

Special Education in Jewish Community Day Schools

Dilemmas. Perspectives. Solutions.

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From the Desk of Bathea James, RAVSAK President

It is so hard to believe that we are fast approaching 2006. I hope that you are all back to teaching full time after a very fragmented October.

This edition of our RAVSAK publication covers a very sensitive and challenging topic, that is, our ability to educate the many children at our schools who have learning challenges and need support. Special needs is commonly interpreted to reflect the children along the whole continuum from the severely learning disabled child up to and including the "gifted" child.

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Bathea James

From the Desk of Bathea James, RAVSAK President

It is so hard to believe that we are fast approaching 2006. I hope that you are all back to teaching full time after a very fragmented October. More so, I hope that the joy of the holidays is not simply a memory - that it sustains you in your important work as leaders in the Jewish community dayschool movement.

This edition of our RAVSAK publication covers a very sensitive and challenging topic, that is, our ability to educate the many children at our schools who have learning challenges and need support. Special needs is commonly interpreted to reflect the children along the whole continuum from the severely learning disabled child up to and including the "gifted" child. Of course, our "community" schools are popularly understood to serve not only the broad Jewish spectrum but to serve all children living in a given catchment area.

Our schools are frequently faced with a number of challenges regarding the inclusion of all learners. Here, I list but a few and throughout this issue of *HaYidion* many more are raised:

- Jewish day schools, because of the desire and mission to educate as many Jewish children as possible,

often try to be everything to everybody.

- Jewish schools are perceived as being nurturing, safe and receptive to "special needs" children, and as a result many of our schools find themselves with a large number of children who require intervention and alternate instructional approaches.

- Limited financial resources prevent our schools from hiring sufficient qualified personnel to work and support these children on an intensive basis.

- The specialists trained to teach and successfully work with these students are in short supply nationally, and the salaries required to compensate them are often not within the reach of our schools.

- Teachers' training is deficient in preparing teachers with the strategies to ensure that all the students will succeed.

So often, we search for what is wrong, or focus on the disability as originating within the student, discounting the possibility that the educational setting and instructional methodology might be deficient. The need to "label" students in order to access any possible support available out-

side of the school can lead to a diminishing of the teacher's expectations. Research has shown that this leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy of poor performance by the student and low self-esteem.

It is crucial that prior to accepting students who have learning challenges, the school clearly understands what will be necessary to ensure a successful learning experience for the student where their specific needs are met and their learning potential maximized. Several RAVSAK schools have been very successful in developing programs to assist these students. I encourage you to contact the RAVSAK office where our very able staff will direct you to the names of these schools.

Early wishes for a Chanukah Sameach to your family and friends. I look forward to welcoming you at our conference in January 2006!

B'shalom,

Bathea James

Bathea James is the President of RAVSAK and former Head of School at the Tucson Hebrew Academy in Tucson, AZ. She can be reached at bathea@msn.com.

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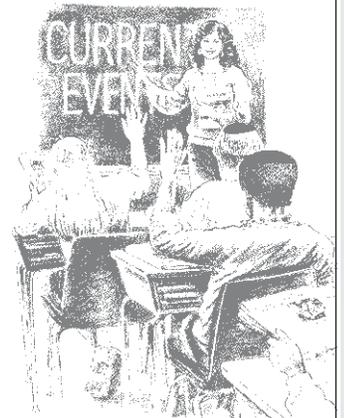
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FORWARD



Rebecca Cohen

Clarifying Special Education Issues and Terminology

The first Jews, Abraham and Sarah, can be thought of as the first Jewish educators. Moses, most certainly, was a teacher (in fact, he is often referred to as Moshe Rabeinu- Moses Our Teacher), charged with the unimaginable task of explaining the Torah to the nascent Jewish People. Tradition holds that a father must teach his children three things: Torah, how to earn a living, and how to swim. Of course,

the commandment “teach them [the 613 mitzvot] to your children” underscores the very rationale for Jewish education.

There is also much rabbinic commentary about the role of teachers. According to the Rambam, if a student does not understand a lesson, the teacher should repeat the lesson until he does. Rabbi Prida is said to have taken Maimonides literally and re-taught a student a single lesson 400 times.

These laws and anecdotes

suggest that the core Jewish value of education is, ultimately, the value of education for all children, including those who need special accommodations in order to learn.

Today, teachers continue to be faced with the challenge of educating children whose atypical learning styles and behaviors can be cause for concern. Labels like learning disabled, gifted and ADD/ADHD are often ascribed to students exhibiting these types of behaviors. However, if examined more closely, one may find that the signs and symptoms typically associated with a particular disability may actually be the manifestation of another.

Take for example a student who has difficulty sustaining her/his attention. At first thought, ADHD may be an appropriate label. However, gifted students may also have poor attention due to boredom. A student who already knows the information is bored with having to listen to it again. In the same vein, a student with a learning disability may appear to have difficulty paying attention when really the problem is due to issues in memory function.

Another example is organization. A student may have great difficulty turning in homework as-

signments or coming to class prepared with a pencil and paper. Sounds like classic ADHD. However, a student with a learning disability could very easily come to school with an incomplete assignment because the work was too difficult. Similarly, a gifted student who finds the need to be organized either unnecessary or uninteresting may exhibit the same behaviors.

In the attached table entitled, “What Is It?” by F.R. Olenchak, Ph.D., he describes other common behaviors and how they can manifest themselves in similar ways for students who are gifted, have ADHD or a learning disability. The information he provides certainly gives one “cause to pause” before labeling a student. It is easy to see how one malady can be readily confused with another. In an effort to follow in the footsteps of our teachers from the past, and continue to fulfill the obligation of making sure that our students understand the lessons we teach, perhaps this chart can be a good first step towards accomplishing that end.

Rebecca Cohen is an Educational Consultant at Tucson Hebrew Academy. Rebecca can be reached at rcohen@thaaz.org.

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What Is It?

