conversation on the obligation to practice tikkun olam. In 2013, JCC Maccabi launched its middot initiative, awarding medals to JCC Maccabi participants, adults included, who demonstrate one of six core values (see below).

Surveys of participants indicate that participating in a program exclusive to Jewish teens, meeting Jews from around the world, and celebrating Israel as the connecting element of global Jewish peoplehood—and not the athletic or artistic activity—are the factors providing the program’s greatest impact. While the teens travel to the Games and ArtsFest to compete and to create, the real journey they take is to explore their identities as Jews.

The power of the JCC Maccabi experience certainly derives, in part, from its status as a massive, once-a-year event preceded by two years of preparation by the host community. While Jewish day schools cannot match those dynamics, they can provide an intentional Jewish context to frame their sports (and art!) activities. This requires thinking about athletics from two perspectives. The first is athletics for its own sake; that is, what are the goals of the program in terms of physical development? The second is athletics as a vehicle for the Jewish expression of values, with particular focus on three areas: vocabulary, behavior, and desired outcomes.

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## VOCABULARY

A Jewish day school athletics program is an opportunity to apply a Jewish vocabulary to an athletic context. JCC Maccabi takes this opportunity through its middot initiative. Kavod, the Hebrew word for respect, is one of the program’s six core values. Kavod applies to self-respect as well as respect toward others. How players from the same or opposing teams speak with one another, how they interact with one another during play, and what words they use to celebrate victory or accept defeat all are teachable moments for Jewish verbal expressions of respect. The other JCC Maccabi middot are ga’avah (pride), rinah (joy), lev tov (big hearted), tikkun olam (repairing the world), and amiut yehudit (Jewish peoplehood).

Promoting and supporting a shared Jewish vocabulary communicates the importance of those ideas in the athletic setting as well as in the classroom, creating a more congruent, comprehensive and coherent message from the school. The shared language allows a discussion of a Jewish approach to interpersonal relationships within the context of a competitive paradigm.

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## BEHAVIOR

A school’s athletics program also provides a forum for exploring Jewish behaviors in an authentic space. Structuring a training schedule to accommodate Shabbat observance, setting limits on “trash talk” on the court, or establishing team dress codes all require asserting the school’s Jewish priorities. This, in turn, demands ongoing conversation between the faculty and students and their families about foundational concepts; for the examples listed above, religious pluralism, nibbul peh (obscene language), and tzeniut (modesty), respectively. These deliberations can inform an athlete’s understanding of personal identity and proper behavior—on and off the court. An athletics program presents a distinct forum for social and emotional learning, allowing teens to practice the interpersonal skills necessary for positive peer relationships.

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## OUTCOMES

Judaism’s classic mode of chevruta study offers a Jewish lens on the goals of an athletics program. In chevruta study, learners engage in verbal sparring both to parse the text’s meaning as well as to draw from the text a broader understanding of Jewish life. Chevruta study can be a competitive race to the “right answer,” despite the Talmudic dictum that “these and also those are the words of the living God” (Eruvim 13b). Ultimately, however, the chevruta approach to learning encourages friendship and not competition, drawing the learners together through the bond of shared achievement. In chevruta learning the partners do not move from the text unless both learners agree they are comfortable doing so; victory requires collaboration. This stands in opposition to the “winning is everything” ethos so prevalent in modern athletics.

A central element of competitive sports is to win. So the challenge to Jewish day school coaches is how to run practices, establish goals for advancing skills, and adjust behavior on the field to promote winning, but not winning at all costs. The chevruta model of parting in friendship articulates a slightly different goal for athletics in Jewish day schools: winning while remaining friends. Competition becomes a specialized context to help Jewish boys and girls grow together in the building of both athletic and social skills guided by the principle “According to the effort is the reward” (Pirkei Avot 5:21).

JCC Maccabi offers a model for Jewish day schools to explore how athletics programs can serve as a platform for Jewish learning. By using athletic activities to build a Jewish vocabulary, adopt Jewish behaviors and identify Jewish outcomes, Jewish day schools can make Judaism relevant for youth through authentic and transformative experiences outside the reach of the classroom.



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MARC  
BAKER

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PAM  
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# SPORTS LESHEM SHAMAYIM:

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## THE SACRED MISSION OF HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS

Our vision of the role that competitive athletics can play in the lives of high school students is a deeply personal one. We—the head of school and athletic director of Gann Academy in Waltham, Massachusetts—have been playing competitive sports since we were children, and we were blessed with opportunities to compete at both the high school and college levels. We attribute a great deal of who we are—as professionals and as people—to our years of training and competing, to the coaches and teammates who invested so much in us, to numerous times that we have experienced the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, and to the joy we have felt just walking out onto the court to play.

We believe that athletics have the power to be transformational in the life of a child and, for this reason, that athletics are essential to the Jewish and humanistic mission of our Jewish high school. With all of the hype around competitive sports in American society today, one might think that a robust athletics program is a “must have” for any Jewish school for pragmatic reasons, such as recruitment. One might also see athletics as an extracurricular activity—a nice outlet, an opportunity for kids to “run around” and “blow off steam,” or, more generously, an important component of physical wellness during years when teenagers are living less and less healthy, balanced lives. All of these are true.

However, we see a higher and more integral purpose to high school sports. In our experience, sports are a unique vehicle for delivering on several of the defining values-added of a Jewish school. This article will focus on three of these: character development, community and spirituality.

Note: While athletics in schools incorporates both competitive and non-competitive experiences, and while recreational sports and fitness are critical for students’ well-being as well as for creating culture and community, this article will focus on competitive sports.





## CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT— MAKING MENSCHES

Competitive sports play a critical role in the character and identity development of student athletes. Below are some illustrations that, for us, capture why and how this Jewish character formation happens.

### Bechirah (Choice) Points

At Gann we see character development not as a set of values posted on a wall, but as a school-wide effort to build an intentional, growth-oriented culture. Based on the principles of Mussar, the Jewish ethical tradition, we ask both teachers and students to reflect on their middot (inner qualities) and to see day-to-day life and school as a vehicle for learning about their strengths and weaknesses and for becoming their best selves.

This process of reflection illuminates what Mussar calls bechirah points, the choices we make—sometimes large, often small, sometimes consciously, often unconsciously—that shape who we are. By raising our awareness of these choice points, we are able to be more intentional about how we want to act and who we want to be.

Athletic competition is a unique setting that can bring out the best in us or the worst in us. Playing on a team creates countless choice points—in games and practices, on and off the field. How does a player respond when a competitor is cheating or playing unfairly? How do we carry ourselves when another team simply cannot play at our level? What happens when a veteran player loses her starting role to a younger, more talented athlete? Situations like these are profound moments in students' lives, and we want our students to understand that to be a Jewish athlete is to live out Jewish values.

### Tenacity, Grit, Perseverance and the Growth Mindset

The biblical story of Yaakov wrestling with the angel throughout the night can be compared to the end of the first *Rocky* movie. That extraordinary ending shocks the viewer when, contrary to almost every other sports movie, the hero does not actually win. Instead, the redemptive moment happens when Rocky “goes the distance.” So too, Yaakov receives the name Yisrael because he continues his struggle throughout the night and, literally, holds on until sunrise. We are a Jewish people whose very name bears witness to the 21st century skills that Paul Tough, Carol Dweck and others have popularized: grit and the growth mindset. There are few endeavors in life that require and develop resiliency like competitive sports. We celebrate the grit it takes to for a student to lose a starting position and then work to regain that position in the lineup. Coaching staff members encourage our student athletes to push themselves further than they believed possible, and they support them along the way.

### Leadership

In the spirit of Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky's theory of adaptive leadership, athletes understand that leadership is not about a formal position or hierarchical authority; instead, *leading* is something that all of us can do. Yes, sports give students opportunities to practice leading from positions of authority, such as captainships. More importantly, athletes lead when they *show up* and *give 150%* every day. On any given day, in any given practice or game, you never know who will step up and lead. We see examples of the “coach on the floor” mentality, as students take ownership in a team huddle or when veteran upperclassmen take younger players under their wings. Participation in athletics provides opportunities outside of the classroom for natural leaders to expand their skills and for developing leaders to gain confidence.

## Respect

Perhaps the middah and interpersonal skill at play most frequently in athletic competition is respect (kavod)—for oneself and one's body, for teammates, for coaches, for opponents. Both winning and losing can challenge students' to be their best selves, and learning to act with dignity at all times is a critical component of sportsmanship. When we meet in the preseason with our student-athletes, we discuss kavod in the context of winning with dignity and losing with grace. Our stated goal is that we want to "be proud" of how our students and coaches handle themselves with respect for the game (always giving their best effort), their opponents, the officials and one another.

## Discipleship

In today's fast-paced, future-oriented world, we see a declining sense of trust in teachers, mentors and authority figures. While too much trust or reverence for power is obviously dangerous, as we have seen from too many scandals, mentorship and discipleship are core Jewish and human values. We famously learn in Pirkei Avot, "Aseh lecha rav . . . Make for yourself a teacher," which we take to be a lesson about being a student. Rather than wait for teachers or coaches to earn your respect, and rather than pick and choose whom we listen to based on what we find relevant to us, discipleship is about trusting that those who have been empowered to teach or coach you, those who have more experience than you, who actually have something to teach you.

Who doesn't remember the famous scene in *The Karate Kid*, when, after waxing his sensei's cars, sanding the floors, painting the house and the fence, Daniel is about to rebel against his master. Just then, Mr. Miyagi shows him that all of these "chores" have actually been his karate training, and that Daniel now is able to defend himself against an array of punches and kicks. The one condition for their training, Mr. Miyagi said at the outset, was "you trust me."

Our philosophy is that sports are a space where students learn humility and work on the critical skill of "coachability." Students are faced with constructive criticism and they must grow in maturity as they learn to filter the message, to and accept and trust their coaches' suggestions or corrections. With increased parent involvement, increasingly high stakes, and a consumer culture focused on immediate gratification, sports have the potential to restore the timeless values of discipleship, along with the middot of reverence and humility, to our students' lives.

Equally important for a values-driven athletics program is the quality of the coaches. We work extremely hard in the interview process to ensure that our coaches understand our mission and that they will be the "right fit" for our students and our school. Coaching staff need to approach their leadership role from a relational, teaching, motivating and supportive lens rather than have a "win-at-all-cost" mentality. We ask our coaches to instill their players with a measure of success that transcends wins and losses.

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## COMMUNITY AND JEWISH IDENTITY

High school can be a lonely time for students during these tumultuous years of adolescence. The "race to nowhere" of high-achieving academic culture can dehumanize and disconnect kids from one another and from themselves.

One of the promises of a Jewish school is that that the wonderfully challenging years of high school take place in the context of a supportive, caring Jewish community. Powerful human relationships with classmates, teachers, coaches and other caring adults are not nice-to-haves that augment academic excellence and a culture of high achievement. In fact, community is the foundation on which students gain the courage and self-confidence to take the risks necessary for them to reach their full potential.

While a Jewish school should be a purposeful meta-community of shared culture and values in a way that many schools are not and cannot be, students also form micro-communities in which they form friendships, often cross-grade, that can last a lifetime. Sports teams are a beautiful example of these micro-communities.

On sports teams, students learn the Jewish values of achrayut (responsibility) and areivut (bound-up-ness) with other people. They understand that whether and how they show up each day affects everyone around them. This creates an incredible sense of personal agency and responsibility (my team depends on *me*) but also a sense of dependency and support (we win and lose *as a team*).

The sports team community is also intergenerational, for, like the Jewish people, teams have a collective identity that transcends any given year. We see this when alumni come back to play with or cheer for their former teams. We see this when student-athletes self-identify by wearing team swag with pride, the athletic equivalent to a kippah.

While this comparison might seem not to do justice to the Jewish religious-cultural significance of a kippah, we believe that when students have powerful experiences of community on sports teams *in the context* of a Jewish high school, these values and habits of group identification mutually reinforce one another. To put it differently, Jewish sports teams can be incredibly formative for students' *Jewish* identities.

## Spirituality

In order to clarify what we mean by spirituality, especially in the context of sports, we will borrow one of Robert Starrat's three foundational qualities of an ethical person (in *Foundations for an Ethical School*): transcendence. Transcendence, Starrat suggests, has three levels of meaning: "one dealing with the reach for excellence, the other with the turning of one's life toward something or someone else, and the third with achieving something heroic." Sports pushes athletes toward all three of these notions of transcendence, creating opportunities for students to go beyond themselves, beyond what they might believe is possible.

As a young school we continue to grow and explore the "drive for excellence" and the "role of competitiveness" within our athletic program. Earning a spot on a competitive team instills a sense of pride in our athletes. We want students to see this as a privilege that honors their dedication, commitment and "willingness to put themselves out there."

To the degree that the Jewish notion of kedushah, holiness, connotes an "other" realm, or that which is separate and different from the mundane, we believe that there is kedushah in sports, at least at special times and moments. A come-from-behind victory that no one believed was possible, the experience of being "in the zone," the thrill of an entire stadium of fans channeling their energy in the same direction... When we witness or experience these moments, we feel like we are connecting with something larger than and outside of ourselves. We have watched in Heschelian awe and wonder athletic performances that have seemed "super-human," and that give us faith in the divine spirit with which human beings are endowed.

At a time when it can be hard for students to comprehend notions of transcendence or spirituality, and when traditional religious language and concepts often are inaccessible to them, a framework for finding "the sacred" in sports can open students up to the possibility of finding the sacred in Judaism and other areas of their lives.

Especially during the high school years, Jewish schools offer the world an educational model that provides academic excellence on foundations of character, identity and community, infused with meaning and spirituality. We need to help our students and families see the extraordinary potential that athletics, and other less obvious elements of our educational program, help to achieve these goals.

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CORRIE  
MIZUSAWA

# CREATING AN ATHLETICS HANDBOOK THAT REFLECTS SCHOOL VALUES

*The Brandeis School of San Francisco is proud of its athletics program and the contribution our student-athletes make in building a strong community. Athletics are an integral part of our educational program. Our athletics program is designed to help student-athletes develop the tools necessary for healthy competition, collaboration, teamwork, lifelong personal growth, and self-fulfillment.*

The Brandeis School of San Francisco Athletics Handbook

In 2010, I was brought in to The Brandeis School of San Francisco (formerly Brandeis Hillel Day School) as athletics director. As a lifelong avid athlete, I understood the important role that athletics can play in student development. At Brandeis, I found a community of like-minded colleagues and parents. However, at that time the school did not yet convey the way that its philosophy shaped its sports program as effectively as it could have.

One of my first tasks as athletics director, therefore, was to spearhead the creation of an athletics handbook. I did a lot of research to understand what other schools were doing, knowing that our handbook would need to share our department and coaching philosophies, expectations for coaches, athletes and parents, and key policies. Most of the handbooks from other schools were not as robust as we hoped ours would be. There were many ideas and questions our handbook needed to answer:

- What do we expect of our athletes, coaches and parents?
- What is our individual and team assessment policy?
- What is our playing time policy?
- How do our athletics department values and philosophy reflect the school's values and philosophy?

Many stakeholders were involved in the design and creation of the handbook to help answer these and many other questions. Athletics staff, the head of middle school, parents, and the Brandeis marketing department all came together to share valuable information, ideas, energy, and commitment.

Overall, the primary goal for our athletics handbook was to establish the value of our athletics program. We needed to showcase how the school's core values of integrity (ometz lev), kindness (chesed) and service (tikkun olam) complemented the character-building and life skills that come with athletic competition. When we laid these values out, this is what we determined.

## Integrity - Ometz Lev

School's core value: We act honestly and responsibly, even when it is difficult.

### Athletics' value:

- *Commitment:* Our students will stay true to their word and compete honestly and fairly.
- *Goals:* Our students will set individual and team goals and strive to achieve them.



## Kindness – Chesed

School's core value: We treat one another with empathy and compassion.

### Athletics' value:

- *Sportsmanship:* Our students will win with humility and acknowledge defeat with grace while representing Brandeis in a positive manner.
- *Teamwork:* Our students will work together to achieve a common goal and treat their teammates and opponents with respect.

## Service – Tikkun Olam

School's core value: We embrace our responsibility to serve our communities and help repair the world.

### Athletics' value:

- *Work ethic:* Our students will develop a strong work ethic that will help them succeed.
- *Effecting change and growth:* Our students will experience the positive impact their efforts can have on their team, their school and their community.

In addition to reflecting how the athletics program goals integrated with the school's goals, we also dug in to articulate some other goals. For example, we ensure that our team sizes remain small so that we optimize student participation and playing time. These small teams allow students to participate with those of similar skill sets. We want our student-athletes to feel comfortable and be in an environment conducive to their success. Once we had established the values and goals most important to the school and athletics department, we discussed key policies regarding participation on a school-sponsored athletics team. We felt it was pertinent to include information regarding team selection, skill assessment protocol and evaluation, commitment, the value of winning and losing, and playing time, among many other topics.

Throughout the creation and implementation process, we have gained a lot of insight into the value of this handbook. Perhaps most importantly, the handbook provides a foundation for everyone involved in our program—administrators, coaches, parents and athletes—that ensures that we are all on the same page with regard to our athletics philosophy. It establishes the value of the athletics program within the school and for our students.

The handbook has also been exponentially valuable in resolving conflicts, complaints or concerns. While we understand that not every situation is covered in our handbook, it provides a resource for resolving any issue by applying its philosophies, principles and guiding practices. Our coaches feel more confident in their decision-making knowing that there is a handbook they can use as reference. And each year we take parent feedback and revise our handbook appropriately. This is a living document that must constantly evolve to fit the needs of our athletic program and our school.

Here is some guidance for schools that want to create their own athletics handbook.

First, take a good look at your school's overall handbook. What school values do you want to include/reflect in an athletics handbook? What does the school handbook say about your athletics program?

Then, clearly determine the goals for your athletics program. Is it to win? Is it to provide an activity for students that enhances their physical, social and emotional wellbeing? These goals are critical to guide how you craft the handbook.

As part of the goal setting, clarify what athletics means to your school. What is the purpose of having athletics? Why do you offer it as a school program? Offer your answers in the handbook to solidify the role athletics plays in your school.

Take a look at who else in your league has a handbook. What do theirs say? We compete in athletics leagues with schools that have similar school philosophies. As a result, their athletics programs very likely adhere to their schools' visions, just as ours does. Articulate key messages and make sure that multiple stakeholders read through the handbook for clarity and consistency. Include the marketing department from the beginning to ensure that values are intertwined and that key messages are clear. Focus on connecting athletics goals with the core values of the school.

We at Brandeis know that our athletics program is an important extension and reflection of the school's approach, philosophy and practice. Going through the process to create the handbook helped us clearly articulate how we want our student-athletes to approach both athletics and academics at Brandeis. It was an important process for us to go through together, and has helped us, as a community, reaffirm our values and commitments that will serve us today, tomorrow and in the years to come.

# RAVSAK MATTERS

I know that our Head of School has benefited enormously from her participation in HOSPEP! She developed a very meaningful relationship with her coach, who she confided in and looked to for wisdom and support. Thank you for organizing such an incredible program, and for including us in the first cohort.

**Suzanne Costom**, past Board Chair,  
The Akiva School, Montreal, QC

RAVSAK's wisdom and advice are incredibly valuable and we are so grateful for your perspective. It is remarkable to see your leadership inspire community day schools to serve so many so well and gives us true optimism that all Jews can work together for a common goal.

**Gayle Govenar**, Board Chair,  
Shalom School, Sacramento, CA

The Reshet was not only helpful, but also enjoyable. Senior management positions in any school can be lonely places. Reshet membership allows us to know and experience that we aren't alone. The Reshet provides a forum to gather information, learn new things, and validate our thinking and sometimes our actions.

**Rory Paul**, retired Head of School,  
Gray Academy, Winnipeg, MB

With its bird's eye perspective on the field of Jewish education and its team's depth of experience, RAVSAK has skillfully helped my school break down complex problems and strategize solutions that are both research-based and realistic to implement.

**Brian King**, Head of School,  
Milwaukee Jewish Day School, Milwaukee, WI

Sulam 2.0 empowered me to take on the Board Presidency with the confidence that comes from the opportunity to learn with others and create sacred relationships. I feel so much more connected to the greater day school world through this experience.

**Michele Levin**, Board President,  
Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy,  
Bryn Mawr, PA

Moot Beit Din has given me the chance to connect with my Judaism in an academic and spiritual sense - unlike anything else I've experienced. The program has been a highlight of my high school career because it's given me the opportunity to meet incredibly smart and passionate Jewish teens. I've left each year more deeply connected to my Judaism, and mentally stimulated from the discussion and discourse.

**Lily Greenberg-Call**, Student,  
San Diego Jewish Academy, San Diego, CA

## How has RAVSAK made a difference for you or your school?

Help us give back to you, by giving to us. Please make a year-end donation at [ravsak.org/donate](https://ravsak.org/donate) to show your appreciation for the work RAVSAK does to ensure a vibrant Jewish future.



## Tamar Katz

### Figure Skater

#### How did sports impact your Jewish identity?

I represented Israel on the international circuit for eight years. At every competition, small or large, the announcer always presented me the same way: "Representing Israel, please welcome Tamar Katz." I would then do a lap and skate out to my beginning pose, look out at the audience, and always see at least one person waving a large Israeli flag—in Sweden, Russia, Poland, Los Angeles, Italy... There was always someone in the stands waving an Israeli flag and cheering me on. The only other time I felt closer to my Jewish identity was when I stood atop the podium, watching the Israeli flag rise, listening to Hatikvah.

#### What advice would you give to a young Jewish athlete today?

Judaism teaches you that hard work and sacrifice in the present can lead to rewards later. It's one of the fundamental practices of Judaism. Sports is the ultimate way to see how sacrifice and hard work can reap rewards and gains later. Going to practice at 6 am when all your friends are asleep or at 6 pm when they're at the movies doesn't sound fun at the present, but it tastes all the sweeter when you hit that winning pitch, nail that new trick, or stand atop the podium.

JAKE  
WEINER

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Keeping students mentally engaged in the classroom can be a challenging task. With so many distractions, even the most focused of students can become overwhelmed and consumed by their surroundings.

Students with special needs often enter the classroom and become overloaded with sensory input. These distractions inherent in every classroom generate a multitude of sensory stimuli for students to absorb and process. Teachers face many challenges in the classroom, especially in those classrooms where students require more individualized attention. The challenge for educators is to look for alternatives to traditional teaching methods and ways of engaging their students. To keep students with special needs more engaged and focused, physical activity can be the key.

I am inviting and challenging educators to step outside of their comfort zones by creating an environment that engages the students with movement. Teachers can benefit from incorporating at least 30 minutes a day of some form of physical activity. Sports specific activities, exercise and fitness related routines, and other forms of movement can improve the health of your students, increase cognitive performance, encourage socialization, and can sometimes decrease self-stimulatory behaviors often referred to as "stimming." These repetitive body movements or movement of objects are very common in individuals with special needs and help them to regulate their bodies. Exercise and movement can have a calming effect on these students.

Some teachers are unsure about how to incorporate physical fitness or athletic programs into their classrooms. Frustration, fears and/or anxiety are often related to time constraints, required curriculum, lack of knowledge and challenging students. Being open to taking small steps towards a more physically active classroom can reduce and possibly eliminate these barriers. The following are several tips for teachers to utilize in their classrooms.

## RAVSAK Enrollment Study

In partnership with our member schools, RAVSAK has again undertaken a study of enrollment trends in Jewish community day schools across North America to clarify the impact that the economy and demographic changes have had on our individual and collective rosters. With 129 of our schools in the US and Canada now reporting, we believe that we have captured an accurate snapshot of enrollment figures, and more importantly, changes in enrollment from last year.

We are pleased to share that the net change in North American enrollment this year is 169 students, only -0.55% of a difference from last year.

It is important to note that enrollment changes vary greatly, from schools weathering losses in excess of 50% to those that have grown by over 50%. We have categorized the national changes and indicated the % of schools in each category.

Loss of 10% or greater	20%
Loss under 10%	22%
Flat enrollment of +/- 1%	17%
Growth of 1%-10%	34%
Growth in excess of 10%	7%

We can see that while 42% of Jewish community day schools experienced a drop in enrollment, a full 58% of our schools had stable enrollments or experienced growth. These data suggest a rise in the number of schools that have sustained or regained stability and a decrease in schools that continue to face notable enrollment challenges.

Member schools have received customized enrollment reports that track and compare their student enrollment rates over the past five years to schools similar in size, scope of grades served, and region. National figures are available on the RAVSAK website. For more information, contact Robin Feldman at [rfeldman@ravsak.org](mailto:rfeldman@ravsak.org).