ADHD (DSM-IV-TR, 2000)	LD (Baum et al, 1991, Olenchak, 1995)	Creativity (Carmond, 1994: Renzuili, Smith, et Al 1976)	Gifted (Piechowski, 1991: Renzuili, Smith et Al, 1996: Silverman, 1998)	Contemporary Theories of Intelligence (Gardner, 1993, 1999; Sternberg, 1995, 1997)
Difficulty with sustained attention; daydreaming	Often poor memory unless in interest areas	Heightened imagination may obscure attention	Poor attention often due to boredom; daydreaming	Weak attention in situations unmatched to intelligence pattern
Diminished ability to listen attentively	Auditory skills can be weak	Hypomanic to the point of not listening	Preoccupation with own ideas and concepts; appears bored	Non-auditory intelligences restrict ability to listen
Problems with independent task completion	Erratic task completion based on interests	Broad range of interests often prohibits task completion	Completion of tasks directly related to personal interests	Tasks often remain uncompleted when unrelated to strengths
Avoids and dislikes sustained mental activity	Motivation governed by areas of interest	Concentration relegated to self-selected work	Lack of persistence on tasks that seem irrelevant	Tenacity linked to thinking preference patterns
Messy and may misplace items needed for work; disorganized	Poor, sometimes nonexistent organizational skills	Finds order amidst chaos	Organization may be seen as unnecessary depending on the task	Organization in the eye of the beholder
Difficulty following directions	Difficulty with oral or written directions or both	Willing to take risks to satisfy creative plans and pursuits	Questions rules and directions	Directions not accounting for intelligences may be overlooked
Heightened activity level; labile	Labile even when not hyperactive	Labile and sometimes erratic energy	Frequently high activity level	High energy level on work in strengths
Impulsive; poor judgment in interactions (not waiting turn, interrupting)	Poor self-concept triggering poor social judgment	Impulsive in actions and often disinterested in relationships	Highly sensitive but judgment lags well behind intellectual development	Impetuous when trying to cope with tasks in non-strength ability patterns
Excessive talking	Verbal may be only means for communicating	Asks questions about anything and everything	Magnified curiosity and need to probe yields much talking	Verbalization increased when working in preferred intelligences
Problems adhering to rules for behavior regulation	Poor self-regulation skills	Freedom of spirit that rejects external parameters; uninhibited	Intensity that leads to struggles with authority	Self-regulation reliant on nature of tasks and relation to strengths

*Permission to copy is granted so long as properly accredited to
F.R. Olenchak, Ph.D., University of Houston, 2005*



Dr. Nina Butler

Kids With Special Needs In Community Day Schools- Voices Around The Table

RAVSAK is in the business of meeting educational needs, but we cannot forget that schools must also consider social and emotional needs, and that RAVSAK schools particularly are impelled by a spiritual imperative/obligation in educating Jewish children. This communal obligation is expanded by the contemporary consensus that all children are capable of learning. However, each child has a unique learning style, and could, ideally, benefit from some level of individualized instruction.

This enlightened consequence of contemporary educational theory

inevitably raises the question of whether there is ever a point when a RAVSAK school should refuse to accept a Jewish child? Similarly, is there a point where, because of institutional limitations, that child's parents should not consider a Jewish community day school? Perhaps most controversial is the question of whether it could ever be acceptable for a teacher to say, "My educational skill-set cannot meet the needs of this particularly challenging student?"

There are many questions to ask, and although we have some answers, this is not a clear, black-and-white discussion, but one with significant

'grey zones.' By allowing for and listening to different perspectives, - 'the voices around the table,'- each school can be guided to make better choices for its own community and situation.

Parents

Parents are the experts at understanding the needs of their children. Although the school can help with formal assessments, parents justifiably have the most power- the loudest voice - in directing a child's education.

Sometimes parents understand the needs of their child but are unsure

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about how to address those needs. They may feel that others have more expertise or training, and therefore carry a bag of insecurities to the table. As reluctant experts, some parents hope that the school has a reasonable plan that they can adopt, to relieve them of the responsibility to come up with answers. On the other hand, some parents are keenly aware of every nuance of their child's strengths and weaknesses. They may be well educated and skillful advocates for their child. In fact, parents may even solicit the assistance of professional educational advocates from the greater community when selecting proper placement and designing an appropriate program for their child.

The more information parents can offer about their special child, the more reliable will be the decisions that are made. Parents can be reluctant to share reports from outside doctors or specialists (like psychiatrists): If a trusting relationship is to be established – a true parent-school partnership for the child's sake- honest sharing of all information is a basic requirement. An atmosphere of trust makes it unnecessary for parents to feel compelled to shop around for test results that meet their preconceived expectations.

Parents are also more emotionally invested than the other 'voices at the table.' Those emotions may drive the overarching objectives that parents have when considering educational placement. For example, a detached, objective evaluation of the child may suggest the need for a highly specialized type of schooling. The parents' hearts, however, may lead them in another direction: Being with Jewish peers may supersede any educational goal. It is easy to understand, then, that the voices around the table must first agree upon the objectives of the education.

School personnel can help parents

crystallize and prioritize a child's educational profile. Another vital role that educational professionals play is to lead parents to community and governmental assistance that extend within and beyond the educational arena. Students with special needs are often entitled to "wrap-around services," governmental services which travel with the child, regardless of the child's placement (the Supreme Court has made it so!). For example, if a child is entitled to 'therapeutic staff support' during the day, it does not matter if the child attends a public or a private school without concern for church-state conflicts.

Parents, then, hold a commanding place at "the table." They provide the lion's share of information about the child. They define their expectations and objectives for a particular educational placement and plan, and they can access governmental and other supports for their child (and, in a very practical way, for the school.)

When might a parent say "no" to Jewish day school enrollment?

If parents recognize that their child needs more of a life-skills curriculum, rather than a college-based academically rigorous curriculum, they may prefer a school that can provide that focus on a full-time basis. Parents may feel that their child should be immersed in an educational environment which directly addresses their unique learning needs, and while accommodations are limited only by creativity, commitment, and sometimes money, parents may prefer a setting that is designed specifically for their child rather than "fitting a square peg into a round hole."

Some parents go to great lengths to have their public schools agree to a "split" program, where students spend part of the day in a special educational program, and part of the day mainstreamed in a Jewish day school. This can be the best of

all worlds, if transportation does not rob too much time from the teachable day and if all parties are working closely as a team. Hopefully, Jewish day schools can be an option for at least some of the years of each child's educational career and parents can always feel that their child is welcome in our Jewish communities.

The School Administration

The Administration is charged with carrying out the mission and goals of the school. Are there children who are just too challenging for the school to consider? Is it possible that educating one child can be so disruptive, or so resource-draining, or so overwhelming to staff and students, that that one child cannot join, or regrettably, has to be asked to leave the Jewish school? When does a Jewish school turn away a Jewish neshama (soul)?

Some say that a school cannot be everything to everyone, but do we really believe that? Ought a community school- by definition – serve the needs of all of the community's children? This leads to a harrowing discussion that can degenerate into the value of one child's neshama over another, and allocation of precious finite resources. We clearly cannot define which soul is most precious to our people, so the discussion can only go downhill from that point. Ultimately, administrators and lay leadership must consider comparable price tags in educating children with varying needs. Who is going to accept the assignment of telling a family that the Jewish community day school loves their child but cannot afford to educate him/her? Hopefully, schools will look beyond the dollars-and-cents in making their decisions.

Importantly, administrators must remember that it is their obligation

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to set the tone and attitudes in their school. Staff members reflect those attitudes, and the staff deserves the proper support and training to succeed with each student.

When would an administrator say 'no' to including a child with special needs in the day school?

It is a heart-wrenching realization to admit that the Jewish day school may not be the appropriate placement for a child. Although schools should try their absolute best to accommodate all learning needs, if the safety and welfare of other students are compromised, an administrator must help the family to find a more appropriate placement, even if that alternative is temporary. A student whose conduct disorder is exhibited by physically attacking other students and teachers may have to be removed to protect the safety of the other students in the school, to give an example. Accurate documentation is imperative to make this

case to the parents and help them in describing their child's needs to the next school. Parents' opposition and antipathy to a move can be ameliorated by empathetic, constructive assistance from day school personnel.

The Teacher

The teacher comes to the table with a different collection of insecurities. Until very recently, teachers were trained to deal with "typical children." Only "special education graduates" were formally trained to deal with kids who have special learning needs. It is interesting that the newest trend to hit university-level Schools of Education is the concept that all children have special learning needs, and therefore all teachers need some special education training! By teachers learning how to manage multiple assessment strategies, collaborate with other teachers and parents, and differentiate instruction, all learners benefit.

Back to our current teachers: they

are the ones saying, "How can I be expected to educate this child when I have no training in the particular disability that this child has?" "How can I find the time to learn what I have to know for this one child when I have a whole classroom of other kids who really need me?" "If I wanted to be a special ed teacher, that's what I would have become! Why is this being forced upon me?" Although staff members should feel comfortable voicing their concerns, they should be able to expect that the administration will provide adequate planning time, appropriate training, and opportunities to collaborate with parents, other staff members, and professionals. Teachers, more than any of the other "voices around the table" have the unique opportunity to see the unquantifiable positive effects on the typical students of accommodating special learners.

So, should community day schools accept all children whose parents are interested in a Jewish education? The distinctive perspectives of the parent, administrator and teacher

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lead to different answers. The most common resolution to the problem of dealing with special needs is creating a "Resource Room", a distinct space and/or person devoted to special education and enrichment. Some schools have one professional special educator and a core of assistants. Other schools exact a fee from parents to provide additional teaching staff specifically for their children. Sometimes students are directed to a quiet space to meet with special personnel and sometimes the special educators co-teach with classroom staff.

It is important to note the "TSS- or Therapeutic Staff Support" provided by many states for special learners who qualify under their guidelines. A formal diagnosis is required, and such children must be assigned case managers to walk the family through the system. It makes sense that before expending our limited Jewish educational resources, we must secure all applicable governmental supports and entitlements. Most cities host local ACHIEVA (formerly

ARC) offices which employ educational advocates who are available to guide parents through their local "system". If ACHIEVA is not the appropriate organization to address a particular need, staff members can direct a parent or school to the right person.

When should a teacher say "no" to educating a student with special needs?

The simple answer? Never. If a teacher is unwilling to learn new educational strategies and make accommodations, then the teacher should reconsider being in any classroom. On the other hand, this perspective presumes that all of the other players are doing their parts. Addressing the needs of special students should be a team approach, where a plan- and IEP or Individual Education Plan- is written by a Student Support Team, ideally including all involved teachers, parents, special educator(s), administration, and other support personnel (to which parochial schools are entitled from the local public

school district). Teachers must feel supported from all directions and be given opportunities for appropriate training to succeed. If the reason a teacher believes the student needs a different school is out of concern for the safety of the other students, that teacher must provide the administration with full documentation supporting that view. But, in the end, it is an administrative decision and not the teacher's.

In conclusion, RAVSAK schools are as varied as the answers to the questions of whether they can accommodate all children who want to learn. Understanding the multiple perspectives of the "voices around the table" can be helpful in resolving these issues in the most beneficial way to our children and our schools.