### TIME-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

Set a length of time for each activity. This will give students an idea of how long each activity will take. Write the time on a whiteboard for all to see. Start off with shorter time periods and space them throughout the day; 5-10 minutes of stretching in the morning followed by 20 minutes of exercise in the afternoon. This clear-cut timing will allow students to adjust to changes in their schedules. You can work up to longer periods of time throughout the year.

### OUTLINE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WITH A SET NUMBER

Creating an outline of what you want your students to do allows them to anticipate each activity and prepare themselves for each activity. Make sure to assign a given number of repetitions for each exercise. Ambiguity in the instructions leads to upset, making it more difficult for a student with special needs to process the information. Use a pattern to encourage the student to create the mind-body connection and keep them focused on the given physical activity. For example: 10 jumping jacks, 9 chair squats, 8 bear crawls, 7 high knees, 6 skip jumps, etc.

### ENCOURAGE GROUP ACTIVITIES

A main goal of any educator working with children with special needs is to teach social skills, encouraging peer-to-peer interactions. Physical activity of any kind can be a great tool to develop an organic social interaction between students. Students should be encouraged to interact with each other in a fun and nonintrusive way. Simple group sports, games or movement related activities naturally create social opportunities among students.

Have students get into a large circle in the classroom or outdoors. Tell your students to pass an object, weighted or not, to a person across the circle. Depending on the ability of the student, the pass can be in the form of a throw or a roll on the ground. Instruct them to make eye contact and say the name of the person they are passing the object to before they pass; give verbal prompts of "eye contact," "say their name," and "throw or roll the ball." Repeat this exercise several times to help create a familiar activity that can be done every day.

Another great way to encourage social interaction is for students to pair up for different activities. Pairs can play on the same team for a sports day or to help count the amount of jumping jacks they can perform in 30 seconds. Depending on your students and their level of interest, pairs can be changed daily, weekly or biweekly. This will allow students to work with one another, demonstrating the importance of teamwork and accountability.

### MAKE IT FUN AND MOVE OFTEN

It is very hard to compete with iPhones, video games, TV, and relaxation on the couch. The classroom setting gives teachers a unique opportunity to engage with their students for a large chunk of time every day without these influences. Teachers strive to keep content educational and relevant, as well as fun. Physical activity should be no different. When sweating, competing and interacting with others is made a fun experience, students are more likely going to continue those activities outside the classroom. Physical activity can be fun when exercise routines are mastered, sports are understood, and friendships are formed. This can be accomplished with repetition, progression and regression of a given activity. Implement a workout schedule that can be followed daily or weekly to achieve best results.

All of these tips can and should be utilized in every classroom or school program. Students are often reluctant to try something new or learn a new task. Starting your students on an easy and simple routine can help them understand the importance of physical activity for both the body and mind. Physical activity is not a magic wand to solve all problems, and some students may not connect with or enjoy these activities. However, it is important to incorporate different modalities of teaching. Do not underestimate the power of movement and its ability to create a mind-body connection that may help to improve the health of your students, decrease typical "stimming" behaviors seen in students with disabilities, increase cognitive performance, and encourage socialization. Have fun and get moving!

## CREATING AN LGBT INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ATHLETIC PROGRAM:

# FROM INTENTION TO ACTION

PAT  
GRIFFIN

IDIT  
KLEIN

A day school teacher shared with us how troubled he was when he heard another teacher scold a boy on the playground, “Come on, stop throwing like a girl!” From hearing “girl” as a pejorative, it is easy for other boys to make the short leap to denigrating one another as “gay.” In conversations with other teachers and students, we see how this seemingly benign comment is damaging to all kids and adults. We see how sexism and homophobia make a particularly insidious combination in the context of sports and athletics.

Jewish values such as kavod, respect, and Ve’ahavta lerei’acha kamocho, Love your neighbor as yourself, are foundational tenets in every Jewish school. What would our schools look like if we applied these values to issues of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender inclusion?

School athletic and intramural programs are a central part of school culture. Sports programs provide students with opportunities to be part of a team, learn sports skills and improve physical fitness. Spectators at school sports events enjoy a sense of community and belonging as they cheer for friends and enjoy the benefits of athletics as a social event. These benefits should be available to all students, but recent research by the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) indicates that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students do not always view school sports programs as welcoming.

The 2013 GLSEN School Climate survey (available at [glsen.org](http://glsen.org)) indicates that LGBT students view locker rooms, bathrooms, gymnasiums and playing fields as the least safe places in schools. LGBT students describe these areas as places where they are most likely to experience bullying or harassment from other students, or even teachers or coaches. As a result, the GLSEN study indicates that LGBT students are half as likely as other students to participate in school athletics.

LGBT students in the survey also indicate that, of all the adults who work in schools, they were least likely to feel comfortable talking to physical education teachers and sports coaches. These results should raise concern in schools that take seriously the goal of creating and maintaining a respectful and inclusive climate for all students, including those who want to play on sports or intramural teams. If school sports are enriching activities that are integral to school programming, they should be available to all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

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## HOW CAN SCHOOLS CREATE A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CLIMATE IN ATHLETICS?

Policy development, education and action together form the foundation for the maintenance of inclusive and respectful school athletic climate. A policy that sits on the shelf and is unknown to those who are responsible for carrying it out is not helpful. Education not informed by policy is missing an essential piece. Action without knowledge of policy or without the benefit of education can do the most damage of all to creating an inclusive school athletic and physical education climate. If school sports and physical education are to be open and welcoming to all students, they must reflect this value at all levels, from overall school policy to the individual actions of everyone associated with athletics and physical education.

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### POLICY DEVELOPMENT

All schools should have a non-discrimination policy and an anti-bullying policy that specifically includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression along with other characteristics such as gender, religion, race, ability or economic status. When non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies do not specifically include sexual orientation and gender identity/expression or talk about “respect for all” without specifying particular groups, members of a school community do not assume that LGBT people are included. In some schools, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are explicitly excluded to avoid controversy. If a school is serious about creating a climate in which LGBT students can thrive, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression must be enumerated as part of these policies. Such enumerated policies form the baseline for expectations for student access and treatment in all school-sponsored programs.

The athletic program in schools should also have a non-discrimination and anti-bullying policy that reflect the overall school policy. Unfortunately, name-calling, hazing and taunting have long been accepted as a part of sports culture. Coaches sometimes engage in these negative practices as a way to motivate players to perform better without thinking about the messages they are sending when they equate poor performance in sports with girls, gay men or people with developmental disabilities. These policies should also apply to spectators at school sports events.

Because sports participation in most schools is divided into girls’ and boys’ teams, it is particularly important that school athletic programs have in place a policy that enables transgender students to participate on sports teams and use locker rooms and bathrooms according to their gender identity. These policies ideally need to be developed and adopted before a transgender student indicates their intention to try out for a sports team. When athletic program leaders are unprepared and without a policy in place when a transgender student makes their interest in sports participation known, it places an undue burden on the student and their family to act as trailblazers. In addition, reactive policies are often not well thought out and may be based on misperceptions about transgender identity and preconceived notions of problems created by including a transgender student on a sports team.

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### EDUCATION

Education is the second component of a foundation for creating safe and inclusive school sports teams. Well thought out policy that reflects a commitment to inclusion, safety and respect is useless if no one knows about it. Athletic administrators, coaches, parents and athletes should all know their school’s and athletic program’s non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies as well as their particular responsibilities for making sure the policies are carried out as needed. Athletic directors need to educate coaches, especially part-time coaches, who may not be familiar with these policies. In orientation programs with parents of athletes, new coaches and athletes at the beginning of the school year, athletic directors can communicate expectations for all of these participants in school sports.

These education programs are particularly important for preparing coaches for the possibility of having a transgender student on a team. Many coaches do not have a lot of information about transgender students. Knowing what name and pronouns to use in reference to a transgender student, ensuring the student’s access to locker rooms and bathrooms at home and away games, and making sure that the student is treated with respect by teammates and opponents are all part of a coach’s responsibility in ensuring an inclusive and respectful athletic climate.

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### ACTION

The third aspect of creating an inclusive and respectful athletic climate for LGBT students is action. Action encompasses the ways that everyone affiliated with the school athletic program acts to translate policy into day to day practice. Action includes the words and deeds of athletic directors, coaches, physical education teachers, parents and athletes as they act as role models for the inclusion of LGBT students. Coaches need to set standards for how athletes interact with each other just as they set standards for athletic and academic performance. Making it clear to athletes and parents that name-calling is not acceptable and then following this up by intervening when it does occur is part of taking action. Setting an example of positive interaction in how coaches motivate athletes or criticize poor performance is an important action.

Coaches can also enlist the leadership of team captains to encourage team members to treat each other and others in the school community with respect. Setting a tone of excellence in competition and at the same time emphasizing the importance of respect in interactions with others are complementary goals. Enacting a commitment to both goals recognizes the true value of athletic participation in preparing young people for success in a world that is increasingly diverse.

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### RESOURCES

Two easily accessible resources that assist schools in their efforts to create respectful and inclusive athletic programs for LGBT students are Changing the Game: The GLSEN Sports Project ([sports.glsen.org](http://sports.glsen.org)) and Trans\* Athlete ([transathlete.com](http://transathlete.com)). Both websites provide a variety of information that can guide school leaders in the development of policy, educational programs and best practices.

Jewish schools can draw from the deep well of Jewish values that promote respect, openness and equality. Placing Keshet’s poster “Seven Jewish Values for Inclusive Jewish Community” on locker room or gym walls send a vital message that an inclusive Jewish community is an authentic Jewish community.

Former tennis champion, Martina Navratilova, once said, “When the score is tied and there are two seconds left in the game, you don’t care if your teammate is black or white, gay or straight, Christian or Jew. You just want her to make the shot.” To reach this day when athletes are evaluated solely on their athletic ability and individual character, it will take the efforts of everyone who cares about school sports and physical education to develop inclusive policies and educate the community about these policies. School leaders must set a personal example of action rooted in respect and inclusion for physical education teachers, coaches and the students in their programs, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

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LEADING A  
SCHOOL-BASED  
SPORTS PROGRAM:

# MISSION AND COACHES

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DAVID  
JACOBSON

Sport has a role in tikkun olam. No less a visionary leader than Nelson Mandela once said, "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair."



## Physical Education in RAVSAK Middle Schools

In March 2015, RAVSAK polled middle schools for information on the amount of physical education at their schools, receiving replies from 40 schools. On average, middle schools students have PE 2.6 times a week for 44.6 minutes a session or 116.3 minutes per week.

PE time ranges from once a week for 45 minutes (least amount of time per week = 45 minutes) to 5 times a week for 45 minutes a class (most amount of time per week = 225 minutes). The most typical (mode) schedule for middle school PE is twice a week for 45 minutes a session.

It is important to note that these figures are based on self-reporting and speak only to formal physical education class time. Many schools reported that in addition to PE classes, students have daily recess and/or regularly scheduled team sports.

By way of comparison, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adolescents undertake an hour or more of physical exercise per day, with the majority of that time dedicated to aerobic exercise and the balance of the time dedicated to muscle and bone strengthening.

Many schools have introduced regular breaks into the school day for organized stretching, walks around campus (or sometimes, walks around the classroom), yoga and movement games. As one head of school stated, "The students need to move, re-energize and refocus between each class. We need to take a cue from the preschool world and give older kids a chance to 'get the wiggles out.' We ask for too much sitting still."

If you want to produce students equipped for maximum positive impact on a world that very much needs it, it is critical to get sports right in your school. Classrooms can provide all manner of academic rigor, requiring and inspiring character traits such as discipline and persistence. But nothing compares to sport as a vehicle for life lessons and character development.

Sport is exciting, healthy, generally fun, often emotional and action-packed so that participation commands focus, and students are likely to engage and commit in ways quite different than they do in the classroom. Sport also offers immediate feedback and understanding of cause and effect: either you stuck the landing or you didn't...no waiting while teachers grade your papers.

And as youth athletes consider the immediate feedback that they themselves perceive—along with soon-to-follow feedback from coaches, parents and peers—they have the opportunity to learn life lessons. The most common life lessons in sports concern resilience, teamwork, competitiveness, discipline, leadership and overcoming adversity and fear. Youth who learn those lessons can use them to succeed in sports, and more importantly, in the rest of their lives as family members, students, employees, employers and members of a community.

If you accept the premise that it is critical to get sports right, the next question is, How? The answer starts with school leaders who focus on creating a sports environment that is in sync with the highest values and mission of the school.

Sport may be viewed as co-curricular, rather than extracurricular. Sport is not what happens after the serious work of the classroom; it is an extension of the classroom that many students and parents may take even more seriously. Sport resonates more deeply and emotionally than many classroom experiences, and therein lies its potential to produce outstanding students and citizens.

A first step in creating a great sports program is for school leadership to frame it within the school's mission statement, or generate an athletic department-specific mission statement that reflects the overall values of the school as a whole. While formulating the mission statement, view it through the lens of both your highest aspirations and your worst fears. Ask, "What is the greatest thing we can accomplish through sport?" or "If all our students had the ideal sports experience, what would the outcome be? What kind of people would they become?" Also ask, "What if we have misbehavior in the stands, poor sportsmanship, and conflict among players, coaches, parents and school administration? How will our mission statement inform our response to those circumstances?"

The result should be a mission statement that is aspirational, challenging to live up to, yet grounded enough in the reality of today's sports culture to guard against some of our population's baser

behavior. If you imagine every best and worst scenario possible and believe your mission statement could guide you toward swift, just responses, you are on the right track.

A great mission statement inspires people and galvanizes their energy. People tend to forget about the nobler goals of their organizations in the course of pursuing day-to-day responsibilities, so a concise, memorable mission statement keeps all stakeholders in an organization mindful of their aims and helps them resolve difficult, ambiguous situations. It provides a starting point for conversations about the school's values, which is key to assessing and modifying culture and behavior and helps hold an organization accountable to its ideals.

The next step is to generate buy-in from all the stakeholders, including teachers, coaches, parents, student-athletes and any supporters, such as fan groups or booster clubs. Sometimes that requires private meetings with key constituents, and at other times small group sessions or schoolwide assemblies. Other venues for sharing your mission statement and some of its key precepts include websites, newsletters, stickers, ticket stubs, banners and public address announcements.

It may seem too obvious to state that school leadership must communicate its sports program's mission, values and standards clearly, thoroughly and consistently to all constituents. But it's not too obvious, because often breakdowns in the sports culture of a school occur due to failure in those lines of communications. Put simply, you cannot expect people to behave in keeping with what you *believe* are cultural norms unless they *understand* the expectations for behavior within those cultural norms.

So far we have examined the foundations of an outstanding school sports culture. Of course, further structure on top of foundation is necessary. Let's consider coaches as the next level of structure. You need coaches who will not only maintain what you have built, but also improve upon it.

Hiring correctly is key, and now you will see why your mission statement is so important. Does your mission statement say anything about developing character in your student-athletes? Does it specify how many games you should win? Likely, those answers are "yes" and "no," respectively.

Therefore, you would err on the side of hiring a coach of great character, with a track record of developing student-athletes of character. If the coach brings scoreboard wins, all the better. By no means are winning and character incompatible; they often go hand in hand. But the way school leadership would weigh the two in importance illustrates how your mission statement can and should inform your hiring.

The right coaches often are right because of their own leadership skills and charisma. School leadership should use that reality to its advantage. Don't just hire coaches to manage groups of athletes.



## Aly Raisman

**Aly Raisman is a three-time Olympic medal gymnast and captained the U.S. Women's Gymnastics Team to its first team gold medal since the 1996 Olympic Games. Raisman added the United States' first ever gold medal in the floor exercise and also won bronze on the balance beam. She is looking to become the most decorated American gold medal gymnast at the 2016 Rio Olympics next summer.**

### **How did sports impact your Jewish identity?**

Being able to perform Hava Nagila at the 2012 Olympic Games was truly a special experience I'll never forget. To be honest, initially I picked the music because I loved the song and my coaches felt it would be a great fit. I had no idea the impact it would have on myself and the Jewish community around the world. Since I performed that routine in London I have felt a stronger connection to the Jewish community because I received so much love and support. It was unexpected which makes the moment and experience so much more rewarding.

### **What advice would you have for a young Jewish athlete today?**

I would tell young female athletes to be true to who they are, and be comfortable in their own skin. Everyone is beautiful in their own way, and nobody is perfect so don't compare yourself to others! Through my partnership with Walden Behavioral Care, I have the opportunity to speak to students about body image and the importance of having balance in life. Whether it's gymnastics, painting, dancing, etc., find something you love to do and work hard at it!



Make coaches your allies in creating your school's athletic culture.

Notice the respect they can inspire from their players, their players' parents, and their fellow coaches. Empower them to lead beyond just the strict environs of the sport you hired them to coach. They will impart your school's values and deliver on your sports program mission statement in ways you never imagined.

Among the most important ways is by keeping peace with players' parents. Most school athletic directors face no greater challenge than managing parent-coach conflicts. These can arise from issues of playing time, the way coaches try to motivate players, the tone of a coach's voice, how a player behaves at home after practice, the mood of the parent subject to that player's behavior, jealousy of a rival team, etc.

The right coaches can keep you ahead of that curve by coaching the full child, not just the athlete. That desire entails a solid, proactive working relationship with the player's family, who presumably wants the best for the child, as should the coach.

In short, the coach augments the satisfaction of the school sports program's ultimate customer, the student-athlete's parent. Fortunately, the sporting lives of the student-athletes, who *should* be the ultimate customers—served by school leadership, parents and coaches alike—also revolve around the coach. So with coaches connecting the other three stakeholders, they are perfectly positioned to ensure that all constituents are driving at the core values of your mission statement.

No matter how well your coaches work with your student-athletes and their parents, there will be occasional conflicts that end up in your office. Hire, train and manage as well as you can, but the buck still stops with you. After implementing these ideas in your school sports program, you are more likely to manage these conflicts effectively and achieve the goal of producing student-athletes inspired by your school's core values.

### **To Learn More**

Here are some of the resources from our website, [devzone.positivecoach.org](http://devzone.positivecoach.org), on topics mentioned in this article:

Mission Statement for Your School or Youth Sports Organization

Athletic Directors: 3 C's To Consider When Hiring Coaches

5 Qualities of a Great High School Coach

Positive Coaching Alliance's Double-Goal Coach® Job Description

Tips for a Positive Parent-Coach Partnership

Creating a Strong Coach-Parent Partnership

Joe Ehrmann on Coach-Parent Relationships

How an Athletic Director May Manage Expectations

Dealing With Upset Parents as an Athletic Director

Hard Conversations With Coaches

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JOSH  
HALICKMAN

# INCLUDING SPORTS IN THE ISRAEL TRIP

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When your school is planning an Israel trip, I highly recommend scheduling a time to go to a game, meet with some of the wonderful athletes, the fans, and the media. Or visit a training facility, pick up the newspaper, and have an expert in Israeli sports give your students a fun educational talk before going to a match. They will gain a greater appreciation for Israel and the fabric of this ever evolving nation.

As Jews, we are proud of the fact that we can compete with the best just as in any other field, whether high tech, literature or architecture. We beam with pride when we see one of our own go to the highest of levels, and we feel a sense of belonging. Their accomplishments inspire us and provide us with role models. Sports are one of the greatest examples of a field that can impact Jews across the world.

In Israel, sports such as soccer, basketball or Olympic sports bring people young and old together. Omri Casspi, an Israeli basketball player currently with the Sacramento Kings, is one of the best-known Jewish athletes of our generation; he gives both children and adults in Israel and around the world a sense of passion and pride. Casspi is just one of thousands of Israelis who play professional sports in competitive leagues in cities all over the country.

Israel and sports have united Jews time and time again. The terror at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games brought together Jews from around the world in support of those Israeli athletes who were taken as hostages and ultimately murdered. The first Olympic medal won by Yael Arad in the Barcelona games of 1992 excited Jews around the globe to celebrate the accomplishment. This year, Maccabi Tel Aviv Football (soccer) Club represented Israel in the European UEFA Champions League, and Maccabi Tel Aviv Basketball Club won its 6th European Championship in May of 2014.

I've attended over 2,000 live sporting events in person, beginning as a three-year old going with my parents to a Montreal Expos doubleheader against the Chicago Cubs (and not making it past the 3rd inning of game 1, from what I'm told). I've held season tickets for the New York Yankees, Rangers, Knicks, Jets, Liberty, St. John's, CityHawks, and Metrostars, all at the same time. Throw in world class boxing, tennis, NASCAR, Formula One, and watching soccer in countries such as Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, Spain, the Czech Republic and Malta—nothing compares to going to a soccer or basketball game in Israel. Hands down, Israel is the ultimate destination for any Jewish sports fan.

## Small School Conference

### Debra Shaffer Seaman

On November 9th and 10th, RAVSAK hosted small schools from all over the Southeastern United States in Charlotte, North Carolina, for a unique networking opportunity, the second regional small school gathering. Each of the schools in attendance has an enrollment of fewer than 150 students. This common ground allowed heads of school, Judaic directors, board trustees, and faculty members to share their wisdom and expertise with one another in a supportive professional development summit.

The group attended workshops on fundraising, friend raising and board building. They collaborated on creative strategies to approach hot button issues including open enrollment, multiage classrooms and Judaic studies challenges. The gathering concluded with an inspiring and hands-on look at “The Power of Us” in which summit attendees developed specific ways to collaborate and consolidate their efforts, leveraging the tremendous capacity of RAVSAK’s Reshet Small School.

RAVSAK looks forward to empowering small schools toward further collaboration, learning and growth, through reshet opportunities both online and in-person.

The two main sports in Israel are soccer, which is called on this side of the Atlantic Ocean “football,” and basketball. Israel boasts a top tier football league, with 14 teams in cities as far north as Kiryat Shemona and as far south as Beer Sheva in the desert. Haifa has two clubs while Tel Aviv has three, and of course there’s also a team in Jerusalem. There are other leagues below the Premier League or Ligat Ha’Al; minor league teams populate cities and towns all over the country.

Maccabi Tel Aviv soccer and basketball teams are the most decorated, having won the league title and the Israel State Cup (a knockout competition) over 20 times a piece. Other popular clubs include Hapoel Tel Aviv, Maccabi Haifa, Hapoel Beer Sheva and Beitar Jerusalem. Most teams bear the name Hapoel or Maccabi, as the teams themselves were founded by sports clubs bearing those names. Hapoel began in 1926 during the British Mandate of Palestine and identified with the workers union, while Maccabi was founded in 1895 in the city of Constantinople. The fan base of the clubs has changed over the years, yet the roots are still strongly entrenched within the populations that started them.

Teams in the soccer league are limited to only five foreign players, while all of the others must be Israelis. This policy nurtures homegrown talent and gives the feel of a truly Israeli product. The purpose of foreign players is to help upgrade the level of play on the teams and in essence aid in the development of the local players, giving the Israeli fans the quality they are looking for.

The basketball league also limits the amount of foreign players; at all times there need to be three Israelis on the court, again helping the Israeli players grow. You will see some clubs sporting American players with dual citizenship, and those do not count against the foreign limit rule.

Over the last number of years, Israel has invested in its sports infrastructure, especially in the building of soccer stadiums, allowing the spectators a more enjoyable experience. A state-of-the-art 30,000 seat facility opened last year in Haifa, while new stadiums in Petach Tikva, Netanya, Akko and Beer Sheva all seat between 4,000-17,000 fans. Just as the world’s Jews have invested in other Israeli industries, they have done so in the field of sports. Maccabi Tel Aviv Football Club was purchased by Mitch Goldhar, a sports fan from Toronto who was responsible for bringing Walmart north of the border. Maccabi Haifa is owned by Floridian Jeff Rosen, and there have been other investors from outside of Israel continuing to help grow the sports landscape in the Holy Land.

One of the greatest experiences you can have in Israel is walking into a packed new arena with over 11,000 people strong in either Jerusalem or Tel Aviv and sing Hatikvah before a game begins. Seeing the beautiful Israeli blue and white flag flying on the massive screen and hearing the passion of all the fans singing Israel’s National Anthem proudly at the top of their lungs is something that can’t be matched anywhere else.

If 11,000 is not enough for you, then try a soccer game at the 30,000 seat Sammy Ofer Stadium in Haifa with acoustics that can’t be duplicated. Hearing all of the announcements in Hebrew and the crowd chanting songs for the players in Hebrew, the language taught in Jewish day schools worldwide comes alive in a totally different and unique way.

The Israel Football League (IFL) and Israel Baseball Association (IBA) strengthen the bond between olim and native Israelis. Both leagues provide people who have grown up with these sports the

opportunity to continue playing them and pass on that love to their own children, friends, classmates and relatives.

Just as there are sports sections in the *New York Post* or the *Chicago Tribune*, *Yediot Achronot* has its own section in Hebrew covering Israeli sports and the world’s most important leagues. This is yet another way to turn students on to Israel and create a bond and a love for the Holy Land.

Sitting in the stands with your fellow Jews provides an opportunity to share something that everyone has in common—the love of sports, the love of competition and sportsmanship—while meeting and sharing stories with your Israeli brothers and sisters. You can all wear shirts and jerseys emblazoned with a team’s logo in Hebrew, the names on the back of the shirts in Hebrew, or with a team scarf. Those souvenirs will follow the students back to their homes and communities; their friends and neighbors will be eager to hear the background story behind them. How about yelling after a goal or or basket with everyone around you? Yet another educational moment that will stay with the student.

In your schools, Israeli sporting events offer a totally different way of introducing and learning about Israel, its society and culture. Use the sports section as a way to make learning modern Hebrew fun. There are numerous Israeli sports websites in Hebrew and my website (SportsRabbi.com) in English to provide up-to-date information on the sports scene in Israel. Begin to think outside of the box the next time you are in Israel, and give the students an unforgettable way to love our homeland.



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DAVID  
LASDAY

# ISRAEL EDUCATION PLAYBOOK

Sports are an organic vehicle to reach North American Jewish youth where they are paying most attention and are most engaged. Growing up in North America, Jewish youth play, watch and talk sport, not to mention sport video games and sport collectibles. They even dress sports, wearing jerseys with professional players names on them, baseball caps and kippot with team logos, and T-shirts with sports brands like Adidas, Nike and Under Armour. Sport is where youth find their community. It is a language they understand fluently. The status and influence of sport inundates daily life from sports practices, to watching games on TV, to attending games at high school, college and at the professional level. As Jewish educators and Jewish institutions, how can we utilize sport to build our community and strengthen our children's connection to Israel?

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## UNDERSTAND THE ENVIRONMENT

The first step to connecting young Jews to Israel through sport is understanding the environment. Where can they connect to sport and how? What sports do Jewish youth play? What sports exist in Israel? What leagues? What teams? How do youth pick the players and teams they cheer for? What players would North American Jewish youth connect to?

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## THE AMERICAN JEWISH SPORTS ENVIRONMENT

Young North American Jews play basketball, baseball, soccer and volleyball. They are swimmers, and track and field athletes. Some play football and many love to watch it. Over the past four years, as director of youth development for Israel Lacrosse, I have come to discover that today there are more Jewish players playing lacrosse at the collegiate level than any other sport. Lacrosse is the fastest growing sport in America, and there are plenty of young Jews playing it.

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## THE ISRAELI SPORTS ENVIRONMENT

In Israel, soccer is by far the number one sport, followed by basketball. Volleyball is growing and handball has established leagues. North American sports like American football, hockey and baseball are starting to make their mark, benefiting from the presence of Jews from North America who have made aliyah. In my case, our goal this year with Israel Lacrosse is to create high school leagues in Kiryat Gat, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ramla, Tel Aviv and Netanya.

While sport does not hold the same status in Israel as in America, the professional leagues and national teams continue to get stronger. Unlike North American youth who play sports in seasons, Israelis pick one sport to play the whole year. Foreign soccer and basketball players are brought in to boost the level of play at the professional level, but there are restrictions on how many can be on the team or play at a time. A Jewish player from North America, who can make aliyah and become a citizen, is perceived to be a valuable addition to a professional team.

Here are several key elements Jewish educators and institutions can utilize in order to leverage the power and appeal of sports to connect young Jews to Israel.

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## NATIONAL TEAM

As Jews, young people will often identify with Israeli athletes and national teams as a part of national and religious pride. Obviously, they pay more attention to them when they are successful. In order to capture the attention of Jewish youth,



every national team accomplishment should be celebrated, documented and shared with them. To stay on top of Israeli national team successes, follow Israeli national organizations on Twitter and Facebook, such as Israel football, basketball, lacrosse, baseball, hockey, volleyball, the Olympic committee of Israel and Ayelet, the organization for non-Olympic sports in Israel. These organizations produce videos, blog posts, player interviews and game recaps that can provide plenty of content. Videos of practices, games and highlights will capture their attention. They will be captivated by the common but endlessly intriguing sports narratives such as David vs. Goliath, big comebacks and crushing defeats.

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## SISTER CITIES

For the most part North American youth cheer and support the professional and college sports teams of the city in which they live. With the sister cities program, this can extend to Israel as well. At Israel Lacrosse we utilize sister cities to connect our North American supporters to city clubs in Israel. We started youth lacrosse in Ashkelon because it is paired with Baltimore. Our supporters from Baltimore cheer on our Ashkelon youth teams and our premier club, feeling a strong connection to their Israeli counterpart. Jewish lacrosse players from Baltimore come to visit Ashkelon to coach the kids and play for the premier team. Young players from Baltimore yet to visit Israel collect second-hand equipment to send to Ashkelon youth starting to play lacrosse. Going the other way, players from Ashkelon have played on the Baltimore JCC Maccabi teams. This example proves how effective the sister cities program can be in building a connection between young American Jews and Israel through sports. This season our plan is to work on strengthening the relationship of Kiryat Gat and Chicago.

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## LOGOS LESSONS

It's interesting to note that Israeli fans cheer on their teams using songs and tunes from Jewish history and prayer. Going to an Israeli sporting event can often feel like a "Maccabiah" color war at camp, each team representing a city with their colors, logos and history. The logo of Elitzur Ashkelon basketball club, for example, has Samson pushing down the columns of the Philistines. The logos, history and culture of these teams can serve as great material for in class reports and projects, engaging students with the lure of sports while at the same time imparting interesting and important facts about Israeli history, culture and politics.

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## TEAM EVENTS

Maccabi Haifa and Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball teams play exhibition games in North America in order to connect with the Jewish community and expand their brands. They hold clinics run by their players alongside their games. Similarly, the Israel Lacrosse national team plays four to five exhibition games each year in North America against local colleges and other national teams. Alongside the women's and men's national team games we put together boys and girls teams made up of Jewish youth from the area to play as Team Israel, wearing the blue and white. Israel baseball and hockey would find similar success while playing exhibitions in the states. More and more of these events and games are being streamed online. All of these organizations need help reaching your students, and connecting to them is a win-win. Having the opportunity to play as Israel in North America, wearing the Jewish star on their helmet or jersey, and hearing Hatikvah before the game build local community and pride in Israel.

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## SPORT SHLICHIM

In the area of Jewish sports heroes, we have always thought too small. We have waited for them to come to us. We let the media tell us who is a Jewish sports hero. Sandy Koufax, arguably the most famous Jewish sports hero, sat out the World Series because of Yom Kippur in 1965, already 50 years ago. The NBA player Omri Casspi is an amazing ambassador for Israel both in his community of Sacramento and to the cities he visits; his recent trip bringing over NBA basketball players to Israel was great public relations. However, we need to increase the number of, and opportunities for, these sports heroes and ambassadors. The status and influence of professional athletes is tremendous, and their impact on young Jews can be significant.

## How and where do we find these sports shlichim?

Israel is full of sports shlichim. There are amazing role models such as point guard Lior Liphitz, who has played professional basketball for 12 years.

Lior, originally from Beer Sheva, has played for Jerusalem, Netanya, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Kiryat Gat, and the Israeli national team. Four years ago I worked with Lior with Netanya Hoops For Kids, a community giveback program where players volunteer to coach at-risk kids. We organized for Lior to visit four camps in Georgia and North Carolina for the summer, and ran basketball clinics that taught Hebrew. At the clinics Lior was able to tell the kids about what it takes to be a professional basketball player in Israel and what it's like to represent his country in international competition. These camps, along with several others, have brought Lior back each of the past four years. It has now become a project of the Jewish Agency. While Lior is definitely special I have come across many more Israeli athletes who have the ability to connect to Jewish youth in America. Eli Hackmon, one of Israel's FIFA Soccer referees, officiates top soccer matches in Europe as well as professional games in Israel. Sports figures like Eli and Lior have the power to engage Jewish youth in America.

Each year 15-20 Jewish basketball and soccer players from North America come to Israel to play in the professional leagues. They make aliyah and play one or two seasons in Israel. These are sports shlichim in your own backyard. They may not have learned a lot of Hebrew, but they most likely picked up the words used on the field or court. These players need to be found and engaged. Furthermore, they need to be packaged and sold to Jewish youth as Jewish sports heroes. Our role as educators is to help them hone their narrative and teach them how to communicate their experience playing in Israel to build a connection with Jewish American youth.

## SPORTS MERCHANDISE

At Israel Lacrosse we call it swag. More than any other sport, lacrosse claims to be about the swag, with cool jerseys, shorts, helmets, socks and cleats. However, every sport has its apparel. We create shooting shirts, warm-up shirts, with Hebrew sayings like *Acharai*—"After me"—and *Beyachad*—"Together." This is a very tactile way to get young American Jews involved and connected to Israeli sports.

Israel provides youth Jewish sports teams to support, follow and play on. Social media gives North American Jews the ability to follow Israeli teams. Events in North America offers youth the opportunity to participate in clinics and possibly play for Israel. The accessibility of national and professional teams allows for educators and students to communicate directly with players and teams. Sports shlichim, Israel sports stars, can have tremendous influence when packaged and marketed as heroes. Sports can be the trigger to ignite a strong and proud relationship with Israel and the Jewish community.

## Useful Websites

[www.basket.co.il](http://www.basket.co.il)

[www.sport5.co.il](http://www.sport5.co.il)

[www.safsal.co.il](http://www.safsal.co.il)

[www.israelleague.com](http://www.israelleague.com)

[sportsrabbi.com](http://sportsrabbi.com)

[www.one.co.il](http://www.one.co.il)



## RAVSAK Welcomes Amy Shroyer

Amy Shroyer is the Communications and Development Manager at RAVSAK. In this role, Amy manages all institutional communications and fundraising activities, including annual giving. Previously, Amy served the New York City Department of Education in two capacities, first as a communications associate for the Office of Innovation (iZone) and most recently as a communications director in the Chancellor's Office, on part of a small team charged with implementing a new school support structure across the city for the 2015-2016 school year. In these roles, Amy played a key part in creating website and social media content, writing and circulating communications such as newsletters to both internal and external audiences, and liaising with key constituents, from steering committee members to the Fund for Public Schools. Prior to joining the Department of Education, Amy served as a communications and public relations specialist for a variety of company types—from edtech (Cite-lighter) to retail (Ralph Lauren). Amy earned her B.A. from the University of Virginia with a double major in Media Studies and Spanish.



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 YOCHAI  
SHARON

# “IN THE LEAGUE TOGETHER”

## RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR CHILDREN, SOCCER AND A MEETING OF IDENTITIES

Religious and secular children play soccer together. One might think this is obvious and natural. In reality, it is a far from ordinary sight in Israel, given an educational system that tracks religious and secular children into different schools.

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### WHERE DID IT ALL BEGIN?

Soccer is Israel's most popular sport. And, as any Israeli child will tell you, soccer is played on Shabbat; that's just the way things are. This custom is such a given that it appears in songs, “Just wait for Shabbat day, for the moment the whistle is blown...” (“Another Shabbat of Soccer,” Herzl Kabilio), and even in popular comedy routines. Any attempt to move the games to a different day of the week is met with intense opposition, based both on economic factors related to television and radio broadcast times, and on fear that “giving in” on this issue could lead to further unwanted change in the status quo maintained between religious and secular Jews in Israel.

The question of whether games should be held on Shabbat usually arises in the context of discussions related to Shabbat observance. The issue of the sanctity of Shabbat is important, but in this article we will highlight a different important social problem—the exclusion of the religious public from sports. It turns out that religious youth are largely prevented from excelling in sports in Israel. This is the case not only in soccer, but in general: in judo, fencing and swimming, many of the major tournaments are also held on Shabbat, thereby excluding religious competitors. Basketball leagues are an exception to this rule, as games take place during the week, and in fact many religious youth participate.

This religious-secular dispute about playing on Shabbat poses a special challenge for Tzav Pius, an organization dedicated to bridging this divide in Israel. How can it be turned into an opportunity for turning the soccer field into a place of meeting and cooperation, one that would not only provide a solution for Shabbat observers,



but would become a space where people can live and develop together beyond labels, stereotypes and separate educational systems?

About twelve years ago, religious journalist Shaul Meislish sought a solution for his son who wanted to play soccer without desecrating the Shabbat. Meislish's idea was simple: to initiate the establishment of a children's team that would not play on Shabbat. Meislish contacted Tsav Pius, who agreed to sponsor the initiative, and together they succeeded in convincing the Israel Soccer Association to allow one team to play on weekdays. Thus, the first "Tsav Pius team" was born in the Tubork Club in Netanya.

Today, in the Soccer Association's children and youth leagues, more than eighty Tsav Pius teams do not play on Shabbat, thereby also making it possible for Shabbat-observing children to play soccer together with secular children.

### CHALLENGES FACED BY TSAV PIUS SOCCER TEAMS

Beyond the challenges of the religious-secular status quo and the deeply engrained Israeli custom of Shabbat soccer games, we also faced an assortment of logistic challenges. These included transporting players on weekdays when parents were working, as opposed to the traditional Shabbat games to which parents drove their children. The burden of transportation fell upon the clubs, which were not always able to take it on. Another difficulty was that soccer fields were not sufficiently illuminated. While Shabbat games are held in daylight, our league's games are held in the afternoon. Good lighting is a necessity in the winter when it gets dark early.

These challenges notwithstanding, increasing numbers of clubs are opening Tsav Pius teams that play on weekdays. This is a product, on the one hand, of pressure upon club managers to include religious children on their soccer teams, and on the other hand, of positive reactions from families of the secular children—whose Shabbat turns from a day of transporting children to and from soccer games to a day of calm family leisure.

### SOCCKER AND ISRAELI SOCIETY— EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

While playing soccer on Shabbat is a social issue in Israel, no less significant is the unfortunate prevalence of violence on the playing fields—in professional games and in youth soccer as well. We thought that our teams could provide an alternative with regard to this as well, and this was the motivation behind the idea of developing an educational program for members of the Tsav Pius soccer teams. The meeting of secular and religious children creates an opportunity to talk about how children are similar and how they differ, about identities in Israeli society, about friendship, and about values of tolerance and acceptance of the other. In the course of the program, the children learn to use dialogue to solve and manage conflicts, respect for the other (both in the team and on opposing teams), tolerance, and mutual responsibility.

On the assumption that such activities would influence not only the players themselves, but also their family members and friends, thereby having an impact on the entire society, we developed an educational program for the practice sessions of the Tsav Pius teams. The program includes educational sessions on the field and a tournament

between participating teams: The players learn lessons about Israeli social reality in its various aspects, they are exposed more deeply to different identities, and they talk about the problems and possible solutions. Another important subject is the common prejudice in the Israeli society in general and in soccer games in particular.

In clubs in which some of the players are Arab children and youth, the national dimension is also included. The educational program relates to both the religious and national dimensions, with an emphasis on Israeli society's complexity and cultural diversity, and on the challenges of living together.

We realized from the beginning that the significant educational figure in practice is the soccer coach. The program has a professional facilitator on behalf of Tsav Pius, yet we decided that the active participation of the soccer coaches is critical: When soccer coaches work with children they deal, as in other sports, with issues beyond the game itself, including especially discipline and team building. Therefore, the program was designed in a way that the coach would be involved with the program, while actively assisting the facilitator in its delivery.

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## WHAT DO THE CHILDREN AND PARENTS SAY?

We asked the children who participated in the program for feedback. It was not particularly surprising that the children noted that they would have preferred to spend their soccer practice—practicing soccer. Nonetheless, most of the children noted that they enjoyed the activities, and gave good grades to the facilitators. Among the parents, nearly all who responded noted that it was important or very important to use the soccer practice sessions to relate to the educational issues.

It was clear from preliminary findings that we needed to find a balance between our desire to create a meaningful program and the impatience of the children and coaches who mostly wanted to play soccer. The original design of more than ten sessions proved too onerous; we cut back to five sessions, once every three weeks. Each session lasts an hour, enabling the coach to use the last half hour for a brief soccer practice.

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## LEARNING VALUES THROUGH THE FEET

We make use of sports language and tasks to connect the children to the program. Most of the activities include ball games and physical activity, through which educational messages are transmitted



experientially. Thus, for example, when players need to decide if a certain value is “not important,” “a little important,” “important” or “very important,” they need to run around one of four cones spread out over the field, and then to kick the ball into the goal. The task is a soccer task, but players need to think about the question asked in order to choose the cone appropriate to them. After their run, players are asked to explain their choice—thereby reducing the chance that they will choose cones randomly. The team coach gives the signal for players to run, and he oversees their performance. He is primarily focused on each player’s success in scoring a goal.

## CURRICULUM: I, YOU, WE

The identity curriculum of the educational program is designed as ever-expanding circles: from personal identity, to group identity, on to national identity. During the first year, the program focuses on issues of personal and group identity, as well as on the issue of sports violence. A group anthem is used to spark a discussion of sport and social values. The anthem is an official song of a professional soccer team; in Israel every soccer team has its own anthem.

During the second year, the program expands to deal with contested issues in Israeli society, and to explore common denominators and shared goals that can be a basis for developing cooperation between different groups.

One program activity, for example, is “love and hate in soccer.” One of the most emotional issues in soccer in general, and particularly in Israel, is the behavior of team fans. Songs sung by fans frequently express their hatred for other teams. A harsh example of this is a song sung by fans of the Maccabi Haifa team: “Hapoel Haifa/ the country’s cancer, Israel’s virus...” and so on. This awful anthem is not, regretfully, out of the ordinary.

Our activity begins with a discussion of the issue of love and hate, while encouraging the children to tell which groups they love and which they hate. In the course of the discussion, it becomes clear that also in this area the group is diverse, with different children being fans of different adult teams.

In the next stage, the children receive examples of hate songs sung by fans, and they are asked to express their opinion of these songs, while relating to their good friends towards whom the hatred is addressed. This situation obviously evokes a shift in attitude toward the language and violence inherent in these songs. It should be noted that after the activity many children emphasize that the hatred in soccer is “not for real” and is limited only to the soccer field. The session concludes with a discussion about the boundaries for the expression of love and hate in sports.

In the third stage, children are presented with fan songs that deal not with hatred but with soccer teams’ different values. These are usually official team songs, whether of Israeli teams or international teams such as Real Madrid and Barcelona (both of which have many fans in Israel). These values relate to uniting around the soccer team, professionalism, decency, freedom, etc.

Finally, the children are asked to make a list of values they would like to express, and together they write an anthem for their own team—which is usually set to a popular Israeli song. It deserves mention that in a number of groups the children claimed that controversial values, such as supremacy or victory over the opposing team, could be expressed. When this happened, we permitted writing about these values, while ensuring the observance of the boundaries of expression discussed in the group during the previous activity.

## Sample Anthem: Binyamina’s Champion (to the tune of “Derekh Hashalom”)

המנון לדוגמה: בנימינה אלופה  
(במנגינת “דרך השלום”)

Binyamina’s champion

With Tsav Pius hand in hand

Here and now will take the title.

Binyamina’s champion

Will rip its opponents to shreds

Will get the victory in the mail.

There’s only one place,

All together, not alone,

Playing soccer here.

There’s a place, not far away,

In tears and in laughter

Honor’s inscribed in the flag.

בנימינה אלופה,

עם צו פיוס היא משלימה,

תקח מיד כאן את התואר.

בנימינה אלופה,

והיא תקרע ת’יריבה,

קיבלה ת’ניצחון בדואר.

יש מקום אחד בלבד,

כולם ביחד, לא לבד,

ומשחקים כאן כדורגל.

יש מקום, הוא לא רחוק,

שגם בבכי, גם בצחוק,

כבוד חרוט פה על הדגל.

## DISCOVERIES AND INSIGHTS

Along the way we discovered a number of things that we had not at first considered. We discovered that the religious-secular dimension, to which the program originally related, was only one of multiple dimensions along which the children differed. Facilitators in the field reported that in the course of the activities the children themselves brought up additional issues relevant to their own lives.

For example, on the Binyamina team there was a significant difference between children from different neighborhoods. Binyamina is a relatively small moshava, originally a community of private farmers founded in 1923, divided in half by a north-south train track. Over the years, new residents have moved into the moshava, some of these from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In the course of the program it became clear that there were significant social and economic differences between children “on opposite sides of the tracks.” The soccer coaches in the local club were familiar with these differences, and they were constantly trying to bridge the gaps between these children. According to the coach, even though the Tsav Pius program was built around the specific religious-secular difference, it nonetheless was very suited to the messages that he sought to transmit to his players.

Children from the Arab village Jisr al Zarqa also participated in Binyamina soccer, and there are large language and cultural gaps between them and the Jewish children. Unfortunately, even though the program also related to the Jewish-Arab issue, which is indeed a charged issue in Israeli soccer, we were unsuccessful in reaching the Arab children on the team. This challenge remains ahead of us.

Our main lesson from the program is that gaps and differing perceptions exist in almost every group, and not only groups that include both religious and secular children. At the same time, since Tsav Pius focuses specifically on the religious-secular split, most of the activities revolve around this issue. Looking ahead to the next season, we intend to make some changes in the program so that it will be more flexible, enabling facilitators to identify the conflicts



## Tamir Goodman

Dubbed the “Jewish Jordan” by *Sports Illustrated* in 1999, Tamir Goodman was a top-ranked basketball player from Baltimore who signed with Maccabi Tel Aviv and served in the IDF. Today he is an author, inventor of the Zone190 training aid and Sport Strings Tzitzit. He is a coach, educator, motivational speaker and author of *The Jewish Jordan’s Triple Threat*. Tamir also serves as Director of International Development for the Hapoel Jerusalem professional basketball team.

### How did sports impact your Jewish identity?

Sport, in particular basketball, was my way of connecting with Hashem, to Judaism and to Israel. When I stepped on the basketball court it was with the intention of representing the Jewish people through sports. I never felt that I was playing just for myself. I was fortunate to grow up in a proud Jewish home and have my parents and friends who were supportive of me. For me, Judaism and sports were never two separate things but a channel by which to serve Hashem.

### What advice would you give to a young Jewish athlete?

My advice is to take all of the life skills that you get from sports and apply them to your day-to-day life. So many great lessons and skills come from sports: resilience, time management, work ethic, communication, teamwork, dealing with loss, commitment and more. When we realize this, sports can provide people with a chance to develop and refine tools that contribute towards living a meaningful life.



that occupy the children in each group and to adapt the program to address these conflicts.

In the coming year we plan to expand the program to additional teams from 6th to 9th grade, and to continue expanding the program in the following years. In light of the understanding that the program can also suit teams that are not necessarily “Tsav Pius,” mixed religious-secular, we are considering whether to offer the program to all youth teams in Israel.

### TO EMPHASIZE DIFFERENCES OR COMMONALITIES?

One last interesting point for discussion relates to whether it makes sense to deal with differences of identity among players if they themselves do not seem to regard these differences as a problem. One could claim that we are insisting on awakening gaps that do not in fact exist in the daily lives of the children, thereby actually causing superficial differentiation that had not existed before the activity.

This question is valid not only for soccer, but for nearly everything that Tsav Pius does. We believe that the gaps do in fact exist, and that they are

revealed among the children in times of crisis, as well as afterwards when the children become adults. People tend to prefer blurring identity differences, which they see negatively. They place an emphasis on unifying factors, while asking children to “give in to” or “accommodate” the other in order to facilitate cooperation.

In Tsav Pius we believe that differences are legitimate and positive, and they should not be blurred in order to promote cooperation. In order to emphasize this message, the last session is devoted primarily to outdoor activities in which the children are challenged to work together—despite the differences they discussed in previous sessions.

While many challenges still lay ahead, we can say that the Tsav Pius soccer program presents an alternative that proves that soccer can be played differently, and that the playing field can be an opportunity for educational activity and a meeting place for diverse identities and ways of life. Credit for success of the program goes also to the soccer clubs, the coaches, the parents and of course, the children, for whom the challenge of religious and secular children playing together is simpler than it might seem to us adults.



# TORAH LISHMAH

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JANUARY

13

### DR. RON WOLFSON

Fingerhut Professor of Education at American Jewish University in Los Angeles, a cofounder of Synagogue 3000, and author of Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community.

DATE

TBD

### DR. RUTH CALDERON

Established the first Israeli secular, pluralistic, and egalitarian Beit Midrash. Founder of ALMA, a center that seeks to acquaint Israelis with Hebrew culture. Former Knesset member from the Yesh Atid Party, where she was Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Lobby for Jewish Renewal.