Dr. Nina Butler is Principal of General Studies at Hillel Academy of Pittsburgh, PA. She raised five children, three with differing special needs. She can be reached at nbutler@hillelpg.org

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RAVSAK Annual Leadership Conference 2006:

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2006

- 10:00 a.m. **Conference Registration**
- 1:45 p.m. **First Time Attendee Reception**
- 2:45 p.m. **Opening Session**
- Future of Jewish Community Day Schools and High Schools: Demographics, Dilemmas and New Possibilities**
Dr. Marc Kramer, Executive Director, RAVSAK
- Adapting to a Diverse Audience: Out of the Box Scheduling for the Whole School Community**
Dr. Adam Holden, Head of School, Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy
- 5:45 p.m. **Break**
- 6:30 p.m. **Wine Reception**
Sponsored by NAIS
- 7:30 p.m. **Opening Banquet**
- 8:30 p.m. **The Ada Michaels (ל"ה) Memorial Lecture**
- Creating 21st Century Schools**
Pat Bassett, President NAIS
- 9:30 p.m. **Hospitality Suite**
Sponsored by Oranim Educational Initiatives

MONDAY, JANUARY 16, 2006

- 7:00 a.m. **Shacharit**
- 8:00 a.m. **Breakfast**
- 9:00 a.m. **Intensive Sessions, Part One**
- Survival Skills for Heads of Schools**
Jonathan Cannon, Head of School, Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School
- Wresting with Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities in Jewish Day School: A Curricular Imperative**
Chaim Botwinick, President/CEO, CAJE Miami
- Start Recruiting and Stop Doing Admissions: Building the Marketing Plan to Drive Enrollment**
Jonathan Schreiber, Founding Partner, Out of the Box Advertising
- 10:30 a.m. **Coffee Break**
- 10:45 a.m. **Intensive Sessions, Part Two**

Developing Plans for Maximal Inclusion

Kathy Levinson and Loree Farrar,
Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School

Curricular Imperative, Part Two

Building the Marketing Plan, Part Two

12:00 p.m. **Lunch**
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Equity of Opportunity for All Children
Jason Kamras, 2005 Nat'l Teacher of the Year

1:00 p.m. **RAVSAK Annual Meeting**

The Sophisticated Leader, Part I – NAAJHS

Dr. Barry Dym, President, WorkWise Research and Consulting

2:15 p.m. **Values Based Strategic Planning: Off the Shelf and Into Action**
Christina Drouin, Executive Director, Center for Strategic Planning

A School Within a School to Meet the Needs of Jewish Children Who Learn Differently

Phyllis Rosenthal, Director, M'Silot

4:00 p.m. **Strategic Planning, Part Two**

Pluralistic Jewish Education in Israel: Is It Possible

Yossi Pnini, Director, Meytarim

6:15 p.m. **Dinner**

7:00 p.m. **Evening Options**
• An Evening on Las Olas Boulevard
• An Evening At the Theatre: *Miracles and Tragedies*

9:00 p.m. **Hospitality Suite**
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TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2006

- 7:00 a.m. **Shacharit**
- 8:00 a.m. **Working Breakfast: The Peer Yardstick**
Dr. Bonnie Hausman and Sacha Litman, PEJE
- 9:00 a.m. **Intensive Sessions**
- Financial Planning for Small and Mid-Size Schools**
Terry Moore, Consultant, Independent School Management
- Quality Mentoring: Models That**

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Work in Jewish Day Schools

Mark Silk, Director and Fayge Safran, Outreach Consultant, New Teacher Project

The Sophisticated Leader, Part II– NAAJHS

Dr. Barry Dym, President, WorkWise Research and Consulting

- 12:15 p.m. **Lunch** (a working lunch for NAAJHS)
- 1:00 p.m. **Closing Remarks – NAAJHS**
RAVSAK Encourages NAAJHS Members to Participate in the Remaining Programs
- 1:15 p.m. **Business Tools That Can Enhance School Effectiveness and Personal Communication**
Joe Septimus, President, Septimus Consulting, Inc.
- Using Standards to Create Educational Excellence For The Teaching of TaNaKH**
Charlotte Abramson, Project Director, AviChai Jewish Day School Standards and Benchmark Project
- 2:45 p.m. **Text Study: Would Moses Send His Child To A Pluralistic Jewish School? Some Challenges and Obstacles in Teaching Talmudic Text**
Yossi Pnini, Director, Meytarim
- 3:30 p.m. **Recent Topics and Developments in Educational Law**
Leo Athas, Esq., Partner, Hinshaw & Culbertson, LLP
- Recognizing and Dealing With Conflicting Jewish Values**
Joe Septimus, President, Septimus Consulting, Inc.
- 6:00 p.m. **Dinner**
- 7:15 p.m. **Intensive Networking Round Tables**
- 9:00 p.m. **Hospitality Suite**
Sponsored by PlanIt Jewish

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2006

- 7:00 a.m. **Shacharit**
- 8:00 a.m. **Breakfast**
- 9:00 a.m. **Using Technology in Curriculum Mapping in Your School**
- 10:30 a.m. **Employee Perks and Benefits: New Ideas/New Options**
- 12:00 p.m. **Wrap-up and L'hitraot**

Chevre,

It is my honor and pleasure to serve as RAVSAK's Conference Coordinator for our Annual Leadership Conference 2006. I look forward to meeting and greeting each and every one of you in January.

Ft. Lauderdale is a magnificent city, home to beautiful beaches, world-class shopping, and a close knit Jewish community. I hope that when you are here for the conference you will have an opportunity to enjoy this wonderful city.

This year is our 19th Annual Leadership Conference! RAVSAK continues its success with a conference format that includes informative sessions for board presidents and other key lay leaders, as well as Heads of School and Directors of Judaic studies. At this year's conference we will offer wonderful sessions informing Jewish educators and leaders about the future of Jewish community day schools, including marketing, strategic planning, special needs in Jewish studies, mentoring teachers, working through ethical dilemmas and re-imagining the very nature of what it means to be a Jewish community day school.

Joining us this year for the first time is NAAJHS (North American Association of Jewish High Schools). We look forward to the potential that this emerging partnership will bring to the conference.

Please let me know what I can do to help your travels to and time in Ft. Lauderdale enjoyable and meaningful.

Feel free to view the links above for a list of our presenters, conference schedule, and registration page. Stay tuned to ravsak.org for updates about the upcoming conference.