MAY

5

### AVRAHAM INFELD

President Emeritus of Hillel - The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life and the founder, president, chair, and director of a succession of innovative educational institutions including Melitz, Arevim, Chais Family Foundation, and Israel Way Oranim.



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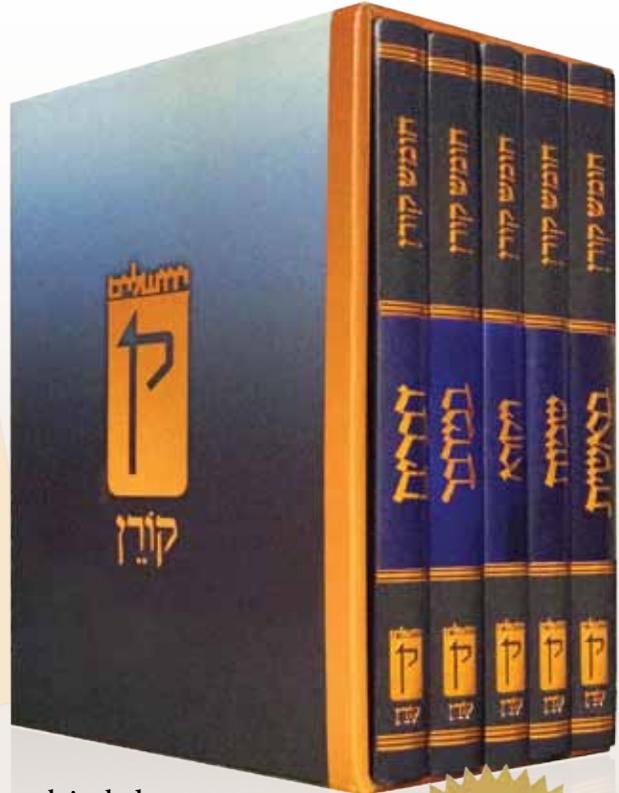
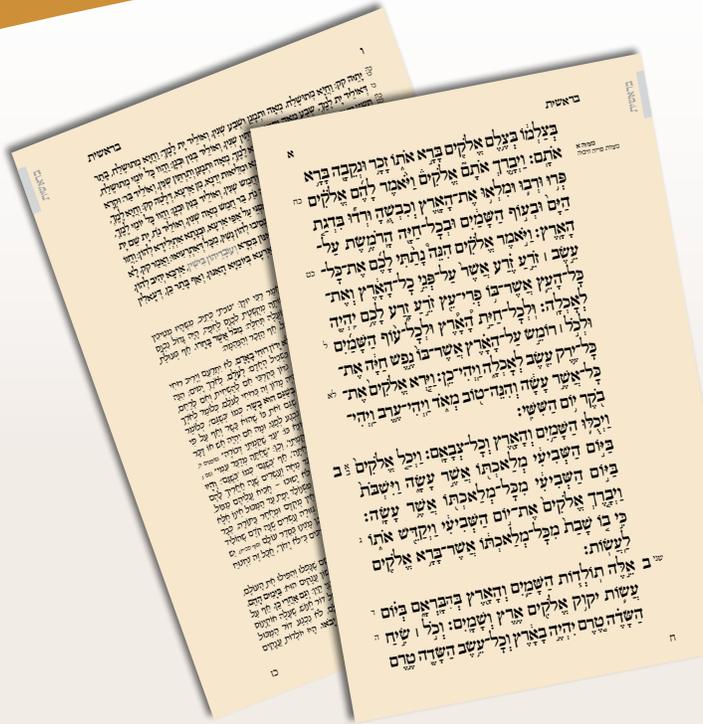
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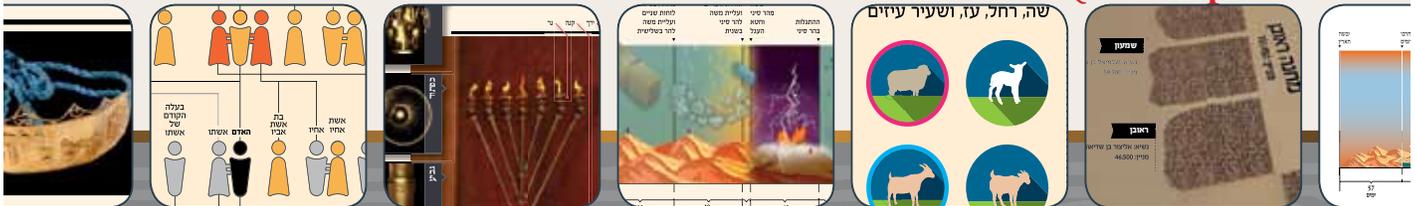
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MIRIAM HELLER STERN

# HAVING FAITH IN SPORTS

At the end of a long workday, I dragged my heels up the staircase to the cafeteria of my children's day school for the JV basketball team parent orientation. Expecting a review of schedule and logistics, I wasn't totally present as Coach D began addressing the parents, although I tucked my phone away out of respect. To my surprise, Coach didn't start with practice hours or attendance expectations. He started with character; basketball was just the medium.

"The sport itself is an extension of who they will be in life," he began. The game is not just about skill, competition, or play, he explained. The game is about developing as a whole human being, as a member of a team, and as a learner who is coachable and committed.

So this is the difference between playing for your day school team and playing at the local park's rec center: the hidden curriculum. Within a moment, I realized I was in the presence of an intentional and capable educator. Coach D's framing of the ethos and objectives of the basketball program caught my attention, and I took out my phone again—to take notes.

"Their success in the game is not determined by what they do on the court," Coach explained. The character they demonstrate throughout the school day determines their ability to play and the quality of their game. The players' teachers regularly sign off on permission charts that their academic performance and their character in class are of a high enough standard to participate on the team. They are expected to be *mentsches* in their relationships on and off the court.

Coach repeated these mantras, enduring understandings that our children would learn through the experience of the game, but that we parents needed to be told explicitly. We parents love to watch our kids play; but let's face it, we really love to watch them win. (I was recently at a youth soccer league game where a parent was ejected for cursing at the referee over a questionable call. The fifth grader who was accused of the foul was so intimidated by the profanity that he was reduced to tears.) The combination of passion for professional sports, competitive spirit, and fanaticism for our children's happiness and success can turn parents into zealots on the sidelines. We need to be reminded of the true values at stake as much as our kids do.

I comment wearing the multiple hats of full-time educator, parent and occasional soccer mom. Sports are not just an extracurricular activity in our household, but a second religion. Playing sports, watching sports and discussing sports, we are constantly shuttling to and from practices and games for our two elementary school-aged boys and attending local professional sporting events. My guys placed first in their father-son basketball fantasy league and my not-quite-two year old daughter figured out how to dribble a

soccer ball almost as soon as she figured out how to walk. One of the gifts of a Jewish day school is its capacity to guide us as a family to derive the best lessons of our religion and apply them to our lives; I am delighted to discover and share how this applies to our family's "second religion."

The character curriculum around sports at school provides a framework for all of us to understand and remember why it's really important to stay in the game:

1. Sports provide an arena for sharpening thinking skills, including calculation and good decision-making. "Keep your head in the game"—stay focused, anticipate what's coming a few steps ahead, look for teammates, assist the win—these are important habits of leadership, teamwork and effective completion of tasks.
2. Sports provide an arena for developing character, defined by traits including grit, zest, optimism, self-control, resilience. It's no surprise that there is significant overlap between the elements of character according to Angela Duckworth's "grit scale," which has become a model for character building in schools, and legendary basketball coach John Wooden's "Pyramid of Success." A day school that reinforces these habits across the curriculum—in general and Judaic academics as well as athletics—gives students the opportunity to apply these character traits to physical, intellectual and spiritual tasks.
3. Sports provide an arena for community building. When a team coalesces and learns to play well together, a spirit of community emerges. Like in any community, players learn to play the roles in which they can contribute most effectively. When family members, friends, teachers and administrators gather to cheer together, a special bond develops. When that space is inhabited not only by love of our children and love of sport, but by shared values and commitments, a *kehillah* is formed.
4. Sports provide an arena for becoming a whole human being. Kids can stretch themselves and also release stress. They can be playful and serious. They can strive for personal milestones and contribute to a team. They can express leadership and be supported by community. They can play by their values, combining compassion with competition.

Jewish day schools have a unique capacity to model ways of living as a whole person, where all of the strands of one's identity can weave together into healthy, flourishing, ethical human beings who build thriving communities. How we set the character expectations for play, practice and competition in a Jewish context will determine how our children will live by those values in every arena of their lives.

*“Sports is the only entertainment where, no matter how many times you go back, you never know the ending.”*

Neil Simon

One of the things that unites many Jews is a love of sports—watching games, rooting for the home team, attending a “Jewish Heritage Day,” buying from the kosher hot dog stand, and more. Participating in sports appeals to us in so many ways, for their health benefits, the thrill of competition, spending time with friends or making new ones. The pieces here tell stories of different sports and athletic endeavors at Jewish day schools. They also reveal the power and potential that sports can exert for the good.



## BUILDING PEACE THROUGH PYRAMIDS: PARTNERING WITH FERGUSON TO CREATE CIRCUS SHOW

CHERYL  
MAAYAN

Head of School,  
Saul Mirowitz  
Jewish Community  
School, St. Louis

I had never been to Ferguson. Neither had the students from our suburban St. Louis Jewish day school, even though it’s a mere 20 minutes away. The events of 2014 made it clear that we needed to change that.

When your city is torn apart after the killing of an unarmed black teen by a white police officer, riots and protests, how do you involve Jewish day school students in tikkun?

In our case, we put on a circus. Seriously. We built “Peace Through Pyramids” in a wildly creative project facilitated by Circus Harmony, a social circus school. Their mission is to use the teaching and performing of circus arts to motivate social change. With the support of our Jewish Federation, students from Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School joined with children from Ferguson last spring to learn circus arts and create a show together.

Our plan was to build bridges between communities and to give our students the opportunity to be part of the solution. Little did we know that this Peace through Pyramids Project would deeply impact not only the children, but their audiences and parents as well. The three circus shows, performed at a Jewish community event, at the Ferguson library, and at the Circus Harmony center in downtown St. Louis, lifted spirits up at a time when there were feelings of little hope. It provided a visual rainbow of children coming together. It made people smile and cheer loud and long, and see different possibilities for our future.

The parents and their relationships were our greatest unanticipated surprise. During rehearsals, they built relationships of their own—chatting about the weather, their children and, well, racism. They became Facebook friends and continue to like, share and connect with each other. As I write this, the children and parents are together again for a Peace through Pyramids reunion retreat at a local camp.

We’ve all faced the same challenge at some point. The world presents us with a tragedy or crisis that is not appropriate to share with our younger students. And yet, our Jewish values drive us to take action. Our students did not need to know the details about the crisis in Ferguson to help St. Louis heal.

At Mirowitz, we are always sending the message that tikkun is not just for adults. Even our youngest children have the power to create a better world. When they see something that doesn’t sit right with them, we encourage them to make it better—whether it’s a mess in the classroom or hunger in the world. Circus arts, a wild combination of the physical team work that comes with sports, and the exhilaration that results from producing a show, provided us with an avenue for tikkun that even a kid can do. During this dark time in St. Louis our students donned sparkly costumes and makeup, dragged out mats and juggling balls, and defied the gravity that was weighing down our community by supplying St. Louis with contagious joy. Indeed, they made peace through pyramids.

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## HARRY PELL

Associate Head of  
School for Jewish Life  
and Learning, Solomon  
Schechter School of  
Westchester, Hartsdale,  
New York

# HOW COMPETITION ON THE FIELD LED TO UNDERSTANDING AROUND THE TABLE

When Schechter Westchester's high school was founded in 2001, it was decided that our varsity and junior varsity sports teams would compete in the local New York State public school league. The decision was driven primarily by the high level of competition available playing public schools, coupled with an understanding that at times, scheduling might be a challenge. Regional and state championships are often on Shabbat, and if our teams made it that far and we couldn't get the games moved, entire shabbatonim would have to be built around the championship games to enable our participation. But that seemed a worthwhile effort if it meant our athletes could compete in many different sports at such a high level.

In the fourteen years since, our teams have done well in many sports. Several times, we have transplanted our Shabbat community of athletes, parents and fans to upstate New York for post-season soccer or baseball. We have yet to win a state championship, although we have come close, and as we could have predicted, our students have had many special Shabbat experiences as a result.

What we didn't anticipate were some of the other blessings and challenges inherent in competing beyond our day school community. Very positively, it has enabled our student athletes to get out of the day school bubble and interact with peers from a wide range of different backgrounds. More challenging have been the isolated but serious incidents of verbal anti-Semitism that our teams have been subject to over the years. Fortunately, even with these incidents, there have been positive outcomes.

Most recently, a few years ago as our varsity baseball team was competing against a local, inner-city school, two unmistakable words were heard on the ballfield. Heil Hitler. Had an opposing player really just said that? Was that possible? As the words were repeated, there could be no doubt. Heil Hitler. Heil Hitler. The words echoed.

The game was called, and the opposing coach apologized as he forfeited and pulled his athletes from the field. If his players would say such things, particularly against a Jewish team, then even in his opinion they didn't deserve to complete the game. It was a painful and confusing moment for our student athletes, and the incident could have ended there, but thankfully, it didn't.

About a week later, following a series of apologies and coordination calls, a visit was arranged. The opposing team, made up almost entirely of African-American and Hispanic students, would visit Schechter Westchester for a joint discussion, as well as a history lesson about the Holocaust. The meeting was an eye-opener for our students. The opposing players knew little about the Holocaust and even less about who Adolf Hitler was. What they did know was the feeling of being victims of hate speech.

As our Jewish students listened to African-American students talk about the pain of being called "nigger," and as all of the students together committed to honoring one another through their speech, a bridge of understanding was built. I can't say for certain whether any lifelong friendships were born that day, but I am not sure that matters. What I am certain about is that not a single student walked out of there without having been moved deeply by the interaction.



## LEARNING PERSEVERANCE THROUGH PERSPIRATION

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### AZARYAH COHEN

Head of School,  
Frankel Jewish  
Academy, Bloomfield  
Hills, Michigan

As any teacher who has assigned group work will attest, clear instructions and outcomes, assigned roles and tasks, and accountability are all necessary to ensure a successful activity. Even with these structures in place, there will be the inevitable student who throws up his hands in frustration and surrenders. What element drives one student to persist and another to forfeit?

Yogi Berra reportedly said that baseball was 90% mental and the other half was physical. While we often think physical activities are just physical activities, we don't give enough consideration to the degree that mental fortitude contributes to success in sports. It is the same mental resilience, I believe, that determines success in the classroom and beyond.

In schools, where weary students attend class after class, engage in marathon study sessions, work on lengthy projects and challenging assessments, and where tests and grades generate anxiety, are we providing students with the support and guidance to develop their 90% mental?

From 2007 to 2014, I spent seven years as Frankel Jewish Academy's cross country coach. My initial impetus to coach was my desire to introduce

students to an activity that had been an important part of my life. I wanted to inspire them to pursue an activity that was both physically and mentally beneficial. I believed that students would benefit from running's meditative and rejuvenating characteristics, helping them process challenges after a difficult day. I ran with the students during practice, often running up ahead to monitor the stronger runners, and doubling back to check on and encourage the weaker ones.

I emphasized to students that while running is a physical activity, the heart and spirit of a runner is just as important. I knew this to be true from the distance races I had run. I described to students how all runners, especially those new to the sport, often engage in a battle with themselves. On hot days, when feeling tired and drained, stopping and walking is so appealing while continuing and finishing the race entails mobilizing the spirit and mind. To put it another way, the only difference between the runner who walks and the runner who continues is determination. This is especially true of a sport where there is no game involving objects and goals. The competition happens within the individual to achieve one's personal best, and in the pure guts and glory of expending



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MICAH  
GRUBERT  
VAN  
IDERSTINE,  
Senior, Gray Academy  
of Jewish Education,  
Winnipeg

## STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL ATHLETICS

Our school's sports teams have been known as the Raiders for decades. With a large variety of options, from ultimate Frisbee to basketball and even curling, all students can be involved. Our athletic council provides students with a unique opportunity to give input into our athletics program. Run by our athletic coordinator, the Raiders Athletic Council provides leadership opportunities for students on both the local and national level.

It is my privilege to be the senior chair this year, with three junior chairs. I decided to get involved in the athletic council after playing for our basketball team since grade 7, and ultimate Frisbee team since grade 9. I wanted to have more of a voice in the athletics program, and to help with organization and planning for our sports teams specifically. It is a fun way to get involved with the school, and to feel like you are making a difference.

The Gray Academy Athletic Council began five years ago and has seen steady growth each year. It consists of a group of students who work with the athletics department to organize tournaments, team trips and spirit days. Community service and creating school spirit are two examples of the work of the council.

Students enjoy being able to give input regarding new team uniforms and Raiders' gear, redesigned every year. The gear is quite popular; every day you see students wearing it in class or gym. Three years ago, the athletic council created a new school mascot, named Rocky the Raider. Using social media in conjunction with Raiders Pride Days and team trips, Rocky the Raider has created a buzz in the school that was not present before.

The athletic council puts an emphasis on the importance of the health and general wellbeing of our students. All students are welcome to become active members of the council regardless of their athletic ability; the only qualification is that students must participate in at least one school sport. The chairs of the council are selected based on leadership and involvement in the athletics program.

Last year, our athletic council teamed up with Adidas to support the West Broadway Youth Organization's Fifth Annual 5ish Fun Run. 70% of the kids in the WBYO did not own or could not afford running shoes. This meant that without our help, a large number of kids would be unable to practice and participate in the run. As a school, we raised enough money to donate 160 pairs of shoes to the club and helped a remarkable number of kids get in shape in order to run in the race. On race day, senior council members ran with the kids and got to see first hand the difference that they made in our local community.

one's last ounce of energy to overtake a competitor. It is a competition of will and determination stripped away of all the dressing, fanfare and formality of many other sports.

I found that students who were diligent in school tended to persevere on the cross-country course. They exhibited dedication to the team and dedication to practice. They worked hard with the understanding that hard work is not always fun but it yields positive results and personal achievement.

In my coaching, I observed the attitude of successful runners and worked to build the determination of those who were less ambitious. Determination, hard work and perseverance are all necessary attributes to engage in authentic learning experiences. Experimentation, inquiry and problem solving all require diligence and persistence. As students saw their race times improve, as they experienced the association between their hard work and resolve, they learned something about themselves they had not consciously known before. They discovered they can, if only they would muster that 90%.

## COMMUNITY-BUILDING EXERCISE

### ZACHARY COFFIN

Athletic Director,  
Emery/Weiner School,  
Houston

“We never would have expected to have a football team before a debate club,” Head of School Stuart J. Dow joked, “but we’re committed to empowering our students and going above and beyond to enable new opportunities. Anyway, now we offer both extracurriculars.” Nine years ago, our young school fielded its first six-man football team. Now, in 2015, the football team has taken home two football championships, and the school and its athletics programs have seen tremendous growth and participation rates among students.

Emery can rightly attribute much of this growth to good old-fashioned teamwork, students and administrators working together to improve and expand opportunities. In 2012, Emery added a lacrosse program, born out of student initiative and brought to the administration by student-athletes. Similarly, in 2014, the school created a wrestling program to meet the expressed interests of its high school students. In Dow’s words, “It’s important to us that students are able to nurture their passions. If that passion is lacrosse, or football or wrestling, we find a way make it happen. Athletics is an important proving ground for students’ confidences and resiliencies.”

Just as the school’s administration has supported its student body in achieving these goals, so too has the school

community supported the institution. In 2013, Emery completed construction of Helfman Field, a multiuse artificial turf field that’s best in class in the Greater Houston Area. In December, the school will complete construction of Caress Stadium, a stadium sporting a 500-seat spectator area, press box, concession stand and exercise facilities for the school’s athletes. Both projects were made possible by gifts to the school’s “Champions Campaign,” a capital campaign which will raise \$20 million by the year 2020. The importance of community in achieving these ends stands at the forefront of the project. Caress Stadium is fashioned from a stone which mirrors the Jerusalem stone adorning much of campus.

The link between athletics and Judaism may not be immediately apparent, but the connection is strong, explained Jill Shoshany, director of Jewish life. “In the Torah, Abraham leaves his land to find a new place which God will show him. It’s a quest story, a journey. When our athletes suit up and take to the field, it’s a similar sort of personal quest—an opportunity for them to overcome a physical and mental struggle, and to be stronger for it. It’s also a community-building exercise. Bonds don’t have to be forged in the synagogue; that can happen on the field or in the classroom—any place Jewish students come together for a common purpose.”



# GOLF: A JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL'S JOURNEY IN DISCOVERING A SPORT FOR A LIFETIME

CINDY  
DOLGIN  
Head of School

KERRY  
DALTON  
Athletic Director, Schechter  
School of Long Island,  
Williston Park, New York

Our small school takes pride in our ability to accommodate as many students' ideas and initiatives as possible to enhance the day school experience beyond the classroom. Nevertheless, we struggle to balance the appeal of a large and popular theatre department, mock trial team, and a full list of other extracurricular activities with team sports that require a "robust number" of skilled athletes. Our challenge in maintaining all these extracurriculars requires flexibility, creativity and improvisation. A few years ago, when the number of players for boys' baseball began to falter, what began as disappointment for a few baseball enthusiasts turned into the birth of a new co-educational spring sports team: golf.

Like most ideas worth pursuing in our school, the idea for starting a golf team that ultimately benefitted others came from one individual student. "Josh" had received one-too-many injuries playing basketball and his parents would not allow him to continue playing contact sports for the remainder of the year. Josh needed to find a non-contact sport to fill his athletic soul or we were in serious danger of losing him as a student to the excellent high school in his home district that had a golf team.

Over lunch with a school supporter, the head of school shared this predicament. The donor offered to speak to the members of his club's board and ask for permission for our school to use one of their courses. Who knew that Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday after school hours are low-volume usage times for golf courses? It turns out that despite the prestige of golf club membership, the "golf community" is concerned about the long-term viability of their clubs and have a vested interest in instilling a love of the sport for a growing pool of future members.

With the stipulation that the high school players be supervised by experienced adult golfers who are members of clubs and are fluent in course etiquette, two different country clubs in the area agreed to host our team for practices. One of the two clubs became our home course for interscholastic competitions.

As interscholastic sports go, golf has proven to be a surprisingly inexpensive sport to launch. The golf courses and country clubs have so far not been charging the school for use of their courses at non-peak times. The school has purchased golf clubs, golf balls and driving mats, and has also had used golf clubs donated. Transportation to and from the golf courses and the purchase of golf shirts are the only real expenses, yet our golf team has brought much attention and pride to our school.

With the formation of the golf team has come an excited and overwhelming response from many students within the school. This newfound enthusiasm has prompted the physical education department to incorporate golf into its curriculum. We now teach golf skills in our HS physical education classes, using the equipment purchased and collected for the golf team members. Even our elementary students have caught on, with a dozen taking part in an afterschool club.

For the first year of our team's existence, our high school had few schools to compete against. Our interscholastic sports league for independent schools did not have an official golf program. We eventually joined a new athletic league that offered golf as an interscholastic sport, and with the new schools added we were able to encourage more schools to incorporate golf in their sports offerings. We started playing against two schools, then four, and in the 2016 season—Josh's senior year—we will play seven or eight teams.

One student's idea, clever problem-solving and ability to recruit peer participation, combined with the behind-the-scenes networking of faculty and volunteer leadership resulted in an innovative solution, the birth of a new varsity team, school pride and blossoming leadership skills. Our baseball team may be "on hiatus" but the golf team flourishes.



# MORE THAN JUST A GAME

AHARONI  
CARMEL

Typically as educators we focus upon what we can teach our students, but occasionally it is our students who end up teaching us the biggest lessons of all. The Beren Stars shone bright that day in 2012 when we proudly declared that we would not play in the TAPPS basketball semifinal championship game that would fall on Shabbat.

Our school, the Robert M. Beren Academy in Houston, embodies an Orthodox outlook that adheres to standards of academic excellence and exemplary moral conduct as it prepares its students to become self-confident, compassionate, practicing Jews as well as committed citizens and lifelong learners. It is our goal to be as welcoming and inclusive to our community, and we pride ourselves for catering to a diverse population of Jewish families who align with our mission and commitment to Jewish education.

In 2012, our school was admittedly small, with roughly 262 students from 18 months through to 12th grade. Our high school had a mere 61 students, but we managed to form a basketball program that was a source of camaraderie and inspiration. The Beren Stars were, and continue to be, a vessel for students and their families to feel our strong and unique sense of community. We gather on the bleachers on a regular basis to cheer on numerous teams that have achieved remarkable results considering the small student body.

2012 was to be a special season for our Beren Stars for many reasons. The varsity boys basketball

team had a stellar season, winning seven of their eight regular season TAPPS 2A basketball games. TAPPS, The Texas Association of Private and Parochial Schools, is a league comprised mostly of faith-based schools like RMBA. The Stars began their playoff march towards the TAPPS state championship and were scheduled to play against Hill Country Christian School for the district title on a Saturday. The opposing team graciously agreed to change the time of the game to accommodate our Shabbat observance. The Stars triumphed and were set to play Kerrville Our Lady of the Hills the following Friday evening and again, our opponents readily agreed to reschedule. We had a great game and were victorious and were now headed to the state championship semifinals, our greatest season to date!

The original semifinal game was scheduled for a Friday evening. Our opponents, Dallas Covenant Christian School agreed to play the game on Friday afternoon. RMBA submitted the paperwork to TAPPS to request the game time to be moved, a procedure perceived as a mere formality. However, on the Monday prior to the game, we were informed that the game could not be moved and we would therefore forfeit the game if we did

not play. Following a deluge of support for RMBA after the story broke nationally on major media outlets such as CNN and the *New York Times*, the TAPPS governing body was still firm on their decision not to alter the game time.

For us, the story could have ended here. Our administration, players and families had accepted the fact that their playoff dreams were no longer alive. When then head of school Rabbi Harry Sinoff was asked at a press interview what we would be doing instead of playing basketball that Friday night, the answer was simple, "Celebrating Shabbat!" At that moment our pride in the team for its athletic accomplishment had been eclipsed by our pride for its commitment to Torah. The team coach Chris Cole, an exemplary leader who is not Jewish, shared, "When I watched how happy those boys were *not* to play, how dedicated they were to something greater than themselves, ... it made *me* want to be more religious; it made me want to give *my* kids something they could hold onto as well."

We were proudly sharing with the world that our commitment to our religious beliefs was and still is unwavering. Naturally, we were

disappointed with the outcome. But if some had seen this as a test of our faith, then they were grossly mistaken as there was simply no question where we stood. As player Isaac Buchine eloquently put it, “If we give up this opportunity for our religion, it just shows how much we deeply care for it.” This is a powerful message and illustrates the passion our students have for Judaism, a goal that we the administration at RMBA strive to achieve for on a daily basis.

After much scrutiny by the media and the threat of a potential lawsuit, the TAPPS governing body relented and agreed to move the game time. Charged by the support of the community and in some ways the world, our team went on to win a thrilling game and were headed to the championship finals, a game that was then quickly rescheduled so as not to be played on Shabbat. People across the globe had caught on to this remarkable story of the little engine that could and with all eyes upon us, we entered the final game as underdogs yet again. Although we played admirably and left it all on the court, we narrowly lost. But our players had already been declared winners days before when they proudly stood together and declared their commitment to their Jewish faith to be more important than just a game. Aaron Hakarian, another player on the team, stated, “Our trophy is in our heads and in our hearts.”

Despite not returning with the state title in hand, the legacy of what the Beren Stars achieved that year lives on. It is Kiddush Hashem, the sanctification of God’s name that drives our school and its remarkable students. It is important to always remember what you believe in and stand for in the face of adversity.

As North American Jewish day school leaders, we naturally want to grow our student enrollment, increase our revenue and thereby successfully impacting the bottom line. We may face challenges unique to our markets that will continue to impact and test our vitality. But in the face of this adversity I encourage you to remain firm and true to your core values and ideals. Know who you are as a school and what you aim to achieve, and believe in this passionately.

I can tell you with conviction that Robert M. Beren Academy provides an integrated Orthodox Jewish and college preparatory education in an atmosphere of excellence. We are committed to Torah and its ethical and moral precepts and to the Jewish people. We are devoted to the development of a spiritual bond with the Land and State of Israel. We are dedicated to our American heritage and achievement in contemporary society. We welcome with open arms students and families who believe in our mission. I am proud to stand with each of you, as fellow leaders and partners to provide excellent Jewish day school education while we ensure Jewish continuity for generations to come.

## RAVSAK Report Provides Comprehensive Portrait of Heads of School

RAVSAK has release a groundbreaking report entitled “Heads of Jewish Community Day Schools: A Portrait of the Field.” (It can be accessed online at [ravsak.org/heads-schools-report](http://ravsak.org/heads-schools-report).) This survey offers a wealth of information on trends in our industry—everything from school size and budget, educational and professional background of heads, length of service, salary, gender, and benefit statistics, to the heads’ perceived strengths and needs.

Among the report’s key findings:

- 44% of RAVSAK schools have 150 or fewer students
- Operating budgets vary enormously, from under \$500,000 to over \$10 million
- 80% of heads had prior experience in school administrative leadership
- 39% of heads had been at their jobs for 2 years or less
- Average salary: \$161,000
- 54% of heads are women, 46% are men

- 43% of male heads serve schools which include high schools; 18% of female heads do
- 46% of women, 18% of men lead schools of 100 or fewer
- 56% of heads are Baby Boomers
- The package of benefits offered heads varies widely from school to school
- 39% of heads receive a coach or mentor, paid by the school
- Heads see their greatest skills as interpersonal rather than operational or technical
- They seek support in areas of operations and management
- Overwhelmingly, the largest factor determining a head’s satisfaction lies in a belief in the school’s mission

We are confident that the report will prove of great use to school boards, current and aspiring heads, funders, and more broadly to leaders and supporters of Jewish day school education.

## RAVSAK Represents Community Day Schools

Over the past several months, RAVSAK’s co-executive directors, Dr. Idana Goldberg and Dr. Marc N. Kramer, have spoken and presented at a number of forums and venues, raising RAVSAK’s vision and perspectives on a host of issues.

### October:

Idana presented at a session entitled “What’s the best model of education for Israeli-Americans?” at the National Israeli-American Conference in Washington, DC.

Marc served as the kickoff speaker for the Partnership Speaker’s series at Temple of Aaron in St. Paul, MN.

Idana attended the first meeting of the National Museum of American Jewish History’s Education Advisory Committee in Philadelphia, PA.

Idana and Marc co-presented a session on new models of leadership at the Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community’s Advance Conference in New York City.

### November:

Marc represented RAVSAK and community day schools at the Covenant Award Dinner and at JFNA’s General Assembly in Washington, DC.

Marc led two sessions at the World Zionist Organization’s Morim Shlichim conference, the professional development conference for Israeli teachers sent to work in North America.

Idana spoke on a panel at the National Association of Hebrew Teachers’ inaugural conference about the role of leadership in advancing Hebrew language education, together with RAVSAK Board member Arnee Winshall and Rabbi Andrew Davids, head of school at Beit Rabban Day School in Manhattan.



# COLOR WAR ISN'T JUST FOR CAMPERS

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AYELET  
MARGOLIN  
LEHTMAN

Anyone who's ever attended a Jewish summer camp knows all about color war. Traditionally, it's the highlight of an intense summer filled with spirit, camaraderie and shared experiences.

It does at Denver Jewish Day School. Since 1984, when they first introduced color war to upper division students, DJDS faculty and staff have found that providing a setting for social comfort, fun and belonging in a nonacademic environment only enhances what students learn in the classroom. Typically held in March, toward the end of the third quarter, the four day event creates a forum for engagement with Jewish content and ideas, mastery of academic knowledge and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Though they begin planning the event as juniors, color war is organized and led by the school's senior class, under faculty supervision. It is a true endeavor in leadership, collaboration and teamwork.

"We have always encouraged our students to stretch their horizons and become intentional participants in their own Jewish lives," says Jerry Rotenberg, lead faculty supervisor for the event. "Particularly for those whose talents lie outside the classroom, shared experiences like color war provide students with alternative opportunities to thrive, take on leadership roles, and participate in a Jewish experience that appeals to them."

Ultimately, the skills Denver Jewish Day School students gain through shared experiences like color war will benefit not just the school community, but the greater Jewish and world communities into which they graduate. The Jewish day school environment can often be an intense and competitive one; such experiences, which are critical both socially and emotionally, show kids how to support one another even as they compete. Students—especially those that lack confidence academically—learn that they can achieve in other ways, and the level of community-building is further enhanced by the variety of opportunities for success.

Generally, color war begins with an exciting “breakout” event. Those at DJDS have included a helicopter landing on the school’s quadrangle with both team captains in tow, the local fire department leading a fake fire drill, and a salsa dance performance—all planned by the Senior class. During the four days of competition, 6th through 12th graders in two teams participate in a variety of events. More traditional challenges include tug-of-war, dodgeball and other sporting events that put a student’s athletic abilities to the test. Others like lip-sync competitions and art contents allow those whose passion lies in the arts to contribute to their team’s success. More unconventionally, Denver Jewish Day School places marked emphasis on the integration of academic subject matter into the competition through events like a quiz bowl in secular studies, Hebrew language and Judaics, science challenges, and “mathletics.”

While the competition primarily engages middle and upper schoolers, even 4th and 5th graders have an opportunity to participate in a limited capacity, whetting their appetite for further participation in later years. At night, a senior hosts the students on his or her team, providing the group with more opportunities for socialization (under adult supervision, of course). Despite the inherent risks of after-hours interaction, past experience has shown that the fellowship of color war generally leads to a respect of the school’s middot even at home.

“The intense ruach and camaraderie of color war creates a connection among students and the school community that would not otherwise exist here,” says Rotenberg. “The kids become passionate about something outside the sphere of their formal education, but are engaged within its context.”

The value in DJDS’s color war lies in the fact that, while it relies on the very best social elements of experiential education, it is unlike anything students will experience at summer camp. School color war means a shared experience with the classmates a student learns with 10 months out of the year. Day-to-day relationships are strengthened, as is the connection to the school. Color war at DJDS is a way for students to own their educational

experience in unprecedented ways. Responsible for planning and executing the event, students take on genuine leadership roles, learning how to address issues that arise with creativity and ingenuity, supported by their adult supervisors. Older students accept responsibility for planning and development of the entire event schedule, and their decisions determine the nature of the experience for younger classmates.

With numerous competitions in a variety of subject matter areas, color war allows those with different skills to shine throughout the week. Color war is particularly beneficial for schools that lack drama, art or dance programs, as it provides opportunities for students who excel in the arts to showcase their skills. For teachers, color war provides a break in the schedule and allows them to expand their vision of what is possible, using new and innovative ways to reinforce the content they are charged with imparting throughout the year.

Color war benefits the school as well. It’s as important in building community within the school as it is in bringing new students to grow the school. Potential families who come to experience color war are often blown away by this unconventional learning opportunity. Students who may be considering leaving the school or debating whether to continue from the lower division to the upper division often make the decision to stay and continue at DJDS after participating in this unique educational experience. Alumni and parents, too, are invited to attend a special event on the final night. Generally, around 500 people attend, and the camaraderie and team spirit of the students infects alumni and parents as well. Alumni are reconnected with their alma mater, much as those at universities stay connected through sporting events, and parents enjoy seeing the joy on their children’s faces.

While at DJDS color war has blossomed into a much anticipated yearly event, other schools can start small and grow, shaping the event to fit their own culture. This activity traditionally associated with summer camp, when done right, goes a long way toward enhancing school spirit and students’ educational experience.

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# A LEAGUE NOT OF ONE'S OWN:

## COMPETING WITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

When New Jersey realigned its athletic conference in the northern part of the state, The Golda Och Academy (GOA) athletic department saw a new opportunity for an independent school which had primarily been playing other private institutions throughout the state. Following meetings with the principal and head of school, as well as a parents' focus group, the decision was made to join the Super Essex Conference in its inaugural year. Since joining the other 30 public and private high schools in the Conference in 2009, GOA has seen a tremendous increase in the balance of play throughout its 12 high school sports teams (boys and girls varsity soccer, volleyball, tennis, cross-country, basketball teams, a coed swim team, boys baseball and girls softball).

While this wasn't the first time GOA reevaluated its athletic program's options, this one made perfect sense. Reexamining your athletic program is a necessary exercise for every school. Evaluate your options. Do the positives outweigh the negatives? Are the travel times you currently have too far for students? Is the level of play fair and balanced, or are your teams consistently losing or winning by a huge margin each season?

One of the major benefits we have experienced being part of a countywide conference has been shorter travel times for games. Like other day schools with a longer day, GOA has a 4:00 pm dismissal, requiring our games to have a later start time. Prior to joining the SEC, we had bus rides lasting upwards of 90 minutes each way. It was not unusual to arrive back at school at 9 PM with students still having to travel home (some 45 minutes away) and complete their schoolwork for the day. Today, our bus rides are limited to 30 minutes.

Having a level playing field has also revitalized our school's athletics programs and given our student-athletes more confidence. Prior to joining the SEC, our only team to enjoy championship success was our boys varsity basketball team. The days of winning or losing a basketball game by 50 points, a soccer game by seven or a baseball game by 15 are mostly in the past. Every two years the SEC examines the divisions and realigns them if necessary. This allows the players not to get too discouraged after a tough season or two because they know there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Previously, when we played the same teams year after year, knowing which games we were going to win and which ones we would lose became predictable. With divisions changing every two years, each season begins with a sense of excitement and enthusiasm.

Although we are the only Jewish day school that participates in a New Jersey state-sanctioned conference, competing against much larger schools as well as schools that are able to draw from a larger pool of student-athletes, we are performing just as well as our opponents. At the end of each season, when coaches meet to choose their all-division teams, Golda Och athletes have always been represented fairly and sometimes have even dominated these lists.

Some of our top athletes have even had the opportunity to gain individual recognition throughout the entire county. Since becoming a part of the conference, our school has produced four collegiate athletes. We have had a two-time state-scoring champion in girls basketball, a nationally-ranked boys tennis player, a Division 1 boys basketball player and an Olympic-hopeful swimmer. Their individual achievements and accomplishments are featured in the media outlets covering the SEC, which in turn, gives our school more exposure and highlights the fact that a Jewish day school can indeed attract top athletes and field competitive teams.

We nevertheless continue to face the challenge of being a Jewish school in a non-Jewish league. Though we still need to reschedule games that fall on holidays or Shabbat, over time we have gone from rescheduling 15 games per team to 15 games across all the sports teams for the season. The athletic directors know when they hear our voice on the other end of the line why we are calling, and all willingly accommodate our needs.

It has also allowed our students to network with the community at large, a community they will be more immersed in post-graduation. For some athletes, competing against the diverse public schools in Essex County can be cause for a slight culture shock at times, especially given the varying demographics of our county. Yet as our student-athletes continue to compete against the same teams, they see the same players on the opposition year after year and gain familiarity with them. Prior to the games, it's typical for players to walk over to the opposing team and converse for a few moments, recognizing one another by name.

Playing such teams also exposes our students to other cultures and religions, which can give rise to teachable moments outside of the classroom. When one of our teams walked into the gym of a Catholic school for a game that coincidentally fell on Ash Wednesday, questions began to flow when our student-athletes noticed the ashes on the opposing players' foreheads. What is it? Why do they have it on their foreheads? This opened up a conversation on other religious beliefs and practices.

The conversations have also turned painful life lessons on being a minority in the United States today. On select occasions, when we have held games in public parks, our athletes have faced anti-Semitic remarks, mainly from spectators unaffiliated with the opposing teams. It's an issue we handle delicately. Our athletes are taught not to respond to the comment, and our coaches always discuss the incident after the game.

No athletic conference has the perfect formula for a day school. Your school may find it easier to participate in a yeshiva league where there aren't mass scheduling conflicts or the prospect of negative slurs. You may find it easier for your athletes to form friendships with other Jewish day schools. But here at Golda Och Academy, we have discovered that joining a county-wide conference has provided us with tremendous benefits. We face head-on the challenges of being a religious minority, and at the same time prepare our student-athletes for the world they will face once they graduate these halls as Jewish citizens living in a multicultural society.



## Student Program Updates



### RAVSAK Artists' Beit Midrash

Love is in the air! Hundreds of students at more than 40 day schools across North America are participating in the RAVSAK Artists' Beit Midrash (formerly known as the Judaic Art Contest), creating artwork that interprets Jewish texts on the theme of love. In collaboration with the Global Day of Jewish Learning, RAVSAK distributed a curriculum that asks student to consider what Jewish texts can teach us about questions such as, What happens when a father loves one child more than his other children? How do we show love for God? Is there love at first sight? Students are weaving together their understanding of the theme, texts and their artwork through writing artist statements. Prizes will be awarded by a panel of esteemed Jewish artists in the categories of drawing and painting, sculpture and mixed media, and photography; winning entries will be displayed in the summer issue of HaYidion. The deadline for submitting artwork through the RAVSAK website is December 15. The RAVSAK Artists' Beit Midrash is made possible through the generosity of Ann Bennett & Family.

### Hebrew Badge Project

With the support of the Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, RAVSAK is launching the Hebrew Badge Project, an initiative that incorporates three innovative pedagogic approaches: alternative assessment through digital badges, student directed learning and participation in an international online community of students and teachers to enhance how middle school students engage with Hebrew as a living language. The unique combination of approaches empowers students to strengthen Hebrew language skills through engagement in authentic conversation, reading and writing within the dual contexts of the physical classroom and of an online community of peers.

Digital badges are credentials that represent achievements, skills and interests earned by an individual through specific projects, programs or other activities. In the secular world, digital badging has been a focus of the MacArthur Foundation, and has been utilized in successful online learning platforms such as Khan Academy. In the context of the Hebrew Badge Program, digital badges will be used as tools for encouraging and recognizing student application of Hebrew through authentic language activities.

RAVSAK has developed 10 badges which align with the core values that RAVSAK schools share and the sensibilities of Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah. To earn each badge students will complete self-selected

and self-guided activities and projects that align with the theme of a particular badge. For example, to earn the Areivut badge, a group of students plans and performs a Hebrew song festival at a local nursing home. To earn the Kehilla badge, a student exchanges a series of "pen pal" emails with an Israeli student.

If you are interested in having your students participate in the pilot program, contact Yael Steiner at [yael@ravsak.org](mailto:yael@ravsak.org).



### JCAT: The Jewish Court of All Time

Giles Blum, a Jewish French teenager, is told he can no longer wear his kippah at school. Laila Mokaddem, a French Muslim teenager, is told that she will need to remove her hijab in order to attend her high school classes. In this year's edition of JCAT: The Jewish Court of All Time, Giles and Laila join together to challenge the French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools and bring their case before figures from across history, played by 665 middle school students, 35 teachers, and 42 graduate student mentors at the University of Michigan, JTS and Hebrew College. Over the course of 12 weeks, students playing figures such as Henrietta Szold, Alfred Dreyfus and Baruch Spinoza are debating, analyzing primary sources, and exploring Jewish history through the context of the trial. Through RAVSAK's partnership with the University of Cincinnati, teachers and graduate students are engaging in action research in their classrooms and on the JCAT site, exploring questions such as the ways that character selection may influence a students' engagement with the game.

Thank you to the Covenant Foundation for its generous funding of this exciting initiative, which brings together twenty-first century technology to enhance Jewish history education in our day schools.



### Moot Beit Din

Preparation for Moot Beit Din 2016 in West Palm Beach, Florida, is underway, with students researching, studying and developing their written rulings for the case. Applying biblical, rabbinic and modern sources, students are exploring how Jewish law responds to contemporary situations, and in particular, questions about medical ethics.

In this year's case, a daughter faces difficult decision about the medical care for her ailing father and seeks guidance from the Beit Din to determine whether or not her father should undergo a risky procedure.

RAVSAK is excited to announce a new division within Moot Beit Din for teams from supplementary Jewish high schools. In collaboration with the North American Association of Community and Congregational High School (NAACCHS), RAVSAK will welcome teams from supplementary schools in a number of communities, including Cincinnati, Memphis and Minneapolis. This new partnership is an incredible opportunity to open up the Moot Beit Din experience to more teenagers who are looking for opportunities for deep engagement with Jewish text.



### Hebrew Poetry Contest

The sixth annual Hebrew Poetry Contest is underway, with hundreds of students from more than 35 schools penning original Hebrew poems. RAVSAK is excited to announce the three judges who will be reading the poems and awarding prizes:

Maya Arad grew up in Kibbutz Nahal Oz in Israel. She earned her PhD in linguistics at University College in London and now lives in California, where she is writer in residence at the Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford University. Author of nine books in various genres, she is recognized as one of the leading Hebrew novelists of her generation.

Sara Hascal has been a Hebrew senior lecturer in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University since 1984. She received an MA in education from Lesley College and a MA in Judaic studies from Hebrew College. She is a co-author of the Brandeis Modern Hebrew textbook, published by University press of New England. Sara Hascal is also the assistant director of the School of Hebrew at Middlebury College.

Giddon Ticotsky is a visiting lecturer at Stanford University's Department of Comparative Literature. His PhD thesis, conducted at Tel Aviv University, deals with the Israeli poetess Dalia Ravikovitch (1936-2005), one of the most prominent figures in modern Hebrew literature. He recently won the Israeli Bahat Prize for the best original scholarly book manuscript in Hebrew, for his forthcoming book about Ravikovitch's work.

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# ULTIMATE FRISBEE:

## ULTIMATELY FUN, ULTIMATELY JEWISH



Sitting on my bed on a Wednesday afternoon, I was itching to walk out the door into the spring air. That night, I, a freshman at the time, thought about ways I could be more active; my school's spring sports include baseball, tennis, and track, all three of which I was not interested in playing. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense: why not try to start a high school ultimate Frisbee team? I immediately began to ask my friends if they'd be interested in joining the potential team. Their affirmative responses buoyed my hope to play ultimate. With too many spring sports teams sharing one soccer field, the athletic director understandably denied my casual request for an ultimate team. Nevertheless, I was still able to form a club. I easily secured the minimum eight names required to establish a club, but I still needed an advisor, and that's when I approached Rabbi Lev, who has since been our adult leader and coach.

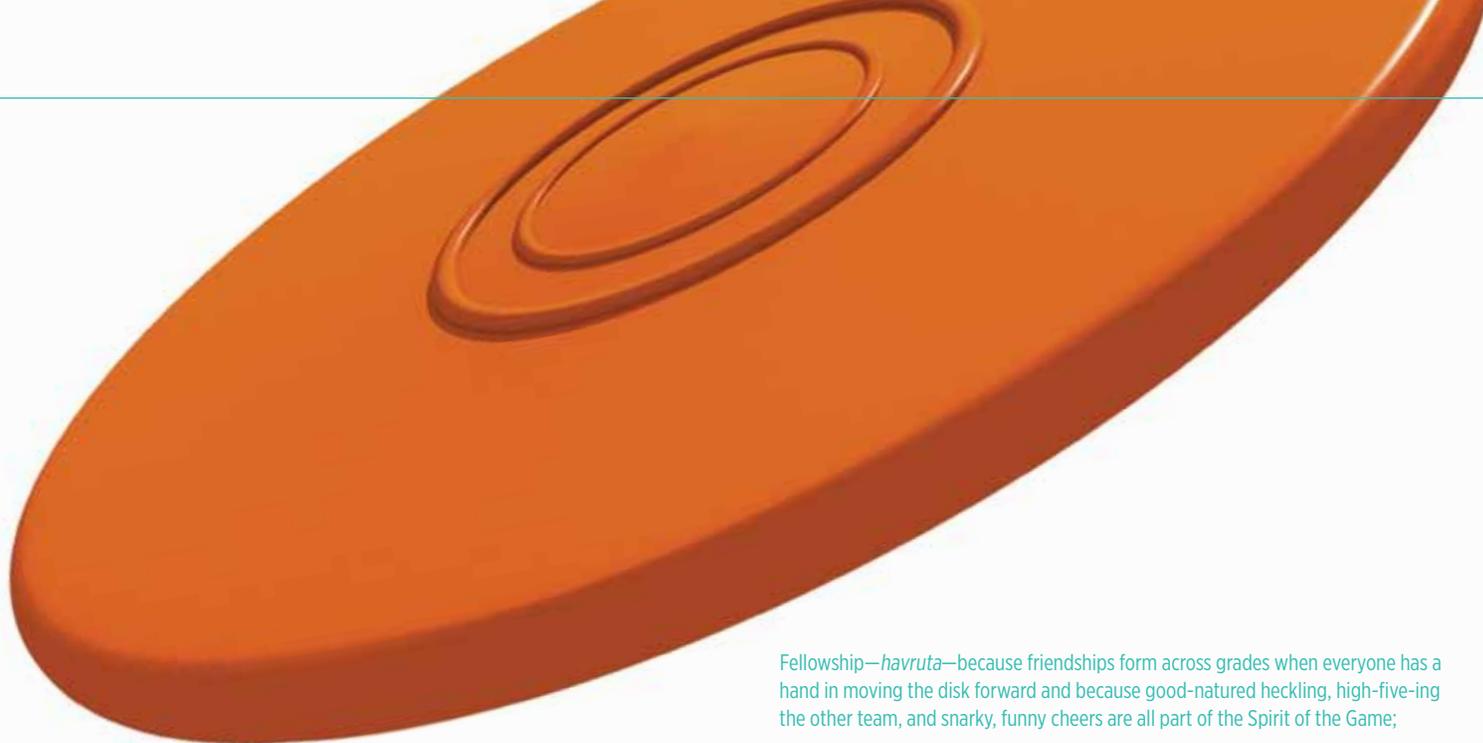
At first, a bunch of my ninth grade friends and I met only once every few days at lunch out on the soccer field. We would chuck the disc to one another without rules or strategies. Gradually, we got more and more structured. The following spring, my tenth grade year, we held a few Sunday practices and two afterschool games. Some juniors joined the team in addition to my sophomore friends. In eleventh grade, we held more practices and more games, and we even competed in two tournaments, with kids playing from all grades. Although we've learned some offensive formations and defensive tactics, we have preserved the casual and fun spirit of our original team when we were just playing out at lunch.