At this time you can register for the conference and make travel reservations by filling our registration form and making travel arrangement at <http://conference.ravsak.org>. See you in January!

Robin Feldman,
Coordinator of Member Services
& RAVSAK Conference Coordinator
E-mail: rfeldman@ravsak.org



Andrea Gamlin

Special Education: A Parent's Perspective

"Mommy, may I do my homework now?" "What?! – er, I mean, excuse me, what did you say?" "Mommy, I said, "May I do my homework now?" That way, when we get home, I can go play outside." This was a conversation in my minivan one afternoon two weeks ago, and this has become the question du jour.

Last year, my son, ZJ, was a frustrated and unhappy second grader at a fine public school near our home. Last year, ZJ had homework every night that he (and I) struggled with, often for one or two hours each night. Last year, ZJ was just plain not getting it – no getting addition of two and three numbers, not getting telling time, not getting reading comprehension, and not getting spelling, and not getting play dates. In May, we had an IEP meeting in which we were told what we knew we were going to be told: ZJ was not going to be promoted to third grade. "What would be different the second time around in second grade?" my husband wanted to know. The response was honest but unacceptable: Nothing would be different; we'd just have to hope that ZJ would catch on to the material.

From the moment he was born, I knew that there was something special about him. Special – different, not necessarily special – good. At 18 months he began to walk, at 3 ½ he began to talk intelligibly. After an MRI, after visits to neurologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and other –ists, the conclusions were auditory processing and sensory integration issues. These issues caused problems for him when he was in a classroom full of kids, or when the school fire alarm went off (the school psychologist took ZJ out

of the building before each fire drill so that he could function the rest of the day), or when teachers or peers spoke too fast for him. ZJ's pediatrician told my husband Dave and me that ZJ is a between-the-cracks kid – he cannot function in a classroom full of kids, but he did not belong in the self-contained class of mostly Downs' Syndrome kids, either. We would need to keep close tabs on his progress in school. We did.

ZJ began kindergarten at the local public school in August, 2002. Our older son, Daniel, has attended Charlotte Jewish Day School since kindergarten, but Dave and I decided that ZJ needed the IEP resources from public schools more than formal Jewish education at that point. We also felt that ZJ would not be able to keep up with the rigorous pace at a private school. At the neighborhood school, ZJ's kindergarten teacher was new to kindergarten and pregnant with her first child. At the end of the year, ZJ was promoted to first grade. His first grade teacher was concerned with his academics, but with the school OT, SP and Resource teachers' help, ZJ marginally made it to second grade. You already know what happened next.

A friend asked me to consider the new Ein Gedi program at Charlotte Jewish Day School. Dave and I talked about it with our parents, with Ein Gedi parents, with CJDS director, Mariashi Groner, and with Tina Roppolo, the Ein Gedi teacher, but it was an easy decision.

Ein Gedi was conceived over a period of years and became a reality during the summer of 2004 when CJDS moved into its new building, attached to the newly remodeled Levine Jewish Community Center. It is an oasis in the big

learning world and currently serves four children – four delicious, sweet, autistic, bi-polar, and between-the-cracks-no-more children whose lives have blossomed since entering Miss Tina's calm, yet fun place. For Jewish kids with behavioral, social, and emotional challenges, this is a place where they can find peace and learn to function well in a world of confusion. Each child is expected to live up to his or her potential. After each child completes an assignment he/she gets to pick how to "chill" before moving on to the next assignment. For ZJ, it's reading and rocking, or just turning around in circles. In this class, ZJ can self-calm and self-regulate. In this class, ZJ is getting it.

A ration of two teachers to four students is obviously one reason that Ein Gedi is so effective. However, the teachers are the main reason. Tina is an exceptional young woman who is very attuned to each child's strengths. She constantly and firmly, yet lovingly, builds on those strengths to form new ones. And, she encourages the kids to help each other. During the first days of school, Tina and her assistant worked with ZJ on the goals we had developed. After seven days, ZJ was tying his shoelaces by himself. After ten days, ZJ was helping other kids tie their shoelaces.

One day during the second week of school, the first fire alarm resonated throughout the school. I happened to be at the school speaking with one of the rabbis, and I panicked. Where was ZJ? Could I get him fast enough before a meltdown occurred? As I headed down the hall, there he was. He was concentrating on walking, holding Miss Tina's hand, eyes forward as though he were executing a soldier's drill. I turned around, hid behind an

open door, and watched. He never noticed me. He was trying so hard to keep himself calm in the storm of clanging and many other kids close to him.

Tina told me that she would not take her class out early before drills because they all needed to know how to react during a real alarm. The class had rehearsed fire drills several times and the students were now performing beautifully. Outside, I cried on the Resource Room Administrator's shoulder, but this time they were tears of joy.

Last week, the fire alarm went off again. There I was, in the school parking lot. I counted on seeing ZJ come out holding Miss Tina's hand. But no, not this time. This time, ZJ came out after the first grade class, by himself and just before Miss Tina, whose two hands were holding brave hands younger than ZJ's. He saw me in the parking lot and with a big smile on his face, he said, "Mommy, I did it all by myself." "ZJ, how do you feel about what you just did?" "Mommy, I am so proud, and so brave!" "I think so, too, ZJ!"

ZJ's recent quiz about telling time had

every question correct but one. He raced through the math section, adding three numbers without difficulty. Subtraction? No problem. He is now using his toy cash register to practice multiplication skills. He writes beautiful stories, and is working hard on spelling. He said that Miss Tina's chart makes it easier for him to write stories because he can write the who, what, where, when and how on the chart then make a story out of it. ZJ is a voracious reader too.

ZJ has been mainstreamed into the third grade class for all specials – music, art, technology, and physical education – and lately for social studies. His third grade peers are excited when he comes into class and thrilled when he succeeds. A few weeks ago, Coach Nixon threw a pass to ZJ who caught the football and outran his classmates to score a touchdown. Everyone cheered! You should have seen his beaming smile when he told me about his touchdown.