Ultimate seems to be especially popular in the Jewish community, and I don't think that is totally coincidental. When I think of a male Jewish teen, I picture someone relatively similar to myself: a skinny, lanky, brown curly-haired kid whose mother's worries have engrained in him the dangers of physical sports like football or hockey. That kid is pretty much built to play ultimate. Though he may not be lightning fast or tremendously strong, he probably has high stamina and is able to run for the long distances that ultimate games and tournaments require. His awkward body proportions and long arms are for once conducive in sport, enabling him to snatch the disc in the air above those with shorter, less lanky arms. His mother is more than willing to give her permission for him to play ultimate due to the non-contact nature of the sport. And since the players themselves are expected to make fair/foul calls, the honesty and humility that his mother taught him thrive in this trust-based sport.

Serving in my role as co-captain, along with my teammate Alec Cohen, has been tough. Our second game in tenth grade against Abington Friends was a close one. Since the score was tied late in the game at 10-10, my team was on edge, nervous about the other team's momentum that might produce an unfavorable outcome. It was time for substitutions, and I was the one who needed to decide who was to play and who was to sit on the bench at this critical moment in the game. I hesitated, trying to balance fairness with a desire to win. This brief lapse of decisiveness allowed one particularly loud player on the team to try to make the decision that I, the captain, should have made. As a result, arguments erupted among the players about individual skill levels, and the team lost its organization and chemistry that the intense situation demanded.

What's challenging has been not only lacking the authority that a true captain who coaches younger players usually possesses, but also coming from a small Jewish private school with limitations. Often, other teams hold practices, games, tournaments, or organizational league meetings on Saturdays or on weekdays. In a small school with only 60 students in each co-ed grade, athletes who play other spring sports must also be permitted to play ultimate to maintain an otherwise unsustainable team. Since many of our team members are busy with their other sports after school on weekdays, and since no one can do anything ultimate-related on Shabbat, we are usually restricted to schedule events for Sundays only. Despite the scheduling difficulties and leadership challenges, I have thoroughly enjoyed helping form our enthusiastic ultimate team.

Our two-hour game of ultimate Frisbee came to an end as the sunlight began to ebb on the Class of '16 ninth grade springtime shabbaton. Benji Joffe, his classmates and I had spent the afternoon out on the field on that beautiful early May Shabbat afternoon and it was time to come in for Minchah services and the final gradewide activities before making Havdalah. I hadn't anticipated that chaperoning the Shabbaton would be so much fun out on



the field, and as Benji, his classmates and I walked back into the building, they asked me if I would be willing to help them start up an ultimate Frisbee team. I knew it would be a rich experience, and I also knew that I would have a steep learning curve ahead of me.

I was a cross-country and track runner in high school and college, but I hadn't played a team strategy sport for many years until I began playing ultimate Frisbee as a teacher when I began supervising students outdoors at a weekly lunchtime duty. I played ultimate Frisbee with my students for a decade without paying much attention to the rules, so when I told Benji that I would be willing to coach the team, I also made a commitment to learning the game. Since then, I have come to appreciate that the values guiding the sport of ultimate Frisbee are right in synch with the values that guide our school. I have to be careful not to talk too much about ultimate, though, because my head of school may think that I'm planning to give up my day job as director of Jewish studies!

Ultimate Frisbee is played like other field sports, in which the Frisbee moves down the field to an end zone. It is a rapid-moving game with constant movement going up and down the field, frequent turnovers as each team gains and loses possession, and eyes directed skyward, tracking the disc in flight. Unlike any other sport, however, "ultimate," as it is commonly known, is guided by a concept known officially as "the spirit of the game," a positive outlook on play that requires honesty and integrity. Ultimate is different from other sports because the players on the field are the only ones who can call a foul; there are no outside referees, so everyone has to play by the rules and be effective self-advocates if they feel they have been fouled.

At Barrack, I serve as the Derech Eretz Council faculty advisor, and when the Council—a mix of students and teachers—identified six values to serve as a foundation for our school's honor code, we could have been planning for ultimate Frisbee because the sport embodies those same six values. These are our school's six values and their relevance for ultimate.

**Honor—*kavod***—because we honor spirit as much as skill;

**Honesty—*yosher***—because we are trustworthy in the absence of outside referees;

**Humility—*anavah***—because we can always improve our game and because we are willing to accept an opponent's call if we foul;

**Community—*kehillah***—because the Spirit of the Game brings teams together and players even join an opposing team if they don't have a full team because a spirited game is better than a forfeit;

**Fellowship—*havruta***—because friendships form across grades when everyone has a hand in moving the disk forward and because good-natured heckling, high-five-ing the other team, and snarky, funny cheers are all part of the Spirit of the Game;

**Modesty—*tzniut***—because no single player can dominate the team.

Ultimate Frisbee captains play unusually significant roles, even on youth teams, so I seek to nurture the leadership skills of my captains. I have worked with Benji and Alec on calling for practices and scheduling games, sometimes at 8:00 AM on a Sunday morning! When we are out on the field, the captains determine who substitutes for whom, calling plays and strategies. As Benji implied in his essay, captains have to play a moral role as well when they have to make difficult choices. I have had more than one conversation with captains about whether or not to remove a teammate from the field if the teammate is acting in poor spirit and bad faith.

Chasing a flying disc across a field might look frivolous, perhaps no more frivolous, though, than chasing a soccer ball or swatting a baseball. The beauty in ultimate Frisbee can be found not only in the aerodynamic disc as it gets launched down a field into the sky, but also in the simplicity of equipment—no pads, no helmets, just shirts, shorts, cleats—and in the broad green expanse of the field.

As a coach, I find that I can reach several students in ways I never would in the classroom, especially when I jump into a game and play, jostle, push, get pushed, and match wits and strategies. We all try to keep the language clean, and the informality means that even though I'm their teacher or rabbi, I'm also just another player while we're out on the field. They see me try and make the catch and throw a successful pass sometimes and then miss the catch or miss a throw on another play. I also see the best in their character when they persevere, give time to the team, lose with grace, and win with spirit. Unlike the classroom with its clear authority structure, the field allows for joking around, silences, shared interests and relationships that feel more informal and even familial.

As my students began to improve their skills and play in official games and tournaments, I began to miss the games we played together at recess, so I signed up to join an intermediate level summer league so that I could play with some kids my own age and improve my skills as a player. When the summer league season came to an end, I wasn't expecting to earn MVP, but I did feel a little proud to receive the Most Improved Player award. When I shared my award with the director of athletics at my school, he encouraged me to tell my team because we can't all be MVP, but we can all strive to keep improving our game.

After all, the beauty and excitement in athletics from youth leagues to professional levels lie in working hard, playing hard, being part of a team community, and being modest and humble enough to know that after every point we are fortunate to gain, we eventually have to return to the starting line, back on defense with a strategy to move forward. Each new game of ultimate Frisbee, like each year of studying Torah in our Jewish schools, offers a fresh start.



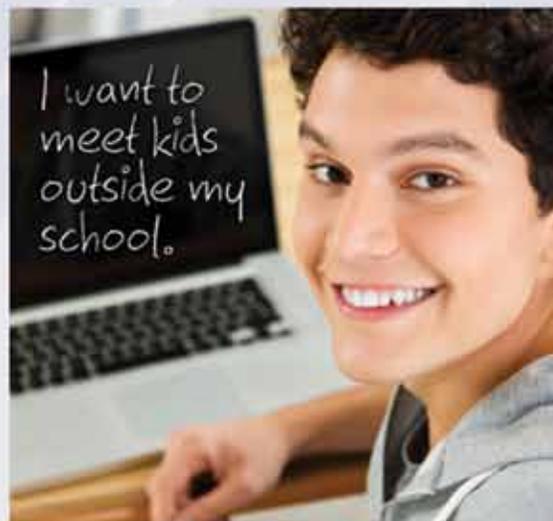
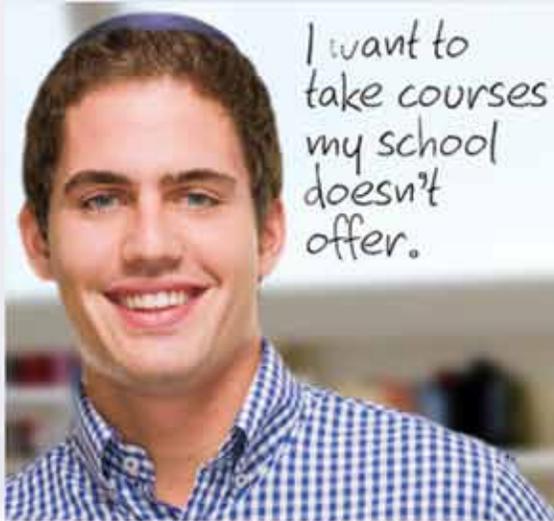
# SPORTS CREATES COMMUNITY

LINDA K.  
SCHAFFZIN

Many perspectives are offered for the value that sports bring to Jewish day schools. In much of our literature, athletics is listed along with other enrichment assets—along with the arts, for example, or other enticing electives. Others stress the value of sports for its social value, in teaching sportsmanship and, when well done, Jewish values. Research has supported the value of sports in stimulating cognitive achievement as well. However, during the last seven years at Lehrman Community Day School in Miami Beach, Florida, we learned a new aspect of the value of athletics: its value in the creation of community. This is the story of the Miami Dade Jewish Athletic League.

In the early years of the 21st century, Florida public schools were undergoing enormous cutbacks in the arts, as well as PE physical education and recess. We resisted cutbacks in those areas, and in fact made sure to point that out in our admissions literature and meetings. But our competitive team sports program, which began in 4th grade, was not a strength, primarily due to our size. We were not in any league, so we would call a school and try to set up a game. There was no structure. Worse than that were the schools we would play; many were much larger than us, which meant that coaches had many kids to choose from for their teams. It was hardly a fair matchup. At the time we had one section per grade, but even now at three sections per grade, we would be smaller than some of the schools in our county. Miami Dade is one of the largest school districts in the country.

As much as our kids loved playing basketball, their experience on the court was just not fun. They did not feel that they had a fair chance against many of the schools they played. Our no-cut policy on all teams meant good news for kids who wanted to play, but bad news for our win-loss record.



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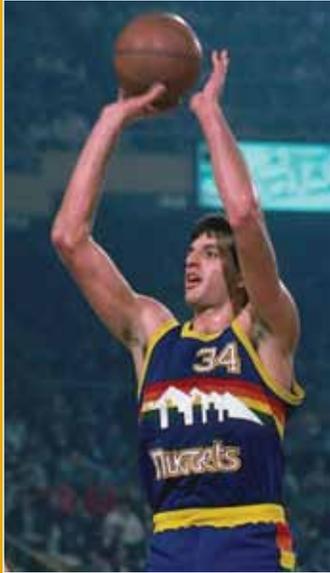


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# JEWISH ATHLETES



## Danny Schayes

Former NBA Basketball Player

### How did sports impact your Jewish identity?

Sports has enhanced my Jewish identity greatly. I have traveled to Israel on 5 occasions that were sports related trips. My first transformational Jewish experience occurred when I traveled to Israel for the Maccabiah Games as a high school senior. I went to play sports and came away with an understanding of what it meant to be a Jew that I could never have achieved by living in the US. I later enjoyed a long NBA career and for a time was the only Jewish player in the league. I was often met by Jewish fans at the games. The connection between Judaism and sports had been a long term love affair for me.

### What advice would you give to a young Jewish athlete today?

The best advice that I can give for a young Jewish athlete today is to pursue the joy of sports to the highest level possible. Sports, academics, and Jewish life can absolutely coexist. The phrase “sound mind, sound body” is one of the most fundamental because it is at the core of every life. Sports is an ideal complement to an academic life, and also compliments a spiritual one.



There were those, of course, who made a case for the fact that our kids were meeting students on the court and the playing field outside of their insular friendship groups. Yet these encounters were very limited, especially since our kids in particular seldom met their opponents in playoffs. Since these were usually one-off meetings, they never formed any real relationships. There were never any significant exchanges or real learning about the “other.” Most rhetoric about cultural exchanges was just that: talk. The athletes seldom saw one another after the games they played. For Lehrman, the experience was even more superficial because our school does not have a home field for flag football and soccer, so we had to play those “home” games at a public field, which meant even less sharing between teams.

In 2008, the athletic director at Hochberg Preparatory, a Miami Dade Schechter day school, and a former Lehrman PE coach, put forth a proposal for a Jewish Athletic League composed of five of the Jewish day schools in the Miami Dade area: Hebrew Academy, Scheck Hillel, Jacobson Sinai Academy, Hochberg and Lehrman. It would encompass 4th grade through middle school. We would run six games a year in three sports: flag football, basketball and soccer. There were many commonalities, including our agreement not to

have games on Fridays, Saturdays or chagim, and we worked around differences in schedules, e.g. schools that closed for Chol haMoed Sukkot and those closed for winter holiday weeks.

The benefits were clear in terms of the athletics. Although there are differences among us, in size, performance level and more, our similarities are important. Our no-cut philosophy is shared by everyone in the JAL and the playing field is much more level. While cultural differences at the schools no doubt influence individual experiences, there is a sense of community overall that the league has engendered for athletes and their families. Parents meet at games, kids feel a part of the school community and a greater community, and overall the athletic effort feels more community-driven.

There is no doubt in my mind that this came at a vital time for Lehrman. Like many schools, we were hurting: attrition was at 30%, which many were blaming on the recession. No doubt some were leaving because of finances, but a careful analysis told us something more. Many felt that the school had lost its feeling of community. There were very few whole-school events. There was a feeling of “us” and “them” between groups in the school. Families were not interconnected. There had been a push to create a prep school

atmosphere: we had gone as far as to use LCDS in our logo, instead of Lehrman, ignoring a sense of our history. We were bleeding families that felt no connection to the school, and certainly not to the greater Miami Jewish community. Our identity as a Jewish community was in question.

I would not go so far as to say that the coaches consciously formed the JAL as a hedge against attrition, but they certainly knew they were creating a community builder. After seven years, in retrospect, the JAL definitely functioned as a piece of this effort. It tied our older students to a community that helped them define who they are. I definitely believe it added to our retention efforts. We are now down to 8% attrition.

Perhaps more importantly is the collateral benefit. We hear that when our alums move on to the next step in their education; they meet these same kids and have shared experiences behind them, which helps in the transition. They see one another at the bar/bat mitzvah celebrations, and at their temples and synagogues. Even the coaches recognize kids and families of other

teams in the community. It has benefited these athletes and the Jewish community as a whole.

Can this work in other communities? Clearly Southern Florida is blessed with a plethora of day schools. Perhaps the notion of creating a community league can lead to sharing and growth no matter what the common denominators are. The ideal, of course, would be the Jewish school common denominator, but it could also be faith-based schools in general, or small schools, or schools in a geographic area.

In assembling alumni news for our publications, I will hear of a grad's participation for her new school at a regional volleyball competition, or an alum being named MVP at a Lacrosse championship, two sports we do not offer at all. I wonder how they got involved in those sports: was it their natural athleticism, or the confidence we helped instill in them? Or was it that a new classmate, someone they met from the JAL, said to them, "Why don't we try out for this together? We liked playing flag football together last year—let's try this now?" That would be a vote of confidence for athletics and for community as well.

## Inclusive Education in Jewish Community Day Schools: A RAVSAK Report

How are day schools doing in educating students with diverse learning needs? RAVSAK developed a survey, the first ever used in the field of Jewish community day school education, to find out. The survey's goals were to discover what schools are currently doing in this area, what their resources and capacities are, and where they seek to improve in order to reach more students and better serve the students already enrolled. The survey was designed by a select advisory group and received funding from the Wexner Foundation.

The report, which will be released shortly, found that at the 75 participating schools, just over 15% of students receive special support services. This compares to 13% nationally in US public schools. Among respondents at K-8 schools, all report having students with ADD/ADHD, and the vast majority have students on the autism spectrum, with learning disabilities or language processing challenges, and emotional and behavioral issues. Jewish high schools serve somewhat fewer students with special needs than earlier grades. There has been a huge change in how students are served: whereas five years ago most students were pulled out, today the vast majority of schools report that their support staff spend most of their time helping teachers differentiate instruction and assessment inside the classroom.

Slightly less than 10% of day school faculty have special-ed certification, which ranks slightly lower than US public schools but comparable to other independent schools. Judaics faculty, however, have a lower rate of certification, 5%. Half of responding schools report a need for more teachers trained in this area. Only half the schools provide special support in Hebrew instruction, and 45% allow students to opt out of Hebrew.

Nearly half the schools expressed concern that their schools might become identified as an inclusion school and therefore limit the number of students with diverse learning needs. Nevertheless, 60% of schools report the need for more trained faculty to support students properly. Many day schools are now including special education in their long-range planning, and looking at a range of funding options to support it.

We are hopeful that this report can serve to provide both a baseline of information about the condition of inclusive education in Jewish day schools today, as well as inspiration to school professionals, lay leaders and funders to find productive paths for serving more students and improving Jewish education for all.

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# FIELD OF DREAMS





At our school, Scheck Hillel Community School in North Miami Beach, we had no home-field advantage. We bussed students to local fields and public parks for 6 AM practices, let alone for evening games. We had no place to house our entire student body for chaggim celebrations or other special events. We had eager athletes with spirit, but few coaches to teach them that sportsmanship is about values even more than skill and technique. And we had vision, of a space where school spirit and Jewish community would be on joyous display with the sounds and movements of our students. Having vision is one thing; bringing vision to life and making it reality is a whole other ball game. The vision was to enrich the Jewish educational experience through arts, athletics and community, extending from our school's mission to develop global citizens with enduring Jewish identity.

What was once a dream is now strengthening our greater Jewish community far beyond what we had initially envisioned. After years of educational and board planning, the first phase of a capital campaign and construction project, along with dedication and bitachon, our dream came to fruition when we opened our state-of-the-art athletic complex in 2014. Here, we can host more than 3,000 for events like community celebrations, educational assemblies, science fairs, district/regional tournaments, games and physical education.

Some of our most beautiful moments are when the sun is setting and school spirit is warming up: generations come together after school with a fourth grade flag football game played alongside varsity soccer and football training, while fitness center workouts and basketball tryouts occur. On the field and court are athletes of all ages; on the sidelines are students, parents, faculty, alumni and extended community sharing cheer, conversation and a nosh from concession. And the lessons learned along our journey of building facilities and programs, specifically within athletics, are guiding our next steps.

#### LESSON LEARNED: THERE'S NO "I" IN "TEAM"

Shared commitment is required to develop an athletics program. Shared means the school's board of governors, students, parents and faculty. When the notion of creating a varsity football team was conceived in 2007, the added value and, of course, potential risks were evaluated by educators, then presented to board members and, ultimately, introduced to students and parents. This was not going to happen without shared commitment. Today's thriving program of nearly 300 athletes and 19 teams would not exist—and would not continue to succeed—without full support and collaboration of board, faculty, staff, student-parent body and generous supporters.

Extending from this early collaboration, the concept of team is seen through a schoolwide sense of inclusion. Scheck Hillel's athletics program begins in Grade 4 with co-ed flag football, where every student who tries out plays as a team member. It then continues through Grade 12 as a competitive program. Students who want to participate but not necessarily play are

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included in roles like team managers and videographers, and lower school students are involved in varsity games as ball and water girls and boys. From soccer to football, from cross-country to tennis, and all the sports in between, opportunity exists for all. Part of a talented coach's job is to make it possible for every team member to play safely. Playing well comes from knowledge and training, not only physical size or innate talent.

## LESSON LEARNED: SAFETY FIRST

Safety is first and foremost. A quality school athletics program calls for investment in the best faculty, equipment and even uniforms. Like any educational program, a school must hire professionals when starting and running an athletics program. Just as the chemistry teacher walks students through a lab experiment, the coach teaches students how to train and play through the lens of safety. And just like expert teachers in the traditional classroom, coaches break down instruction into progressions. Lesson plans involve training and technique, commitment and consistency.

Safety is about reaching above and beyond—not simply following basic requirements. Here are examples of how we've been prioritizing safety:

- expanding the campus and building a facility to house educational events and games within the safety of our school's robust security system, rather than entirely at open local venues
- bringing a university sports medicine group to campus to conduct mandatory medical exams free of charge for every athlete before they join a team, making health and wellness accessible for all
- having an athletic trainer at all home games, grades 4-12
- extending health education from the classroom to team workshops about topics like injury prevention and nutrition
- adding state-of-the-art football helmets, through a private generous donation
- hosting voluntary off-season strength and speed conditioning sessions in our indoor fitness center to maintain health throughout the year
- requiring every varsity athlete to undergo ImPACT (Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing) digital assessment before playing
- pursuing professional development opportunities for faculty like Heads Up Football developed to advance player safety. Scheck Hillel has been requiring coaches to take courses like this and others since the early years, even though the school is not mandated to do so.



## Knesset Member Rachel Azaria Gives Emergency Briefing



During the violence on the streets of Israel, Rachel Azaria, Knesset Member from the Kulanu Party and former deputy mayor of

Jerusalem, gave a special briefing for RAVSAK schools. She inspired lay leaders and school professionals alike with her down-to-earth explanations of life in Israel today.

Though this terror wave is smaller compared to those of years past, Azaria believes that it is drawing a much stronger reaction than those of recent memory. Social media exerts tremendous influence, causing terror attacks to “be carried around in our pockets with us everywhere we go.” The Israeli leadership has shifted its messaging, now recommending that Israelis arm themselves at all times, rather than relying on the protection of the state. In addition, those carrying out these attacks are lone individuals and often teenagers who live in Jerusalem.

Azaria spoke of the roles of hope and education during this difficult time. She described Thursday night study sessions in Jerusalem’s Zion Square with residents from all different backgrounds. School leaders come together and work as catalysts to provide safety and common understanding for the students and the faculty. She reminded us that whatever our political views and feelings, Arabs and Jews need to learn to live together. Azaria mentioned two organizations, the Yerushalmim Movement ([yerushalmim.info/eng](http://yerushalmim.info/eng)) and Shaharit ([facebook.com/Shaharit.Think](https://facebook.com/Shaharit.Think)), as examples of how we can teach our students about Israelis working toward a common future.

Azaria also recommended that RAVSAK educators work with students to open their minds to a variety of narratives, whether or not we agree with them, modeling for them deeper political conversations and ways to support Israel even when the country is not exactly the way that we always want it to be. As she explained, “It’s like family. You don’t always agree, but that’s part of who you are.” Those who attended the emergency briefing shared their overwhelmingly positive feedback. “A million thanks for planning the webinar with Azaria. It was informative, inspirational, educational and so much more! I have so many thoughts, ideas and information to take back to our teachers, students and board.”



### LESSON LEARNED: WINNING ISN'T EVERYTHING

As one of the first Jewish day school football teams, we felt like pioneers. We won only a single game in our first season (2008). Yet school ruach had never been stronger. Now we’re considered competition by surrounding schools and even made it to a district playoff for the past two years, but winning games still isn’t the priority of our program. It’s our neshamah that drives us.

Practices and home games in the first years of our varsity athletics program were away. Times and venues would change at a moment’s notice; school opponents were scarce as we were brand new. But students, parents, coaches and fans rolled with the punches. We were in it together for the school—guided by early vision and community spirit.

Our athletics faculty will tell you that some of our best teams over the years weren’t those with the most combined talent but rather those unified by the greatest heart, shared values and determination. When last year’s grand opening of our new athletic complex turned into a downpour of rain and a homecoming football loss, the school spirit in the packed bleachers of cheering fans—donning ponchos—could not be dampened. That October 2014 evening is still talked about as one of the most special community gatherings in the school’s 45+ years.

### LESSON LEARNED: THE MAGEN DAVID MARKS OUR 50-YARD LINE FOR A REASON

Symbols of Judaism appear in our school crest to illustrate and remind us of who we are and why we’re here, representing our identity as a Jewish school, as a Jewish community. It’s why each game begins with a dvar Torah and huddle brachah. It’s why we sing Hatikvah along with The Star Spangled Banner before each game. It’s why we use Hebrew to call plays during a game—that also happens to be strategic when playing non-Jewish athletes. It’s why it’s no surprise when an afternoon practice becomes a shelf-stocking visit to the kosher food bank. In every way, our athletics program is an element of Jewish education.

And in every way, our Lion Pride is a reflection of and catalyst for our mission to educate and inspire our rising generations.



## Yuri Foreman

Former WBA Boxing Champion

### How did sports impact your Jewish identity?

For me personally it was a gradual process. I wasn't an observant Jew when I found my passion for boxing. Only when I started to get interested in Judaism, then I found so many parallels/correlations between boxing and Judaism. One of the most important qualities in boxing is to have a strong will/spirit/mind. For example: you have to control your emotions in the ring, like fear, anger, anxiety. In Judaism we have so many commandments "designed" to control emotions so we don't lose our way from the right track.

Judaism helped me to be a more refined athlete, and boxing helped me to attain confidence, the mental strength to be a more refined human being.

### What advice would you give to a young Jewish athlete today?

My message is to believe in yourself with all your heart and with all your might and dream **big** because there is no dream that's too big.

BRUCE  
POWELL

# WHY FOOTBALL? WHY NOT?

For the past 36 years, as principal or head of a Jewish high school, I have dealt with the question of whether "to tackle or not to tackle." The arguments for and against can be compelling and cogent.

Those "for" hosting a tackle football program argue that no other sport can unify a school in such a powerful way. The lure of "Saturday night lights" following the Havdalah light can produce high student morale, make Jewish boys feel part of the society at large, and engender pride as no other single high school activity can. And, from the standpoint of our marketing and admissions (read: recruitment) departments, what could possibly be a better advertisement for a Jewish high school than "big time" football, in a real stadium, with the roar of the crowd, and the grandeur of those very cool uniforms? Indeed, instituting football would certainly be a dream come true for our marketing professionals.

So, if the sport is so compelling, so powerful in its reach, and so "normal" within the American high school scene, why not host the sport in every Jewish high school that has the population to support it?

For those "against" having a tackle football program, the arguments usually run something like this.

First, in Jewish school cultures that promote peace, are usually non-violent, and deeply value ideals of kindness, football becomes the "anti-culture." It promotes a form of "warfare," is reminiscent of the ancient Roman Forum where Jews and Christians were eaten by lions, and works against some of our core Jewish values such as the importance of good health and the avoidance of causing harm to another human being.

Second, the football culture and ethos often tends to dominate the overall school culture, drawing attention away from ideals most of us hold supreme. An exclusiveness often grows up around super athletes that involves "in" and "out" crowds. It often separates kids into the realm of "football cool" and everyone else, and creates a highly visible distinction between those who are "cool" and those who are not. Many argue that instead of unifying a community, the reality is the opposite.

Of course, there is the financial cost and the liability issues surrounding serious injuries. These issues fall squarely on the desk of the Head of School and the school board's finance and legal committees. The national discussion regarding head trauma or other serious long-term injuries also looms large in the moral conscience of our schools' leaders.

When making a final determination, schools must ask some guiding questions: What do we want our culture to look like? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a football program? What are the financial and moral costs? And, of course, is football good for the Jews?

# FROM FANS TO FANATICS

Interview with Justine Gubar, ESPN Producer and Author of *Fanaticus: Mischief and Madness in the Modern Sports Fan*

Let's start with you. What do you get out of being a fan?

For me as a fan, sports provides connection. Growing up, as the only child of a crazed and committed New York sports fan, if I wanted to spend time with my dad, we watched games together. My dad started taking me to Shea Stadium at the age of 3 to watch our beloved New York Mets. As an adult, a love of sports is the currency of many of my friendships.

Do you think being a sports fan is more healthy or unhealthy?

Where is the line?

Studies show most fans are well adjusted folks with a healthy dose of self-esteem. Commitment to a team can prevent depression.

Where fandom can go bad is with too much "team identification," as psychologists call it, the extent to which a fan feels psychologically connected to a team. The more "highly identified" a fan is, the more likely that fan is to engage in bizarre and sometimes abusive behavior.

Tell us about the psychological dangers of fandom that you discovered.

One psychological danger is when a fan engages in unhealthy worship of an athlete, putting a sports celebrity on a pedestal that they don't deserve to be on, detracting from the team concept of sports and potentially undermining their own emotional and psychological state. When a fan subscribes to an unhealthy obsession, they may then engage in ugly, compulsive behavior. These behaviors can show up as nasty and threatening tweets and stalking.

Sports also play up fans' loyalty, to their city, country, and more: "tribalism." Tell us about the dangers that can present.

Our brains are literally primed to bond with members of our tribe and to protect ourselves from those outside the tribe. For millions of years, humans lived in groups, hunted together, and competed for limited resources. This type of wiring lives on in us as an evolutionary adaptation. Tribal bonding leads to hostility toward other tribes. We must protect ourselves from those outside. Aggression can be a natural outcome. What does this tribalism sound like to you? Sounds like a good explanation of why Auburn and Alabama, Yankees and Rex Sox, Packers and Bears fans don't mix.

## FANATICUS

MISCHIEF AND MADNESS IN THE MODERN SPORTS FAN



Justine Gubar

What about the sports industry, including professional leagues, marketing, media, etc. In what ways are they responsible for the worst aspects of fandom?

Managing fan behavior is a challenge for the industry. In *Fanaticus*, I spend time with technologists who use hi-tech solutions to secretly monitor fans. No one wants to bite the hand that feeds them, especially when competition is as fierce as ever to put butts in the seats. Security measures are expensive and detract from the bottom line, but as more and more fans express that they fear bringing their kids to professional sporting events, teams and leagues realize fan misbehavior needs to be addressed.

Our audience consists of people at Jewish day schools, grades pre-K to 12, worldwide. What did you learn about parent-fans of student-athletes?

People always ask me to pinpoint the worst fan base out there. I think they just want to hear me name fans of their most hated rival. But I've come to the conclusion that the worst fans out there are actually youth sports parents. No spectator at a sporting event cares more about an athlete than a parent watching his or her own child play, and this dynamic can be a recipe for bruised egos and sideline rage. What's really disturbing is that kids will mimic a parent's lack of sportsmanship because they don't know any better, and that's a vicious cycle that needs to be broken.

What advice would you give to schools that want to cultivate a healthy attitude towards sports?

Make it fun for the kids, engage families early and often, call out overbearing, helicopter parents, foster a healthy attitude to sports celebrity worship, dissuade kids and parents for the belief that playing youth sports will lead to money and fame. Dreams are important but not at the expense of sportsmanship.

# MEETING THE HEALTH AND FITNESS NEEDS OF DAY SCHOOL STUDENTS

The prevalence of hypokinetic (lifestyle-related) diseases in our community is staggering, and the statistics are irrefutable. Yet many Jewish schools across the country are not doing nearly enough to help remediate problems such as childhood obesity, Type 2 diabetes (rarely seen in young people until recently), deficiencies in physical fitness, and a host of other health-related maladies associated with sedentary living and poor nutritional habits.



A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled “The Toll of Sitting All Day” cites several studies referencing the health risks of sedentary lifestyles. According to the author, over 35 diseases can be attributed to inactivity, including diabetes, cancer, heart disease and osteoporosis. The famous Framingham Study on heart disease found the process of atherosclerotic plaque formation can begin as early as 12 years of age. These are problems that our students are certainly exposed to as well, and it behooves Jewish day schools that aim to cultivate the whole child to address the physical needs and wellbeing of our students along with the intellectual, social-emotional and other capacities.

First and foremost of concern to Jewish educators is that the time constraints of a dual-curriculum school typically do not support a comprehensive health/wellness program in the course of the daily schedule. Whether elementary, middle school or high school, this is always a major obstacle. Another obstacle is the policy that interscholastic sports can adequately replace a well planned health/wellness curriculum. The problem with this approach is that not all kids are sports-oriented, nor do they all have an interest in competition. Furthermore, we are doing our athletes a disservice by not adequately preparing them for the rigors of sport competition through fitness training and sports nutrition. The old adage that “you don’t play sports to get in shape, you get in shape to play sports” is still sound advice. In addition, there are budgetary constraints of hiring full-time health and physical education professionals who can develop and implement an effective curriculum, secure adequate space, and the necessary equipment.

At the American Hebrew Academy, a boarding high school, we have chosen to devote our resources toward the inculcation of fitness for all students, equal to or above our

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PHIL  
PAPIER

emphasis on team sports. All of our students are required to participate in fitness (activity) classes, which require no prerequisite skill, while team sports participation is optional. This goes against the grain of most college prep schools that require team sport participation, but not health or fitness education. We require at least one trimester of fitness training per year throughout high school. In order to accommodate the schedules of students who are involved in other programs, we offer these fitness electives after school and/or at lunch time, and we have created a “double” lunch period for this purpose. This allows students who are committed after school to sports or theater to get their fitness training during the day.

Our classes on physical wellbeing also provide opportunities for many of our students. We require our 9th and 10th graders to take a course called Wellness during our daily block schedule. Freshmen wellness includes units on stress management, nutrition, aerobic and anaerobic training, drug education, human sexuality and disease prevention. The sophomore wellness curriculum expands this course of study to include sports nutrition, anatomy and kinesiology, and prevention and care of injuries along with CPR and First Aid. We also have an advanced sports medicine elective for upperclassmen who might want to pursue this field of study in college. Athletes may earn their fitness credit through sport participation, but everyone must take Wellness I and II.

As for budgetary constraints, our board and administration have incorporated a philosophy of health, wellness and sports into our school’s mission. This is where it has to begin! A concerted commitment to a holistic approach of educating our students mind, body, and spirit is needed from the top down.

Schools with fewer resources have adopted a wellness approach by implementing grade appropriate classes and/or assemblies weekly or monthly with outside consultants. While this saves time and money, and addresses hot topics such as nutritional counseling, eating disorders, stress management, drug education and bullying, it does not ensure the same level of instruction as a regular class with assessments, teacher feedback and student/teacher interaction. There are schools that require one semester of health/wellness each year in middle school and high school, while others require just one credit or course for the entire four years of high school.

The issue is not just the need to address current hot topics in health; the larger challenge is how to correct a disturbing trend of sedentary young people with fitness levels below that of healthy and active senior citizens. We have seen many students who can't complete a mile run or walk, can't do a push up or a dozen sit ups, and have no concept of sound nutritional principals.

Most Jewish schools have a commitment to team sports because it promotes a sense of community and ruach and benefits the school by attracting student athletes who, according to many studies, will perform better academically, in leadership capacities, and in terms of representing their school to the outside community. We athletic directors look for these students and want these programs to thrive. However, sports practices generally do not include fitness training or nutrition education during the sport season. Coaches spend most of their practice time working on skills and strategy.

Parents rely on us to educate their children in core subjects, Jewish studies and Hebrew. Unfortunately, it seems that educating the student in terms of health and wellness is not an important priority. Sadly, many of our athletes have season-ending or career-ending injuries that could have been prevented with the proper education. Or through proper training, student athletes could earn college scholarships or get into schools of choice because of the development of these special skills or talents. Many private school parents leave this component of their child's education to personal trainers, health clubs or even Internet fitness fads or gimmicks. Why should they have to go outside of school for this information and education? Our students are spending eight to ten hours a day at day at our schools (sometimes longer). Doesn't the student in theater, band or afterschool art class have the same fitness needs as our athletes? Why is this not important for the entire student body as well as the athletes?

We have a responsibility to make health and wellness education a priority and not leave it up to families to figure it out on their own. While competitive sports and fitness are not mutually exclusive, they are also not the same thing. Not yet mentioned are the fields of study and career opportunities available in health and wellness. As a college preparatory Jewish school, should we not make available subject matter that could lead our students into occupations such as sports medicine, nutrition counseling, personal training, cardiac rehab, athletic training and physical therapy?

Exercise is one of the most widely prescribed interventions for everything from depression to diabetes to allergies to hypertension, but it's the least emphasized academic subject in schools. We should not only be teaching fitness, we should be teaching fitness for life.

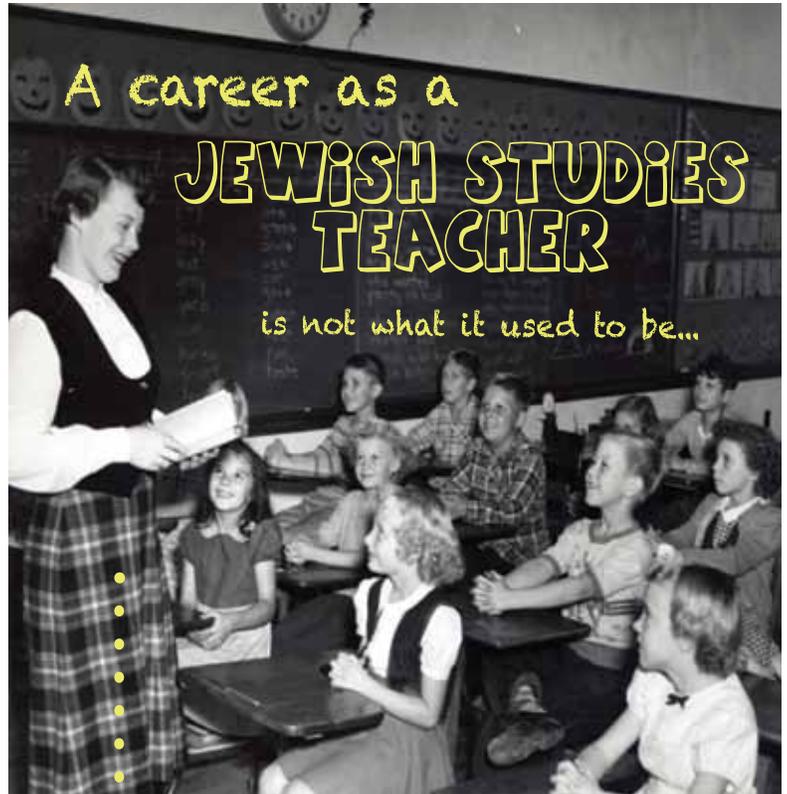


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# HITTING THE TARGET FOR DEVELOPING HEALTHY ATTITUDES

Students run around, rolling down a hill, climbing trees, and playing Frisbee. Smiles stretch wide on their faces; shouts and laughter fill the air. These are high school students, mind you, waiting for an outdoor museum guide. In another setting, students sweat in the hot sun as they climb, bend, lift, grasp, squat, and walk while cleaning a nature preserve. In a final scene, students move around acting out scenes from a play, stretching, reaching, orating, and smiling as costumes complete their character. All of these images have movement and physical expression in common. While some feel spontaneous, none are unintentional. Each scenario hits the bull's-eye in a school's specific aim to incorporate physical activity, as well as health and wellness, into students' daily experience, a choice that has numerous positive outcomes.

## RAVSAK's Board Convenes to Serve the Field

On Monday and Tuesday, November 2-3, 2015 RAVSAK's Board of Directors met in New York City for its annual retreat. Eleven of RAVSAK's Board members flew in from all over North America and engaged deeply in the strategic and generative questions that currently face RAVSAK and the community day school field. In accordance with our commitment to Jewish learning, each day began with a dvar torah that raised questions and reminded us that we can find insight into our challenges and opportunities from our Jewish sources. The Board retreat was an opportunity for the dedicated lay leaders of RAVSAK to celebrate its growth and accomplishments while also seriously considering the needs of our schools and how best to meet them in the coming year.

A highlight of the board retreat was welcoming Beni Surpin to the Board. Beni joined the RAVSAK board after he participated in RAVSAK's recent board leadership program, Sulam 2.0. He and his wife have two children who attend San Diego Jewish Academy. Professionally he works as a lawyer and is a partner with Foley & Lardner LLP, where his focus is on global technology and commercial transactions. Beni has already brought his keen intellect and sense of humor to our board work.

Part of human nature is moving in the direction we are aiming, and the same is true for schools. Henry David Thoreau writes, "In the long run, we only hit what we aim at." Torah itself means to "take aim," and we are reminded each year at Yom Kippur to think about the "target towards which we aim this year." The idea of taking aim and hitting the mark serves as a powerful guide when exploring the notion of health and well-being in Jewish education. We are sure to miss the mark in ensuring our students learn how to lead healthy lives if we fail to aim for and model a healthy path for our children to follow through school and beyond.

Developing a mission geared towards wellness leads to activities and structures that bring a sense of joy and happiness within the school day. Jewish day school staff face increased pressures due to having a dual curriculum. As a result, they make tough choices based on what they deem to be most important. Making students' health a priority can strengthen student achievement and happiness while also ensuring that school administrators and teachers hit the mark of making a positive difference in a critical aspect of their students' lives.

Why does this issue matter and why should we attend to students' health? From a religious lens, we find an emphasis on caring for the body. Hillel contends that care of the body should be counted as one of the 613 commandments. Lessons from Midrash Vayikra Rabbah teach us that the soul is a guest in the body, denoting that care for the body equates to care for the soul. At Sukkot, the lulav and etrog symbolize parts of the body and serve as metaphors to help us grow and strengthen our personal connection to Hashem. Multiple halakhot reinforce the idea of sanctity of the human body. Maimonides believed individuals are required to care for their bodies and detailed methods on how people should live a healthy life.

From a secular perspective, our children face a crisis. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), over the past 30 years, the rate of obesity in children has more than doubled, and the rate for adolescents has more than quadrupled. In 2012, more than one third of children and adolescents in the United States were obese. The CDC also provides statistics on increased rates of depression, anxiety and eating disorders often linked to poor diet and lack of exercise. These statistics fail to capture the personal stories of the emotional and physical pain and suffering that go along with the problems.

In the curricular dimension, what goals and objectives do we expect our students to master? Without the focus on wellness, it is easy to stick to the cerebral development of our students and mastery of essential secular and Judaic content. When a school cares about students holistically, a traditional focus falls short. When a school chooses not to teach students about how to eat

a healthy diet, and why exercise is important, students learn that these things must not matter. When students' holistic wellbeing is part of a school's mission, overlooking and not prioritizing these topics is problematic, and the outcome is to search for a solution. Simply learning the information theoretically also falls short, however, which leads to the importance of pedagogy.

Pedagogical choices are a critical way in which educators can make a difference. When health and wellness are not a priority, one might look at a classroom and see children sitting in their desks all day, with five minute breaks in between, as acceptable. A lack of movement, quiet order and control seem normal and even beneficial. Elementary classrooms will often evidence more movement, because such a choice is deemed developmentally appropriate.

However, once physical wellbeing enters the equation, these choices raise concerns. Current research shows that people need to move at least every half hour to increase blood flow and prevent muscle and eye strain, yet our students often sit in the same position for an hour or more. In addition to the physical concerns, how often have we seen students falling asleep or demonstrating other evidence of boredom? Adding the lens of fitness and health gives us pause and helps us ask the question, Is there a better way for students to master the material that gets them moving and more active? Easy strategies can be something as simple as having the students move around and get into groups or work with a partner.

Complex approaches can motivate educators to think more creatively about pedagogical methods. For example, teachers could have students create movements and a cheer to memorize terms for their AP language, science, or history class. Kinesthetic learners who often fail to connect to material that is most often presented in visual or auditory ways can excel through this pedagogical choice. All students will get to laugh and have fun in the process. And the evidence indicates that the retention of information is more meaningful and long-term.

Using manipulatives that afford the opportunity for students to get out of their seats and spread out on the floor to work is another pedagogical choice that can help students feel happier and learn more in school. Could a psychology teacher have students learn about the process of learning by teaching each other different skills versus just lecturing? Students could teach such things as how to shoot a basket or a particular dance, and talk about the different psychological concepts throughout the process. Could a Halakhah teacher have students get up and model kashrut principles they are learning in a hands-on way? Taking into account Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences model, students who are bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal and naturalist almost never experience modes of instruction that meet their needs or allow them to shine. Aiming for



## Estee Ackerman

**Ping-pong player, currently ranked 6 in the US for Cadet Girls under the age of 15, and 68 for all women in America. She is trying out for the 2016 Olympics Table Tennis Team.**

### **How did sports impact your Jewish identity?**

Sports has impacted my Jewish identity in a great way. My brother and I are the only Orthodox Jewish members of the United States Table Tennis Association, which numbers close to 10,000. At the 2012 US Nationals in Las Vegas in December, I made it to the final 16. My next match was scheduled for 7:30 pm Friday night. I chose not to play because it is not in the "spirit of Shabbos" to play in a tournament with cameras, umpires and wearing my uniform. I did what I felt was right. The referee defaulted me. I was 11 at the time. Even at home I do not practice on Shabbos or Jewish holidays. It is ok to play ping pong on Shabbos with friends and family but not in tournaments. When I travel we have to bring our own food or find supermarkets and restaurants that sell kosher food. These events sell nonkosher food, which is very convenient for all the other players except me. When the tournaments are over we usually stay at a hotel near a shul instead of going home right away.

### **What advice would you give to a young Jewish athlete today?**

My advice is: Remember that you are Jewish. Practice and try to be the best athlete you can be. Yes, you will compete against other athletes who go to public school and can train much longer than you, because you go to a Jewish day school. Dream big and try to live out your goals. We all know we can be better, but remember Judaism is #1, and sports is #2. Whatever sport you play, please remember to practice good sportsmanship. We are different. We should watch how we speak and should show a good example to other players, teams and officials. Think about this before you play, that way in the heat of the moment, you will be ok. As much as I would want to win the gold medal in the Olympics, I would much rather win the gold medal in life.



movement and care for students' physical wellness leads to ideas that might otherwise be missed that can help diverse students thrive.

One dimension of education that invites creative opportunities to enhance health is the structural dimension, which includes how school staff develops and uses physical and financial resources and time. Envision children setting up regular banquet tables with a net they bring from home in order to have ping pong tournaments during lunch, instead of simply sitting around. The choice to encourage students' creativity and need for doing something active finds greater support when schools aim for fitness. Space and time come together in this scenario, as they do when the classroom furniture invites teachers to easily move around tables and desks to play a game on the floor, spread out for a teambuilding activity, and so on.

Do administrators create an open space for gathering and moving around, such as a student lounge? Class time is precious, and when movement and learning merge together, schools can accomplish more. The use of space also extends beyond the school walls. Do teachers and administrators look at the physical spaces around their schools that invite physical activity that can support learning? Is there a park or other places within walking distance that teachers can incorporate into their lessons, whether historical simulations, naturalistic observation, or drawing inspiration from the setting to write poetry?

How school staff allocates time speaks volumes to students. One high school had scheduled PE as independent study at home on students' own time. The quality and strength of the program varied from student to student. More importantly, the school communicated that students' physical wellbeing was not important enough to make time for it in the schedule. The school worked hard to realign with their mission and made time for two hours of PE a week, which helped build a culture of fitness, play and community. When administrators adjusted the schedule during final exam review week, students advocated for PE time, saying it helped them reduce anxiety and have fun in this otherwise stressful time. One student went so far as to make his parent drive him back to school from a doctor's appointment with only one class left in the day, PE.

Some schools have been able to restructure their use of time to allow for trips that focus on getting active as a priority, including walking, hiking, snowshoeing, sledding and even rock climbing in the itinerary. Because these schools aim for health and building lifelong habits of being active, they provide time and resources accordingly and communicate, explicitly and implicitly, that health matters as much as all of the rest that schools teach. The trips cost money, but the aim justifies this use of financial resources.

Affording space, time and money for athletic teams at the middle and high school levels can help reach fitness goals as well. Oftentimes students at larger schools are precluded from participation due to the competitive nature of the teams, and how schools manage this reality can reflect their commitment to all students' health. Do they fund junior varsity teams? Do they provide training and club opportunities that help students get active if they do not make the higher level teams? What about scheduling sport conditioning, where students interested in getting fit, but not excited about competition, can train side-by-side with athletes? Again, the allocation of resources speaks volumes to students. All of these options require creative use of financial, time and personnel resources, and perhaps actively seeking out funding from donors who value physical health.

When a school's mission aims for healthy youth development, school staff is more likely to hit the target, overcoming barriers along the way. They can assess their curricular and pedagogical choices, as well as audit how they use space, time and financial resources with student health in mind. They shine the light on practices that best support or those that can hinder achievement of their goal. The choice to do so can change student lives.