Last year, ZJ wasn't invited to any birthday parties from school. Next Sunday, ZJ will attend the fifth birthday party he's been invited to since the school year started. A couple of

weeks ago, ZJ asked a friend to come over to our house, his third play date this school year. I told the mom that we'd keep it short, just an hour, since ZJ still engages primarily in parallel play, and I wanted the play date to end with his friend still wanting to be friends. She said that an hour was about all he had for a play date, because they were planning to go out for dinner. Keeping my distance, I listened to the boys talking and laughing together, and I watched them playing tag, Frisbee and football. I totally forgot that I needed to get ZJ's friend home. ZJ had his first real play date!

Now I see what I have known all along; that there is something special, special – good, about ZJ and everyone who meets him knows it too, by the huge smile on his face, the hugs that he gives, and the happiness and pride that he feels whenever he accomplishes something new. Thank you Tina and Mariashi for allowing ZJ to be a successful, proud, happy child. Our son has a home at school. ZJ is finding his way.

Andrea Gamlin is a parent at the Charlotte Jewish Day School



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Phyllis Rosenthal

A School Within a School that Meets the Needs of Jewish Children Who Learn Differently

The children in M'silot are the Greenfield Hebrew Academy's best advertising for this innovative and nationally recognized program for students who learn differently. A "school within a school," M'silot ("pathways" in Hebrew) provides children with an educational environment in which they become empowered learners, maximize their potential by building new skills, and develop a positive self image – all under a Jewish umbrella. Six years ago the program began with eight first grade students and now has eighty-five students who are currently in or have completed the program. M'silot gauges its success by the outstanding growth and development of these students.

Having witnessed the frustration of many Jewish parents who recognized that their children required a specialized learning environment, but who wanted the religious and cultural components of a Jewish day school, administrators at Greenfield Hebrew Academy sought a way to address both. At the same time, Jerry and Elaine Blumenthal, former GHA parents, wanted to create a legacy in the name of their late son, Matthew, to honor a remarkable life that had triumphed over disability. Thus, in 1999, the Matthew Blumenthal M'silot program of the Greenfield Hebrew Academy was made possible by a generous grant from Elaine and Jerry Blumenthal.

The M'silot program is designed for children who have average to above average intelligence, who learn differently, and who have been diagnosed with a mild to moderate learning disability based on testing conducted by a licensed psychologist. The students are not making expected progress based on their potential; and their needs cannot be met solely within the confines of the regular classroom, even with support services. They have an uneven cognitive profile exhibiting one or more processing deficits in areas such as: receptive and expressive language, visual processing, auditory processing, visual-motor skills, or memory.

The program has been very positively received by the community and by M'silot parents. In fact, many ask, "What are the keys to success?"

• Small teacher-pupil ratio: With a 1:5 teacher-student ratio, M'silot classes emphasize strategies to help the students remediate their weaknesses and utilize their strengths.

• Highly trained and dedicated teachers: Teachers have specialized training in programs such as the Orton-Gillingham reading method, which is specifically designed for children diagnosed with dyslexia or reading disabilities.

• Well-developed curriculum: All programs used for specific remediation are research-based.

• Individualized goals for each child: An Individual Educational Plan is written for each child which includes strengths, needs, learning style, short-term and long-term objectives, strategies and modifications, and assessment results.

• Speech and language pathologists and occupational therapists: These specialists are part of the program and work with students and faculty to determine what types of intervention and/or accommodations are required.

M'silot begins in kindergarten and currently goes through fourth grade, and both General and Judaic/Hebrew studies are conducted in modified, self-contained classrooms. However, since another important goal of the program is to encourage interaction among all students, children in M'silot join their GHA peers for many non-academic times of the day (physical education, music, art, computer, lunch and recess). They take part in all grade level special events such as field trips, the first grade Siddur presentation and the second grade Chumash program; and they join in school-wide programs including Friday afternoon Oneg, the Model Seder and the Purim Carnival.

One of the challenges in designing this program was how to incorporate Hebrew language. We have found the techniques that are important in teaching general studies subjects are also important when teaching Hebrew:

<u>Hebrew Language</u>	<u>General Studies</u>
<i>Multisensory and repetition</i>	<i>Multisensory and repetition</i>
<i>Insure that readiness skills are mastered</i>	<i>Insure that readiness skills are mastered</i>
<i>Small student/teacher ratio</i>	<i>Small student/teacher ratio</i>
<i>Use assessment to set individual objectives</i>	<i>Use assessment to set individual objectives</i>
<i>Immerse in a Judaic rich environment</i>	<i>Immerse in a language rich environment</i>

When students are ready to leave the small structured environment, they may enter the school's Transition Program for fourth and fifth grades. In the Transition Program, students attend General Studies classes with their grade level peers, while receiving support from a Transition teacher who stays in constant contact with each student's classroom teacher. For part of the day, Transition students are taught a modified Judaics/Hebrew curriculum, called Jewish Living for Life, which emphasizes Hebrew reading and writing skills; learning prayers and their meaning; understanding our Jewish heritage, holidays, and history; and instilling a love for Israel.

“I feel special in M'silot because I am learning to read more. We do fun things. We play sentence games and card games... My teachers help me to learn. If we have trouble, our teachers help us.”

The future of M'silot includes the addition of a fifth grade self-contained class for those who are not quite ready for the mainstream, and continued support in the upper middle school grades. The school's first M'silot class – children who began in first grade – has already entered middle school and receives continued support as needed. In fact, as they matriculate, M'silot students put into practice the many learning strategies and self-awareness tips that they have learned in the program, and often match -- and sometimes surpass -- the academic achievement of their GHA peers.

The most frequently asked question by prospective parents is how does being part of M'silot impact the child's self-concept? What we have learned is that once a child meets with success, the message changes from “why is this so hard for me and easy for those around me?” to “I can do this, I can learn, I am capable.” The child understands from our “All Kinds of Minds” unit that everyone, including parents and teachers, have strengths and also weaknesses which require specific strategies. The student leaves M'silot understanding his/her learning style, has strategies for success, a sense of empowerment and at the same time is instilled with Jewish pride.

Phyllis Rosenthal is the founder and director of M'silot. She has her Master's in Education (Learning Disabilities) and has been with Greenfield Hebrew Academy for 11 years. She began as a resource teacher before the creation of M'silot.



The Asper International
Holocaust Studies Program



Yad Vashem – The Holocaust
Martyrs' and Heroes'
Remembrance Authority



The Conference on Jewish
Material Claims
Against Germany

The International School for Holocaust Studies

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We are pleased to offer this seminar in English for Jewish educators working in Jewish day schools. This is a unique and prestigious program taking place at the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

How should we present Jewish *life* before, during and after the Holocaust? How do we implement Holocaust education in our schools and instill a positive Jewish identity in our students? What is our responsibility and how will we transmit Holocaust remembrance without survivors? How shall we commemorate Yom HaShoah in the future? These questions will be explored in-depth during our seminar.

Criteria for applying

The seminar is open to Jewish educators working in Jewish day schools.

Seminar Cost and More Information

The cost of the seminar is US\$550.

This includes the tuition fee and hotel accommodation in a double room on a bed and breakfast basis. The seminar is largely sponsored by Yad Vashem, The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and the Asper International Holocaust Studies Program. For more information please contact:

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PEJE Pages (Partnership for Excellence)

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Matching First-Time Gifts to Jewish Day Schools

Imagine a way to infuse as much as \$15 million dollars into individual day schools throughout North America. Through MATCH, a joint project of PEJE, Jewish Funders Network, and five generous donors, first-time gifts of \$25,000-\$100,000 to Jewish day schools can be matched 1:2, up to a per-school maximum of \$100,000 matched funds. PEJE welcomes Sheila Alexander as MATCH Program Manager to help schools take advantage of this opportunity. Sheila is currently fielding calls

at 617-367-0001 ext 130 to help guide schools through the solicitation and application process. She will work with successful MATCH schools on capacity building for effective relationships with major donors through cultivation and stewardship.

Encourage day school funders to leverage their financial impact with MATCH. Funders must be members of the Jewish Funders Network and can join JFN simultaneously with applying for the matching grant. For full eligibility requirements (and terms and conditions) contact Sheila at sheila@peje.org or visit www.dayschoolmatch.org.

NOTE: The online application deadline for MATCH is January 13, 2006.

MATCH is a project of JFN and PEJE, funded by The AVI CHAI Foundation, Ingeborg and Ira Leon Rennert, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, the Alan B. Slifka Foundation, and the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation.

PEJE Assembly for Jewish Day School Education

Your PEJE Day School Calendar* is already marked, so now is the time to make plans and register for the 2006 PEJE Assembly, to be held March 19-21 in Boston, MA.

The PEJE Assembly, building on the success of previous Leadership and Donor Assemblies, is an opportunity for professional and lay leaders to access EXPERTISE in areas critical for day schools, to engage in NEW IDEAS, and to NETWORK with colleagues who are committed to day school education. Participants at the Assembly will have the opportunity to collaborate actively with stakeholders, power brokers, and individuals of influence throughout the Jewish community. RAVSAK school leaders at the Assembly will have the chance to meet with colleagues in the community school world as well as with partners from across denominations.

Along with dynamic sessions led by visionary thinkers and practitioners, the Assembly features special guests Ronald A. Heifetz, co-founder of the Kennedy School's Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University, and Douglas Reeves, Director of the Center for Performance



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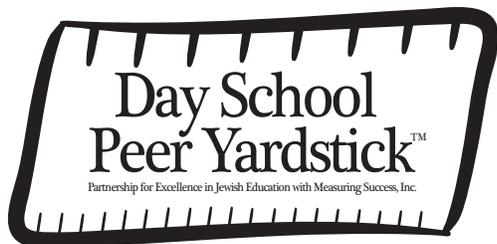
Assessment.

Register online at www.peje.org before January 17 to take advantage of early bird rates, with special discounts for teams of two of more leaders from the same school who register together.

*If you did not receive a PEJE Day School Calendar, contact Suzanne Kling at suzanne@peje.org.

in Jewish Education)

Day School Peer Yardstick™



Thanks and congratulations are due to the 22 RAVSAK schools who completed the Day School Peer Yardstick survey last fall! With the data analyzed, schools received two customized reports that enabled them to benchmark their progress on leading indicators for day school enrollment growth. Watch for ways your school can participate in the Yardstick's second round of data collection in order to have resources for making data-based decisions. For more details, contact Bonnie Hausman at bonnie@peje.org.

The Yardstick Executive Summary is available at www.peje.org with recommendations such as these...and more.

- Be focused and diversified on intake from feeder (partner/sender) schools. Maximize the number of applicants and yields from your top partner/sender schools. At the same time, your school is unlikely to grow by focusing only on drawing from your own or from a single sender school. Your school must diversify its enrollment portfolio by introducing new students from as many other schools as possible. The biggest and fastest growing schools also drew from a larger number of synagogues,

even after controlling for the size of the community. This is true of all divisions: preschool to elementary, elementary to middle, and middle to high school.

- Proactively organize tours of the school for prospective families. The Yardstick tracked a wide variety of recruitment activities, such as ambassadors, phone contacts and meetings with the head of the school, but only guided school tours were significantly associated with school size. Moreover, in 2004, Jewish day schools averaged less than 2 tours per week during the height of the recruitment season. We recommend that schools track progress in conducting tours (defined as an individual visit while school is in session, but not including attendance at an open house or multiple visits by the same family).