Soft puffs of steam escape the students' lips as they hike across a vast field of yellow grass matted down from an earlier snow. Some race ahead with the guide, others linger, taking photos of shriveled flowers and frost covered leaves. Everyone speeds up when the guide produces a skull with horns from a bison that had died. "I've never hiked before," one of the students shares with a teacher as they walk. "Never?" the teacher asks. "No. My family doesn't do this kind of thing. I can't believe I love it so much. Thank you for taking us," she says with a smile.

# SPORTS MEDICINE AND ATHLETIC TRAINING:

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## LIVING OUR VALUES, EXPANDING OUR MISSION

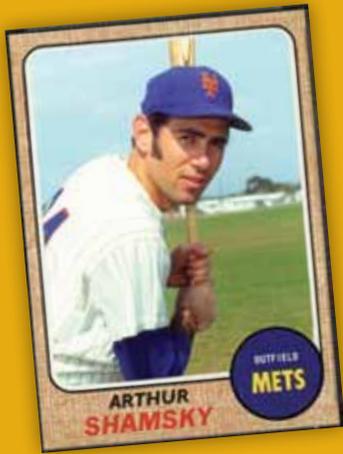
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MIKE  
RILEY

JESSICA  
MATULA

AILEEN  
GOLDSTEIN

The Sports Medicine and Athletic Training program at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School (CESJDS) is designed to promote lifelong fitness and personal responsibility through education and hands-on experience. Our program is grounded in our school's core values of Torah lishmah (lifelong learning for the sake of learning) and Ve-ahavta lerei'akha (creation of a caring moral community). While our athletic program places great emphasis on the teaching and learning that is so valuable in athletic competition, our athletic training program emphasizes achrayut and areivut (individual and collective responsibility).



## Art Shamsky

Former Major League Baseball Player

### How did sports impact your Jewish identity?

To be perfectly honest, growing up in St. Louis, Missouri, sports never impacted my Jewish identity. I always considered myself an athlete who happened to be Jewish. In particular, baseball taught me about teamwork, humility and dealing with failure and success. The fact that most of my friends were Jewish and loved to participate in sports really helped me. Again, through my minor league days and my first few years in the Major Leagues I was a professional baseball player who happened to be Jewish. That changed somewhat when I came to the New York Mets. I identified more with being Jewish for various reasons, and when I took off for the Jewish Holidays in 1969 (the year the Mets won the World Series) during a tight pennant race I realized that I had done something that many people thought very significant. Over the years that has become synonymous with me and I am constantly reminded by young and old fans and some who weren't even born at that time of how important that was to them. I am very proud of that.

### What advice would you give to a young Jewish athlete today?

My message to a young Jewish athlete today is very simple. Don't even consider your religion to be a detriment. There are more Jewish players in the Major Leagues now than ever before, and I believe in all professional sports there are many more opportunities to make it to the highest level of those sports. Work as hard as you can to become a better athlete, and remember whether you make it to the top or not give it your best shot and cherish the moments along the way.

Our Sports Medicine and Athletic Training program began over 20 years ago as a response to student interest in the work of our newly hired athletic trainer (AT). The AT was hired to help manage the prevalence and risk of potential injuries during athletic events while providing support and care for our student athletes. Having an AT on staff enabled each of our coaches to focus more on instruction, tactics and drills for their specific sport and worry less about treating injuries at practice and contests. Seeing our AT in action, our students showed great interest in starting a sports medicine program to learn about becoming an AT. The inherent desire to learn led to the creation of our first Sports Medicine elective course for interested high school students, and ultimately to the introduction of a Sports Medicine II class which enables students to earn American Red Cross certification.

Together, these two courses provided many unintended benefits, expanding our athletic program in new ways. For the first time, students could become a part of the athletic program even though they may not play on a team. Further, students are able to put their knowledge learned in the classroom to use on the field and on the court by helping student-athletes. Not only do these courses provide our students unique opportunities to earn credit towards graduation, they also gain valuable knowledge and skills essential to sports medicine and a healthy living.

## COMPONENTS OF THE SPORTS MEDICINE PROGRAM

The sports medicine program at CESJDS consists of several components. Classroom instruction provided by our AT is at the program's core. In class, students receive first aid instruction, learn methods to correctly tape athletes, treat wounds of various levels, and study basic anatomy. We bring in experts in the field to speak with our student athletic trainer aides (SATA) about proper techniques for hydration, nutrition, stretching, physical conditioning, and treating injuries. We also advise of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations as they pertain to athletic training. Students who finish our level 1 class and enter our second level class have the opportunity to become certified by the American Red Cross in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and use of the automated external defibrillator (AED). In this course, students also learn about the Good Samaritan laws in our state. All of the students who finish the second level course have the skills to help in emergency situations as first responders.

Perhaps more distinctive is the on-the-job training element of the class. Each student is assigned an afterschool athletic activity for the season. The students gain practical experience in the medical field and offer assistance to all student athletes incorporating the domains of athletic training in regards to prevention, emergency care and record keeping. They learn that they are part of the team and practice responsibilities of professionals: they must be punctual, reliable and attentive during the practice session for their team. In this phase, students set up hydration stations for the team, prepare and restock medical kits that are used on the field, and become first responders if our AT is not available. Our students who have been with the program the longest and are most knowledgeable are assigned to sports that have the most chance for injury, such as wrestling or soccer. Students take their responsibilities seriously, and embody the high standards we expect of CESJDS students and, in particular, of those in the position to care for the health and wellbeing of their peers.

## IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM

The impact of the program has been tremendous not only for our school, but to the community as a whole. Because of the training they have received, our students are capable of assisting in emergency situations that occur in and out of school. In one instance, several of our SATA helped with a student who had injured his head on the corner of a wall. Our SATA quickly recognized the emergency and helped the AT and student immediately. One SATA notified our athletic director, while another one stopped pedestrian traffic in the hallways as our AT took care of the student.

Five years ago, we implemented the Immediate Post Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing (ImPACT, [www.impacttest.com](http://www.impacttest.com)) baseline testing program. This program, developed by concussion experts at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, uses a computerized examination system to assist with diagnosis and management of head injuries and is used by many professional, collegiate and high school interscholastic programs across the country. Computerized neurocognitive tests such as ImPACT are fast becoming the standard in the field in recognizing and managing head injuries. Our ATC administers the 45 minute baseline testing for concussions. The test is set up in a "video game" format that tracks memory, reaction time, speed and concentration. The ImPACT test is not an intelligence test or a measure of an individual's IQ. If a student has a head injury, we have a baseline for return to play. The tests help to determine if a student

should be sent to a physician for further testing of concussion symptoms. It also is an aide for the safe return of a student back to the sport without causing further harm. This program provides parents with data before they take their child to a physician with concussion symptoms. A physician or clinician may recommend that the athlete retake the post injury ImPACT test following the injury. The ImPACT program has been very well received by our families, and eventually we plan to administer the test to all students who enter our upper school (grades 6-12).

## EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAM

Educationally, our students incur many benefits. In addition to the primary educational benefit of receiving hands on experience of working with and understanding the duties of an ATC, our sports medicine program provides a gateway to other experiences in the medical profession. Several of our former students decided to enter medical programs when they started college, as a result of their participation in this program. Many sports medicine students have become full-time emergency medical technicians and pursue degrees in that field.

Our athletes know their bodies better, recognize symptoms of injuries more readily and how to better train for specific sports. They recognize when something is wrong, and they understand that turning to a professional for help would be beneficial. The SATA are honored at our yearly sports banquets with the teams and take part in all team activities each season. Some of our former SATA have gone to college to become physical therapists, doctors and physician assistants, and completed internships with physicians and physical therapists having helped directly with patient rehabilitation protocols.

## ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

A successful Athletic Training Program is contingent on the hiring of an AT. Our AT is board-certified and licensed through the board of physicians in our state. While potentially expensive, the AT is an invaluable resource to the school, even beyond her work in the athletic training program. Our athletic trainer has networked with many physicians in the area, as well as physical therapists and nutritionists. In our school, our AT serves a dual role, as AT and classroom teacher. She teaches health and physical education classes and anatomy and

physiology classes. She has also served as a grade advisor for many different activities during the school year.

Our AT not only helps the students in our building, but she is a valuable resource for coaches and staff alike. Many times staff members seek out our AT for advice about injuries and proper treatment, and she has offered advice on how to heal and strengthen the injured area in order to return back to physical activity. Our staff considers this a great benefit, especially those who are athletically inclined. We have found that through our program we have created students who are no longer bystanders when an emergency happens. They begin to learn skills that help the community at large, which is in direct alignment with the school's vision and mission.

Fitness facilities should include a dedicated athletic training room and a fitness facility. We have recently renovated our fitness center, which is adjacent to our athletic training room. The equipment we purchased for the center provides our AT with the tools required to rehabilitate our athletes. Our fitness center is open each day after school and is staffed by a coach each season. The fitness center further serves to prevent injuries by improving strength and flexibility of our athletes.

As with all programs, there is a cost involved for the school. In addition to the cost of hiring an AT, our school also pays the cost of her yearly certifications and her attendance at the national conference to obtain mandatory continuing education units. The ImPACT testing program costs us \$600 each year for 300 baseline tests and 60 post-injury tests. We pay approximately \$1,200 per year for medical supplies and equipment as needed.

The investments we have made in our certified athletic trainer and our sports medicine program are well worth the cost. They clearly demonstrate to our community that we are doing our very best to keep our athletes safe, train our athletes properly, and emphasize teaching and learning.

### Reshet Roundup

#### Debra Shaffer Seeman, Network Weaver

RAVSAK is offering many events for Reshet members to learn and be inspired. We were proud to host Israeli Knesset Member Rachel Azaria for a briefing about the current situation in Israel (page 65). A yearlong series called Torah Lishmah, consisting of master educators



discussing a favorite Jewish text, launched in November with Dr. Deborah Lipstadt (brochure on page 39). Other learning activities have been created to support the conversations, questions and requests taking place within each individual network.

Reshet Small Schools, comprised of lay leaders and professionals in schools with fewer than 150 students, is off to a busy start with a monthly peer assist group. Each month, a member presents a school-related challenge, and others brainstorm strategies to address the issue. This is a structured process which enables creative thinking, collegial support and exceptional resource sharing. The successful Tricks of the Trade series features webinars such as "Making the Most of Parent Ambassadors" and "Quick and Simple Fund-raising Ideas for Tax-year End." An in-person gathering for Southeastern schools took place in Charlotte, North Carolina, November 9-10 (p. 29).

Reshet Board members launched their learning this year with an interactive webinar featuring Nanette Fridman, noted organizational consultant and coach, called "Building Blocks for a Successful Year." Keep your eyes out for the winter roundtable on open enrollment policies.

Learning specialists in RAVSAK schools attended a virtual roundtable with Jewish High School of Connecticut Head of School Rabbi Elisha Paul, Gateways Director of Professional Development Beth Crastnopol, and Jewish Community High School of the Bay Director of Educational Support Yael Krieger. They shared strategies and techniques to support and hold teachers accountable for their learning plans. This event was an outgrowth of RAVSAK's ongoing partnership with Gateways: Access to Jewish Learning. Don't miss RAVSAK's soon-to-be-released report on the education of diverse learners in our schools (p. 61).

This fall, Judaic directors joined forces to launch three long-term working groups. Members of one group are sharing best practices around implementing havruta learning in their schools. A second group is mapping out the scope and sequence of community day school tefillah. The third group is delving into the creation of Hebrew and Judaics benchmarks in elementary, middle and high school years.

For more information about any RAVSAK Reshet initiative, please be in touch with me at [debra@ravsak.org](mailto:debra@ravsak.org).

# WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY?

SHIRA  
LOEWENSTEIN

SHIRA  
HELLER

MELANIE  
EISEN

It is an all too familiar situation: a third grader comes home from school today and the parent asks him, “What did you do today?” He doesn’t look up from his book as he responds, “Nothing...”.

This scene (or something similar) is happening in millions of homes across the country on a daily basis. The question might vary, but the response is usually the same: “Nothing.” While this is surely untrue, it led us to think about what children spend their school day *doing*. What action words describe a child’s school day? In addition to thinking, learning, speaking, reading, calculating... were the children *moving*?

We decided to try a small-scale experiment to see if we could answer this question. We sent five different children to three different Jewish day schools wearing activity trackers to help answer: what had they done all day?

We measured steps taken, periods of activity and periods of inactivity. We could trace the exact classes the students had and see the different teaching philosophies depicted in movement. What was most striking to us was the difference in activity by classroom and by day.

Students in the same grade had vastly different amounts of movement dependent on their setting. Some were sitting idle for 37 minutes at a time when others were idle for no longer than 20 minutes. It was no surprise that PE and recess were the most active parts of the children’s day, but lunch was shockingly one of the most idle periods for everyone (think about the rules in your lunchroom). Children who wore the tracker on multiple days had days where they were significantly more active than others (7,975 steps on one day and 4,794 the next).

The child who moved most throughout the day (14,800 steps) was a high schooler. He reported that although he doesn’t move very often during class, he plays “bell to bell” basketball during PE and lunch and takes the stairs multiple times throughout the day to get to his various classes.

As we thought about these children and how much movement they did or did not have during

the day, we wondered how that would impact them. Anecdotally, the children who moved more reported feeling better. But how might all of that movement affect their learning? How might the movement breaks take away from their learning, or perhaps enhance it?

In Eric Jensen’s book *Teaching With the Brain in Mind*, he talks about the benefits of movement in the classroom. “In the same way that exercise shapes up the muscles, heart, lungs, and bones, it also strengthens the basal ganglia, cerebellum, and corpus callosum—all key areas of the brain. ... Research found that exercise improves classroom behavior and academic performance and that even when an experimental group got four times more exercise per week than a control group of their peers (375 minutes versus 90 minutes), their ‘loss’ in studying time did not translate into lower academic scores.” His research further revealed that social skills improved in the groups who exercised more. Other research has found that students who are engaged in daily physical education programs consistently show not just superior motor fitness, but better academic performance and a better attitude toward school than their students who do not participate in daily PE.

So how does this translate into our classrooms? In Jewish day schools, we face a real challenge incorporating physical activity into students’ days because of our dual curriculum. In the study above, the “low exercise” group got 90 minutes of activity. In our schools, even that can sound like an unattainable goal. As Rabbi Tarfon said, the day is short and the work is great. In many schools, physical education periods have been limited or eliminated, and recess times are getting shorter and shorter to accommodate the growing list of academic demands. With so many subjects to learn, we wonder: how can we fit it all in?

As a first step, we can reconnect to all of our Jewish values. As much as Jewish families and

## Head of School Professional Excellence Project

### Cooki Levy, Program Director

Well into our third cohort, HOS PEP is continuing to serve the needs of our institutions by supporting, guiding and inspiring new or “new-ish” heads of school across North America. Each of the ten school leaders in this year’s cohort is working with a successful, longtime head of a Jewish day school who was also trained in the skills related to effective coaching. (See [ravsak.org/programs/head-school-professional-excellence-project](http://ravsak.org/programs/head-school-professional-excellence-project) for a full list of our deans and fellows.) This mentoring/coach experience has been, in the words of one fellow, “a unique opportunity for reflection and professional growth.” Another refers to her coach as her “lifeline”; still another says that the opportunity to speak freely to a knowledgeable, effective and empathetic listener allows her to set the bar high and to feel success.

For the first time this year, RAVSAK was able to include in HOS PEP those who had finished their initial year with their coach but who wished to continue the weekly conversations that contribute so much to their success. These “second years” are reaping the benefits of this unique form of professional development; we thank their visionary boards who have given them this opportunity.

Many participants from Cohorts 1 and 2 will join Cohort 3 at our midyear conference in January. Current and former fellows will share stories of their successes and of obstacles they have overcome, and we will focus our attention on the many areas of responsibility that are part of being a successful head of school.

We continue to appreciate the generosity of our philanthropic partners who enable us to provide this important service to the field of Jewish day school education.

Jewish schools value learning and academics, we need to remember that physical wellbeing is also an essential Jewish idea. God gave us each a mind and a soul, which schools and parents are responsible to cultivate. God also gave each of us a *body*, which we are also responsible to safeguard (Deuteronomy 4:15: “Take good care of your lives”). Today more than ever we know that exercise is a key component to staying healthy. The Rambam teaches that “maintaining a healthy body is among the ways of serving God, since it is impossible for one who is not healthy to understand or know anything of the Creator. Therefore one must distance oneself from things which harm the body, and accustom oneself to the things which strengthen and make one healthy” (Hilkhot Deot 4:1).

We should think of the opportunities we take with our students to stretch, do jumping jacks, change seats or dance as essential learning activities—not as distractions or breaks from learning. By paying attention to students’ need for movement, we are fulfilling the mitzvah of caring for our bodies. We can also be reassured that our care results in increased ability to concentrate and learn.

We have heard of all sorts of radical interventions to increase movement in the classroom—trading all the chairs for yoga balls, getting rid of chairs altogether, having standing desks, treadmill desks and more. Often times, we do not have to take these drastic measures in order to make a dramatic change; with some small steps, every child could add a few more active verbs into his or her day.

The first move that we can make in our classrooms is during transitions. These are natural times for student movement, and as teachers we can think about how to maximize the gross motor stimulation we give our children.

- Have you ever thought that you wish your classroom furniture was in a different format for your lesson? Teach the students to move the furniture to accommodate the different types of lessons you might be teaching. Having the students move their desks and chairs into a different configuration will allow the space to meet your learning goals and will allow your students to exert some energy during the moving process.
- When your students transition to a different space either inside the classroom or outside have them move in an unconventional way. The bear walk, crab walk, frog hop are just a few transitional moves that your students can be taught to implement on their way to another location.
- Teach students to stand when they have a question or comment rather than raising a hand—or to stand while speaking.
- Put classroom supplies in a far corner of the room, and allow students opportunities to get up and walk to get a pencil, marker or book.
- Set a timer for yourself when your students are engaged in a seated activity. After about 10 minutes of inactivity, take a brain break, and stand behind chairs on tiptoe (3 sets of 10 seconds), cross the midline with their elbows to their knees (3 sets of 10), hold a plank on the floor (30 seconds), or move to the nearest wall for a wallsit (30 seconds).

These are all simple moves that can add to the verbs of your day. We do not need to revolutionize the classroom or invest in new gadgets or furniture. Our students and our ingenuity are all we need to add some more action into our school days.

We would like to propose a checklist for educators to think about how we can add some more movement into our classrooms. Take this checklist with you to see how many of these verbs you use on a regular basis with your students. Can you increase their number over the course of a week? A month? The year?

### What verbs did you use in your classroom today?

Bend	Hop	Run	Tip-toe
Carry/Lift	Jog	Shake	Turn
Catch	Jump	Shuffle	Twirl
Clean/Tidy	Kick	Skip	Twist
Climb	Leap	Stamp	Walk
Crawl	March	Stomp	Wash/Scrub
Creep	Pedal	Stretch	Wave
Dance	Pull	Sway	Wiggle
Dig	Push	Sweep	
Gallop	Reach	Swing	
Grab	Roll	Throw	

FROM THE  
CO-EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTORS



MARC N. KRAMER

# DAY SCHOOLS LEAD DURING CHANGING TIMES

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*“Raise up your  
heads, O gates,  
and raise up,  
you everlasting  
entrances...”*

Psalm 24

Recently, a large group of prominent Jewish figures—rabbis, scholars, educators and funders representing a broad range of Jewish identities and organizations—were signatories on a “Statement on Jewish Vitality.” Aimed to coincide with the second anniversary of the release of the Pew Study, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” this manifesto, which has received a fair share of criticism, tried to inject a note of hope and optimism in the face of serious challenges to the Jewish community in areas of demography and affiliation.

I have no interest here in taking a stand on this statement. What I do want to observe is that the Pew report does not address some of the realities of the Jewish community that we see every day in our work and lives. Jewish day schools are witness to trends taking shape in the Jewish community everywhere, long before they are codified and reported in studies. Day school leaders cannot put these developing realities at bay. Instead, they create a safe space where people are free to be who they are, where they leave as they came in—informed and enriched by the values and wisdom of Jewish tradition.

Here are some of the trends I’ve seen:

- Unlike a generation ago or more, intermarriage is no longer seen as a ticket out of the Jewish community. In fact, the latest decision of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College welcomes students married to non-Jews for the first time.
- Women are increasingly occupying rabbinic leadership roles, even within the framework of Orthodoxy.
- Transgender Jews are seeking not just acceptance but a welcoming place within the broader Jewish community.
- In the world of Jewish organizations, there’s been movement away from larger hierarchical structures to smaller, more nimble associations.

One of the main conclusions that many have drawn from the Pew study is the importance of bringing Jewish education—the main driver of Jewish identity and inspiration over the centuries—to as many people as possible. We need Jewish education that is rich in content and deep in thought, that is taught in ways that build relationships, that empowers questioning, invites individual spiritual growth and inspires community engagement and social action. We need Jewish education conducted in a tent open wide on all sides,

in which the riches of our tradition and culture provide multiple pathways to live Jewish lives of significance and connection.

As I’ve traveled far and wide to visit and consult with Jewish day schools, I’ve seen that day schools are institutions uniquely positioned to provide exactly this vitally needed form of Jewish education. Jewish day schools serve as the primary portal of Jewish life and learning for families of all kinds—gay and straight, Israeli, Russian and native-born, of different and no denomination, intermarried and in-married, and much more. Day schools are places oriented to accept whoever enters their door without compromising their enduring commitment to a mission- and vision-driven Jewish education. Jewish day schools are critical partners in shaping the Jewish soul and the Jewish community of today and tomorrow; they need the unequivocal support of the larger community to be able to meet the challenges of affordability and sustainability, to help ensure that no family that wants a Jewish education gets turned away.

RAVSAK continues to serve as a leader and partner with our schools in the essential quest to offer a Jewish education to all. In service of this goal we have managed several initiatives in recent months:

- This month, in December, we are working with Keshet to organize a conference on inclusion of LGBT students for New York-area day schools.
- In November we convened a conference for small Jewish day schools, that took place in Charlotte, North Carolina.
- With the help of a grant from the Wexner Foundation, this summer we took a survey of special education capacity in RAVSAK schools; more than half of our schools participated.
- In October we released a comprehensive portrait of the field of day school headship, in a report designed to strengthen the work of professional and lay leaders at all day schools.
- We are proud to announce that RAVSAK has received special recognition from Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community for our new co-executive model with Dr. Idana Goldberg and myself.

Through these and other programs built upon partnerships with our schools and expertise from outside organizations, RAVSAK is dedicated to further this holy mission of helping day schools serve the broadest spectrum of Jews.

## Sometimes, What You Don't Know *Can* Hurt You.



### *What you and your family should know about Gaucher disease.*

Gaucher disease results from a specific enzyme deficiency in the body, caused by a genetic mutation received from both parents. It is the most prevalent of all enzyme deficiencies. Anyone can have the disease, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. Gaucher disease type 1 (the most common, treatable form) is most prevalent among Jews of Ashkenazi descent. Approximately 1 in 450 have the disease and 1 in 10 are carriers.

Gaucher disease can cause bone pain and easily broken bones, easy bruising, bleeding, fatigue, anemia, distended stomach due to an enlarged liver and/or spleen, osteoporosis, and more. Symptoms are often ignored, misdiagnosed and can be debilitating.

If you or a family member has symptoms of Gaucher disease, talk to your doctor about testing for Gaucher disease. A blood test can detect if you are a carrier or have the disease. Presently, there is no cure, though a number of treatment options are available.

To learn the importance of early diagnosis, testing and treatment contact the National Gaucher Foundation, Inc. (NGF) at 800-504-3189 or visit us at [www.gaucherdisease.org](http://www.gaucherdisease.org). Now that you *know* about Gaucher disease, it is our hope that you will educate others by sharing this information within your family and circle of friends.

You have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others by supporting education and awareness of Gaucher disease. You can donate by mail, online at our website or texting `gaucher` to 41444 from your mobile phone. Go to [www.gaucherdisease.org](http://www.gaucherdisease.org) for more information. Thank you.



## **RAVSAK**

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# **Looking for a new way to encourage your students to communicate in Hebrew?**

## **Introducing RAVSAK's Hebrew Badge Project**

Through the generous support of Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, RAVSAK invites you to be a part of the launch of The Hebrew Badge Project, a new leading-edge initiative to enhance the use of Hebrew as a living language. Middle school students earn digital badges through completing creative projects in which they engage in authentic conversation, reading, and writing within the dual contexts of the physical classroom and an online community of peers.

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**For more information and to apply for a spot in the pilot, contact Yael Steiner at [yael@ravsak.org](mailto:yael@ravsak.org).**