- Avoid the low-price, low-value trap through carefully managed pricing and financial aid policies. Contrary to expectations, there is no association between relative price and any enrollment outcome; tuition subvention programs are not associated with school size or growth. Create a virtuous cycle by pricing your school commensurate with value and relative to the price of private schools in your market. Also, make your school attractive to families who are able and willing to pay full tuition, and ensure that financial aid awards are carefully calibrated to match families' true needs, which range widely. Control costs by increasing school size to achieve economies of scale, not by cutting spending, which may adversely affect quality.

- Do not assume building a new facility will cause your enrollment to grow; rather, fill your current facility to capacity by improving quality in other areas. Building a permanent facility may be the result of large enrollment rather than a driver of larger enrollment.

Challenge Grant for Day School Growth

With applications due December 8, 2005, the PEJE Challenge Grant for Growth will offer professional assessments, coaching, and matching funds for initiatives designed to grow day school enrollment. Grant programs include School Improvement Journey, Pipeline, and New School. Many RAVSAK schools have partnered with PEJE in grant programs in the past, and we look forward to continuing to build these relationships.

PEJE at the RAVSAK Annual Leadership Conference

PEJE looks forward to the upcoming RAVSAK conference in Ft. Lauderdale. We are especially glad to sponsor Terry Moore's presentation on financial issues for small and mid-sized schools. Terry is a consultant with ISM (Independent School Management) with great experience in operational management. See you in the sun!

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Inclusion in Jewish Education

matan



Meredith Englander

Each day when we recite the *sh'ma*, we repeat the words “*v’shinantam l’vanecha v’dibarta bam*”, loosely translated “we shall teach the lessons of the Torah diligently to our children.” The *sh'ma*, of course, does not differentiate between any of our students, nor does it delineate that there are some students we should teach while others may remain out of our reach. One would be hard-pressed to find any Jewish educator who believed our heritage implied such a sentiment! However, when our schools neglect to consider serving the needs of students with special needs, we inadvertently choose some of our children over others. In so doing, we unintentionally send the message that some of our families belong in the Jewish community more than others.

One need not be an expert in the field of Jewish education or special education to know that the task of serving all of our children is a daunting one. There are financial hurdles, philosophical implications, and a variety of other potential stresses on schools that are often already stretched to their limits. In all likelihood, it is not that we do not want to serve all of our children, but that the very idea of doing so seems so far out of our reach.

There are several, albeit too few, extraordinary examples of day schools including children with a range of significant special needs. To look at the Sinai School in New Jersey or the Keshet program in Chicago is to wit-

ness a miracle in Jewish education. Twenty-five years ago, parents could have only dreamed of providing such a high quality Jewish education to their children with special needs. Now, parents uproot entire families to move to these cities where all of their children can learn together in a Jewish day school environment. For these families, the dream of an inclusive Jewish community is fulfilled.

What if the creation of these types of programs in our school is, for the moment, unattainable? What if it is financially unrealistic and professionally out of our reach? How can we begin to think of Jewish special needs education as an obligation and not a field too daunting to approach? Perhaps the answer is in ceasing to think of inclusion as an “all or nothing” proposition. Perhaps it is in feeling a sense of proud accomplishment if we reach one more student than we did last year.

The possibilities for new approaches to special education in your school are practically endless. For you, it might mean the beginning of a resource room, the addition of Judaic studies support, or a renewed effort to enhance the communication between resource room teachers and classroom teachers so that students can begin to feel successful no matter where they are during the day. For others it might mean putting your resources towards the successful inclusion of a child with Down’s Syndrome in your kindergarten for the first time. For you the first step might be

inviting children with special needs into your school community for after-school activities, teaching your students that there are all kinds of people who make this world as special as it is. Or, a first step for this year might be a teacher workshop designed to educate the faculty about learning disabilities that will likely appear even in their mainstream classes.

As with the schools mentioned above and so many others, inclusion in Jewish education almost always starts with one child. If we can cease to be overwhelmed by what we think the end result should be, we can begin to improve our own school communities by taking small steps towards ensuring that everyone can be a part of them. Our students – our current typically developing students and our future students with special needs – all benefit from our diligently teaching a greater understanding of similarities, differences, and learning the Torah’s beautiful lesson that each of us is created in G-d’s Image.

Meredith Englander is the Founder of MATAN: The Gift of Jewish Learning for Every Child. For more information about MATAN, contact Meredith at: Meredith@matankids.org or Executive Director Susan Holzman Wachsstock at susan@matankids.org

**Thank
You.**

**Our thanks to everyone who contributed
to RAVSAK’s Katrina Relief Fund.
Together we raised over \$45,000!**



Dr. Marc N. Kramer

Notes From The Executive Director

We all know the old saw about the newspaper with the motto “all the news that fits we print,” and today I found out how true to life this adage can be. Deferring to our many talented contributors to this issue of *HaYidion*, my column has been relegated to the back page – and to 300 words or less. But as the head of any dynamic organization knows, it is nearly impossible to say all that must be said about our many challenges and many successes. Thus, in brief, allow me to mention one major success story in the making, and one challenge which I know we can meet with your help:

This past month, RAVSAK launched

a new strategic planning process in service of our next 3-5 years of visionary work. Under the capable leadership of Dr. Ray Levi, and with guidance from RAVSAK schools, Executive Committee members, and representatives from some of the most important Jewish educational and philanthropic organizations, we are developing a plan that will both improve existing programs and broaden the scope of our mission. We will present this plan – in draft form- for your critical review at the 2006 Leadership Conference.

RAVSAK has also begun its inaugural annual campaign. This important foray into development is an essential step toward ensuring our short and long term viability. With your help,

we have substantively reduced our dependency on school dues (which represent only 17% of our total income this year); of course, by keeping dues in check, we must turn to our friends, our supporters, and our constituents for support. I do hope that each of you will consider a tax-deductible gift to RAVSAK.

And at 277 words, I wish you a Chanukah of warmth, light, and happiness.

PS: There is so much more to say – We’ll catch up in January in Ft. Lauderdale!

Dr. Marc N. Kramer is the Executive Director of RAVSAK. He can be reached at mkramer@ravsak.org.

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